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Eco-Anxiety in the Romantic Visions of Lord Byron and P.B. Shelley: A Literary and Environmental Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the manifestation of eco-anxiety in the poetic works of Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley, two eminent figures of the Romantic movement, whose literary expressions encapsulate profound ecological concerns. Romanticism, as a literary and philosophical movement, emphasized the sublime beauty of nature while simultaneously expressing apprehensions about its destruction due to human intervention. This paper employs an eco-critical framework to analyze how Byron and Shelley engage with themes of environmental degradation, the consequences of industrialization, and the fragility of the natural world. Through a comparative textual analysis of *Darkness* by Byron and *Ode to the West Wind* by Shelley, the study examines the poets' prescient environmental sensibilities and their reflections on ecological decline. Byron's apocalyptic vision in *Darkness* portrays an uninhabitable world, mirroring fears of climate catastrophe, while Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind* embodies both the destructive and regenerative power of nature, highlighting an intrinsic ecological awareness. The analysis underscores how both poets critique the anthropocentric worldview and foreshadow contemporary eco-critical concerns, positioning their works as early literary articulations of eco-anxiety. The findings suggest that their poetry, though rooted in the Romantic era, remains highly relevant in contemporary environmental discourse, offering insight into the emotional and philosophical dimensions of ecological crisis. This study thus contributes to the intersection of Romantic literary studies and environmental humanities, demonstrating the enduring significance of

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Byron's and Shelley's ecological thought.

Keywords: Eco-Anxiety; Romanticism; Lord Byron; P.B. Shelley; Environmental Criticism; Nature; Industrialization

1. Introduction

Eco-anxiety, broadly defined as the psychological distress associated with climate change and environmental degradation, has emerged as a crucial area of inquiry in contemporary literary and cultural studies. As the planet grapples with accelerating ecological crises, scholars have increasingly turned to literature as a lens through which to understand the emotional, philosophical, and ideological dimensions of humanity's relationship with nature. While eco-anxiety is often framed as a distinctly modern phenomenon—intensified by industrialization, global warming, and ecological collapse—the roots of this anxiety can be traced much earlier^[1]. In particular, the Romantic poets of the early nineteenth century, whose works were deeply imbued with both reverence for and fear of nature's fate, exhibited profound environmental awareness. Among them, Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley stand out as poets whose literary expressions encapsulated concerns about the degradation of the natural world and human complicity in its destruction. Their poetry not only reflects a deep-seated anxiety about environmental loss but also foreshadows contemporary concerns about ecological crisis and human responsibility.

The Romantic movement, which flourished in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, was characterized by an intense fascination with nature, the sublime, and the interplay between human emotions and the natural world. Romantic poets often depicted nature as a source of spiritual and aesthetic inspiration, yet they also conveyed anxieties about its vulnerability^[2]. Industrialization, deforestation, and the rapid expansion of human civilization disrupted the delicate balance between nature and humankind, leading many poets to question the consequences of unchecked human intervention. In this context, Byron and Shelley emerged as poets who not only celebrated nature's grandeur but also expressed apprehension about its potential demise. Their works frequently depict nature as both awe-inspiring and endangered, oscillating between reverence and despair. Through their poetic visions, they articulated an early form of eco-anxiety,

anticipating the environmental concerns that preoccupy modern scholars and activists alike.

Lord Byron's *Darkness* (1816), written during the "Year Without a Summer", reflects a vivid poetic response to environmental crisis. Triggered by Mount Tambora's eruption, the poem imagines a sunless world where nature collapses, life ceases, and human civilization dissolves into chaos. Byron's vision of a dying Earth—marked by blackened skies, barren landscapes, and extinguished celestial bodies—captures a chilling sense of ecological doom. His stark portrayal of environmental and societal decay anticipates contemporary eco-anxiety, emphasizing nature's fragility and the dire consequences of climate disruption. *Darkness* remains a haunting reflection on humanity's vulnerability amid ecological catastrophe^[3].

Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind* (1819) reflects a nuanced ecological consciousness that contrasts with Byron's apocalyptic vision in *Darkness*. While acknowledging nature's destructive power, Shelley also emphasizes its regenerative force, portraying the West Wind as both destroyer and preserver. The poem highlights nature's cycles of decay and renewal, suggesting resilience amidst crisis. However, Shelley's tone is laced with anxiety over humanity's environmental impact. As a vocal critic of industrialization, he mourns ecological decline while calling for transformative change, presenting the wind as a metaphor for both natural and political revolution—underscoring nature's vitality and its entwinement with human responsibility.

This study aims to explore the manifestation of eco-anxiety in the works of Byron and Shelley, situating their poetic expressions within the broader context of Romantic environmental thought. By employing an eco-critical framework, this paper will analyze how these poets engage with themes of environmental degradation, human intervention, and nature's precarity. Through a comparative textual analysis of *Darkness* and *Ode to the West Wind*, this research will illustrate how both poets anticipated modern eco-critical concerns, offering valuable insights into the historical trajectory of environmental anxiety in literature. Furthermore, by examining the philosophical underpinnings of their ecological

consciousness, this study will demonstrate how Byron's and Shelley's works challenge anthropocentric worldviews and advocate for a more harmonious coexistence with nature.

This research contributes meaningfully to Romantic literary studies and environmental humanities by examining how Byron and Shelley anticipated modern eco-anxieties. Writing long before the emergence of environmental science, both poets revealed an intuitive awareness of ecological fragility and human culpability. Revisiting their works, especially *Darkness* and *Ode to the West Wind*, sheds light on early ecological consciousness and its relevance to contemporary debates on climate change and sustainability. Their poetic visions challenge anthropocentrism and reflect a deep engagement with nature's vulnerability and power. By situating their anxieties within an eco-critical framework, this study underscores the historical continuity of environmental concern, demonstrating how literature remains a powerful medium for interrogating humanity's evolving relationship with the natural world.

2. Literature Review

The scholarship on Romanticism and environmental criticism has increasingly acknowledged the eco-conscious dimensions of Romantic poetry. Scholars such as Jonathan Bate (1991) and Timothy Morton (2007) have argued that Romantic literature, particularly the works of William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lord Byron, and Percy Bysshe Shelley, anticipated modern environmental thought^[4]. These poets, through their engagement with nature, critiqued industrialization, questioned humanity's impact on the environment, and fostered ecological sensibilities that continue to influence contemporary eco-critical discourse. While extensive research has been conducted on Wordsworth's pastoralism and Coleridge's metaphysical engagement with nature, Byron and Shelley's eco-anxiety and their responses to environmental crises and industrial expansion remain relatively underexplored. This study aims to bridge that gap by examining how these poets expressed ecological concerns in their works and how their poetry resonates with modern environmental challenges.

2.1. The Emergence of Ecological Criticism in Romantic Studies

The relationship between Romanticism and ecological criticism emerged in literary studies in the late 20th century.

Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology* pioneered the recognition of Romantic poets as early environmental thinkers. Bate argued that Romantic poetry, particularly that of Wordsworth, advocated for a harmonious relationship between humanity and nature, resisting the exploitative tendencies of industrial modernity^[5]. Timothy Morton expanded on this perspective in *Ecology Without Nature*, where he introduced the concept of 'dark ecology,' emphasizing the complex and often unsettling relationship between humans and the natural world. Morton's work challenged idealized visions of Romantic nature and suggested that Romantic poetry contained deeper ecological anxieties that reflect the modern environmental crisis^[6].

Building on these foundational studies, scholars such as Ashton Nichols (2011) and James McKusick (2010) have further contextualized Romantic ecological thought within sustainability and environmental ethics. Nichols's 'urban pastoral' concept explores how Romantic poets negotiated nature within increasingly industrialized spaces, while McKusick's *Green Writing* examines the ecological consciousness embedded in Romantic and post-Romantic literary traditions^[7]. These studies provide a broader understanding of how Romanticism contributed to the emergence of environmentalism as a cultural and intellectual movement.

2.2. Wordsworth and Coleridge: Established Ecological Readings

Wordsworth has long been considered the quintessential Romantic nature poet. His works, particularly *Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey* (1798) and *The Prelude* (1805), articulate a deep reverence for nature and an awareness of environmental degradation's spiritual and psychological consequences. Jonathan Bate has examined how Wordsworth's poetry promotes an ecological ethics that resists humans' alienation from the natural world^[8]. His advocacy for rural simplicity and his critique of industrial encroachment align with contemporary concerns about sustainability and conservation.

Similarly, Coleridge's poetry and philosophical writings engage with nature through a metaphysical lens. In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798), the poet presents a cautionary tale of ecological destruction, emphasizing the moral consequences of human hubris in exploiting natural resources. Morton has explored Coleridge's engagement with

proto-ecological ideas, particularly his concept of the ‘One Life,’ which posits an interconnectedness between all living things^[9]. These interpretations have reinforced the ecological significance of Wordsworth and Coleridge in Romantic studies, yet they have also overshadowed the contributions of Byron and Shelley to environmental discourse.

2.3. Byron and Shelley: Underexplored Eco-Anxieties

Despite their prominence in Romantic literature, Byron and Shelley’s engagement with environmental concerns has received comparatively less scholarly attention. Unlike Wordsworth’s pastoral idealism, Byron’s poetry often conveys a darker, more ambivalent relationship with nature. His epic poem *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (1812–1818) reflects on the destruction of natural beauty and cultural heritage caused by war and industrialization. In *Darkness* (1816), Byron anticipates apocalyptic environmental scenarios, depicting a world devoid of life following ecological catastrophe. Jerome McGann’s *Byron and the Poetics of Adversity* emphasizes how Byron’s poetry frequently engages with themes of opposition and critique, including resistance to the dominant cultural and philosophical ideas of his time^[10]. This extends to Byron’s treatment of nature, where he often subverts the Romantic ideal of nature as a benign force and instead portrays it as adversarial or indifferent to human concerns. His works suggest a proto-ecological awareness, demonstrating how human actions can lead to self-inflicted environmental destruction.

Shelley, on the other hand, articulated a more radical ecological vision, aligning with proto-environmentalist and anti-industrial sentiments. His poetry frequently critiques the destructive impact of human civilization on the natural world. In *Mont Blanc* (1817), Shelley explores the sublime power of nature and its resistance to human domination. His visionary poem *The Mask of Anarchy* (1819) connects political oppression with environmental exploitation, suggesting that social justice and ecological sustainability are intertwined. McKusick has examined Shelley’s ecological philosophy, arguing that his poetry foreshadows modern eco-anarchist thought^[11]. Despite these contributions, Shelley’s environmental consciousness remains a relatively underdeveloped area in Romantic studies.

2.4. Industrialization and Environmental Crisis in Romantic Poetry

The Romantic period witnessed the rapid expansion of industrialization, which transformed landscapes, displaced rural communities, and polluted natural environments. Many Romantic poets responded to these changes with apprehension and critique. Wordsworth lamented the loss of rural innocence, while Blake’s poetry condemned industrial exploitation in works such as *London* (1794) and *The Chimney Sweeper* (1789). Byron and Shelley, however, took a more confrontational stance against industrial progress. Byron’s *The Island* (1823) romanticizes a pre-industrial paradise, contrasting it with the corruption of European civilization. Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) envisions a world liberated from tyranny and environmental destruction, offering a utopian vision of ecological and social harmony.

Harvey has examined how Romantic poets engaged with the environmental consequences of industrial expansion, emphasizing their relevance to contemporary ecological debates^[12]. Byron’s and Shelley’s poetry, in particular, resonates with current concerns about climate change, deforestation, and environmental justice. Their works challenge anthropocentric narratives and advocate for a more respectful relationship with nature.

2.5. Reassessing Romanticism’s Ecological Legacy

The increasing recognition of ecological themes in Romantic poetry has expanded the scope of environmental literary studies. While Wordsworth and Coleridge have been extensively studied for their ecological perspectives, Byron and Shelley’s environmental consciousness has remained underexplored. This literature review highlights the need for further scholarly engagement with Byron’s eco-anxiety and Shelley’s radical ecological vision. By examining their poetic responses to environmental crises and industrial expansion, this study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of Romanticism’s ecological legacy and its relevance to contemporary environmental thought.

Future research could further explore Byron and Shelley’s environmental politics, their engagement with scientific discourses of their time, and their influence on later ecological movements. As climate change and ecological crises

become increasingly pressing issues, revisiting Romantic poetry through an environmental lens offers valuable insights into the historical roots of ecological consciousness and the enduring power of literature to shape environmental ethics.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design, utilizing textual analysis as its primary methodology. Textual analysis is particularly suited to literary research as it allows for an in-depth exploration of themes, motifs, and linguistic patterns within a given text. By focusing on Byron's *Darkness* (1816) and Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind* (1819), this study examines their treatment of environmental catastrophe, human impact on nature, and existential dread. The research is rooted in an eco-critical theoretical framework, which enables an analysis of these works in relation to the broader Romantic discourse on nature and contemporary environmental concerns.

3.2. Selection of Texts

The choice of Byron's *Darkness* and Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind* is based on their thematic engagement with environmental anxieties and natural forces. *Darkness* presents a dystopian vision of a world plunged into perpetual night, symbolizing ecological destruction and the consequences of human hubris. *Ode to the West Wind*, on the other hand, reflects on the power of natural forces as both a destroyer and a harbinger of renewal, embodying a dynamic and complex view of nature. These texts are particularly relevant for studying the Romantic preoccupation with environmental instability and the fragility of human civilization in the face of nature's power.

3.3. Theoretical Framework

Eco-criticism serves as the guiding theoretical approach for this study. Originating in the late 20th century, eco-criticism examines the relationship between literature and the environment, interrogating how texts reflect, critique, or reinforce ecological concerns. Foundational works in the field, such as Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology* (1991) and

Timothy Morton's *Ecology Without Nature* (2007), provide the conceptual basis for understanding how Romantic poetry engages with environmental issues. By applying eco-critical principles, this study situates *Darkness* and *Ode to the West Wind* within the larger tradition of ecological thought, highlighting their anticipatory relevance to contemporary discussions on climate change, industrialization, and ecological destruction.

3.4. Analytical Approach

The textual analysis in this study is conducted through close reading, a method that involves a detailed examination of language, imagery, and structure to uncover deeper meanings within the text. The analysis is structured around three key themes:

1. Environmental Catastrophe – In *Darkness*, Byron constructs an apocalyptic vision of a world without sunlight, where nature is rendered lifeless. The study examines how the poem conveys ecological collapse and critiques human overreach through its bleak imagery and nihilistic tone.
2. Human Impact on Nature – Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind* explores the transformative power of natural forces, depicting wind as both a creative and destructive agent. This study investigates how Shelley portrays the human-nature relationship, particularly in the context of industrialization and environmental degradation.
3. Existential Dread – Both poems express anxieties about humanity's place within the natural world. The study explores how Byron's apocalyptic vision and Shelley's invocation of the West Wind contribute to a Romantic-era ecological consciousness that resonates with modern environmental fears.

3.5. Use of Secondary Sources

To supplement the textual analysis, the study engages with a range of secondary sources, including scholarly articles, literary critiques, and historical analyses. Research from eco-critical scholars, Romanticists, and environmental historians provides additional interpretative frameworks for understanding the selected texts. Key sources include:

- Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology* (1991) for an un-

derstanding of Romantic environmental consciousness.

- Timothy Morton's *The Ecological Thought* (2010) for insights into Romanticism's relevance to contemporary ecological theory.
- James McKusick's *Green Writing* (2010) for an analysis of ecological themes in Romantic literature.
- Clark (2019) and Harvey (2020) for recent scholarly perspectives on Byron's and Shelley's environmental concerns.

These sources help contextualize *Darkness* and *Ode to the West Wind* within the broader discourse of Romantic environmentalism and provide a comparative basis for analysing the poets' ecological visions.

3.6. Limitations of the Study

While this study provides a focused eco-critical analysis of two Romantic poems, it acknowledges certain limitations. The selection of only two texts, though justified by their thematic relevance, may not fully represent the diverse ecological concerns in Romantic poetry. Additionally, while eco-criticism is a valuable lens, alternative theoretical approaches such as historicism or psychoanalysis could yield different insights. Future research may expand on this study by incorporating additional Romantic texts or interdisciplinary methodologies.

By employing a qualitative textual analysis within an eco-critical framework, this study explores how Byron and Shelley's poetry reflects environmental anxieties that resonate with contemporary ecological concerns. Through close reading and engagement with secondary scholarship, the research highlights the enduring relevance of Romantic poetry in understanding humanity's complex relationship with nature. This methodological approach not only enhances our comprehension of *Darkness* and *Ode to the West Wind* but also contributes to the broader field of environmental humanities, demonstrating how literature serves as a powerful medium for ecological reflection and critique.

4. Results

The analysis of Byron's *Darkness* and Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind* reveals distinct yet interrelated visions of eco-anxiety, each offering a nuanced perspective on human-

ity's relationship with nature. While Byron's work presents an apocalyptic vision of environmental collapse, Shelley's poem explores the transformative power of natural forces, oscillating between destruction and renewal. Through these poetic representations, both poets contribute to a broader Romantic ecological consciousness that foreshadows modern environmental discourses.

4.1. Byron's Fatalistic Vision of Environmental Catastrophe

Byron's *Darkness* serves as a grim meditation on environmental collapse, depicting a world plunged into eternal night. The poem, often interpreted as a response to the 1816 'Year Without a Summer'—a climatic anomaly caused by the eruption of Mount Tambora—constructs a scenario in which the sun ceases to shine, leading to widespread famine, despair, and societal collapse. This bleak vision underscores the destructive consequences of human actions on the natural world, offering a critique of industrialization, deforestation, and the exploitation of natural resources.

Key Themes in *Darkness*

1. Environmental Collapse and Apocalypse—The poem's imagery evokes a planet devastated by ecological disaster, where even the natural elements succumb to entropy. Byron portrays nature as irreversibly damaged, suggesting a fatalistic view of environmental degradation. "The bright sun was extinguish'd, and the stars/Did wander darkling in the eternal space."^[13] This apocalyptic imagery sets the tone for a world plunged into unnatural darkness—a fitting metaphor for ecological collapse. Byron's portrayal of the extinguished sun aligns with modern climate anxieties about atmospheric and environmental destabilization.
2. Human Hubris and Its Consequences—The poem's depiction of societal breakdown serves as a warning about the perils of ignoring ecological limits. In this respect, *Darkness* resonates with contemporary concerns about climate change and environmental sustainability. "The world was void, /The populous and the powerful was a lump, /Seasonless, herbless, treeless, manless, lifeless."^[13] This haunting line paints a post-human, post-nature scenario, emphasizing total ecological annihilation. Byron underscores the

fragility of both nature and civilization in the face of environmental catastrophe—illustrating eco-anxiety through a fatalistic lens.

3. Absence of Redemption—Unlike other Romantic works that celebrate nature’s resilience, *Darkness* offers little hope for renewal. The poem’s nihilistic tone suggests that humanity’s reckless interference with nature leads to irreversible destruction.

Byron’s apocalyptic vision, therefore, represents an extreme form of eco-anxiety, reflecting fears about the ultimate consequences of human-induced environmental degradation.

4.2. Shelley’s Dialectical Perspective on Nature

In contrast to Byron’s fatalism, Shelley’s *Ode to the West Wind* offers a more dynamic and dialectical engagement with nature. The poem portrays the wind as both a destroyer and a preserver, illustrating nature’s capacity for self-renewal. Through its invocation of cyclical change, the poem highlights nature’s ability to recover from devastation, suggesting a more hopeful ecological perspective.

Key Themes in *Ode to the West Wind*

1. Destruction and Renewal—Shelley’s wind is a force of both decay and regeneration. This duality aligns with contemporary ecological discourses that emphasize nature’s resilience in the face of environmental challenges. “O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn’s being, /Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead/Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing.”^[14] Shelley personifies the wind as both destructive and transformative, suggesting that ecological destruction may also initiate regeneration. This duality forms the core of Shelley’s more hopeful eco-consciousness.
2. Interconnectedness of Nature and Humanity—The poem suggests that human and natural processes are deeply intertwined. Shelley’s speaker longs to merge with the wind, symbolizing the Romantic aspiration to attune human existence with natural forces. “Drive my dead thoughts over the universe/Like wither’d leaves to quicken a new birth!”^[14] Here, Shelley explicitly connects decay with potential rebirth. His plea to the wind reveals a belief in the cyclical power of nature—a vital contrast to Byron’s irreversible desolation.

3. Call for Environmental Awareness—The closing lines of the poem—“If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?”^[14]—suggest that even in moments of ecological crisis, renewal remains possible. This perspective offers a contrast to Byron’s *Darkness*, reinforcing the idea that nature, despite its vulnerabilities, possesses an intrinsic regenerative capacity.

4.3. Comparative Analysis: Byron and Shelley’s Eco-Anxiety

While Byron and Shelley articulate different perspectives on eco-anxiety, their works share common thematic concerns. Both poets acknowledge the precarious relationship between humanity and nature, emphasizing the consequences of environmental degradation. However, their approaches diverge in the following ways:

1. Byron’s Fatalism vs. Shelley’s Optimism – Byron presents a world in irreversible decline, whereas Shelley suggests that destruction is a prelude to renewal.
2. The Role of Humanity – Byron depicts human civilization as doomed by its own excesses, while Shelley’s speaker aspires to harmonize with natural forces.
3. Symbolism of Natural Forces – In *Darkness*, nature is a passive victim of destruction, whereas in *Ode to the West Wind*, it is an active agent of transformation.

4.4. Relevance to Contemporary Environmental Discourses

Both Byron’s and Shelley’s works anticipate key themes in modern environmental thought. Byron’s *Darkness* prefigures contemporary anxieties about climate change, ecological collapse, and the Anthropocene—the idea that human activity has irreversibly altered the Earth’s systems. Shelley’s *Ode to the West Wind*, meanwhile, aligns with ecological resilience theories, which stress nature’s capacity to recover from environmental crises.

Their poetry thus serves as a reminder of the longstanding nature of environmental concerns, reinforcing the need for ecological awareness and responsibility in the present era. By engaging with their works through an eco-critical lens, we gain valuable insights into the enduring relevance of Romantic literature in shaping contemporary environmental consciousness.

Through a detailed textual analysis, this study has demonstrated that Byron and Shelley articulate complementary visions of eco-anxiety. Byron's *Darkness* offers a bleak and deterministic view of environmental catastrophe, emphasizing the dire consequences of human actions on nature. Unlike more one-dimensional treatments of ecological despair, Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind* portrays nature as a paradoxical agent—capable of immense destruction yet equally endowed with the power to rejuvenate and inspire collective renewal. Together, their works underscore the urgency of ecological awareness and contribute to the ongoing discourse on environmental responsibility. By revisiting these Romantic texts, we not only deepen our understanding of their literary significance but also engage with pressing environmental issues that continue to shape our world today.

5. Discussion

The eco-anxiety expressed in the poetry of Byron and Shelley reveals distinct yet interrelated perspectives on environmental collapse and regeneration^[15]. Byron's *Darkness* presents a deeply pessimistic and dystopian vision of ecological destruction, while Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind* oscillates between despair and hope, ultimately affirming the potential for renewal. Both poets, however, contribute to a broader Romantic engagement with nature, critiquing human exploitation of the environment and anticipating modern ecological concerns. This discussion explores their thematic treatment of environmental catastrophe, human culpability, and the possibility of nature's resilience, situating their works within contemporary environmental discourse.

5.1. Byron's *Darkness*: A Vision of Ecological Doom

Byron's *Darkness* is a harrowing depiction of an apocalyptic world in which the sun has ceased to shine, vegetation has withered, and human civilization has descended into chaos. The poem, often linked to the 1816 'Year Without a Summer'—caused by the eruption of Mount Tambora—reflects an acute awareness of environmental vulnerability. Byron constructs a scenario where nature's demise leads to the collapse of human society, reinforcing an underlying fatalism about humanity's role in ecological destruction.

Themes of Eco-Anxiety in *Darkness*

1. Environmental Collapse—Byron envisions a world where natural cycles are permanently disrupted. The absence of sunlight, death of flora and fauna, and subsequent societal breakdown underscore an irreversible ecological crisis.
2. Human Culpability and Desperation—The poem suggests that human interference with nature accelerates the apocalypse. The image of people burning their last possessions for warmth symbolizes the ultimate consequences of unsustainable consumption.
3. Nature's Silence and Finality—Unlike other Romantic poets who emphasize nature's resilience, Byron portrays it as succumbing entirely to destruction. The concluding image of universal death reinforces a deterministic vision of ecological catastrophe.

Byron's pessimistic outlook aligns with contemporary fears of environmental collapse, climate change, and resource depletion. His work serves as a cautionary tale, emphasizing the dire consequences of ecological neglect.

5.2. Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*: A Dialectic of Destruction and Renewal

In contrast to Byron's fatalism, Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind* presents a more nuanced exploration of eco-anxiety, oscillating between despair over nature's vulnerability and hope for its regenerative potential. The west wind, which serves as both a force of destruction and renewal, embodies Shelley's complex ecological vision.

Thematic Exploration in *Ode to the West Wind*

1. Destructive Power of Nature—Shelley acknowledges the immense force of natural phenomena, describing the wind as a "Destroyer and Preserver." This duality reflects an awareness of nature's capacity for upheaval and devastation.
2. Interconnection Between Humanity and Nature—The speaker longs to merge with the wind, highlighting the Romantic ideal of aligning human existence with natural forces. This vision contrasts with Byron's depiction of humanity as a victim of environmental catastrophe.
3. Hope for Renewal—Rather than surrendering to despair, Shelley concludes *Ode to the West Wind* with a hopeful invocation for change, envisioning the cyclical return of life and renewal after a period of turmoil.

This forward-looking sentiment stands in marked contrast to Byron's apocalyptic tone in *Darkness*, which offers little room for redemption or recovery. Shelley's perspective affirms that even amidst ecological collapse, the possibility for regeneration persists—underscoring his faith in nature's enduring vitality and the transformative power of poetic imagination.

Shelley's eco-conscious perspective resonates with contemporary environmental movements that advocate for sustainability and resilience. His belief in nature's capacity for regeneration offers a counterpoint to Byron's apocalyptic vision, suggesting that even in moments of crisis, hope for recovery persists.

5.3. Comparative Analysis: Two Visions of Eco-Anxiety

While Byron and Shelley both engage with themes of environmental crisis, their approaches reflect divergent attitudes toward nature's fate.

Points of Contrast:

1. Byron's Fatalism vs. Shelley's Optimism—Byron depicts an irreversible environmental catastrophe, whereas Shelley envisions nature's capacity to heal.
2. The Role of Humanity—In *Darkness*, humanity is powerless against ecological collapse, whereas in *Ode to the West Wind*, the speaker actively seeks communion with natural forces.
3. Symbolism of Natural Elements—Byron's imagery suggests finality and silence, while Shelley's wind signifies dynamic change and renewal.

Despite these differences, both poets contribute to a critical Romantic discourse on nature's fragility and the consequences of human actions. Their works remain relevant in contemporary environmental studies, offering valuable insights into the emotional and philosophical dimensions of ecological crisis.

5.4. Relevance to Modern Environmental Thought

Byron and Shelley's poetic eco-anxiety resonates with present-day concerns about climate change, deforestation, and ecological sustainability^[16]. Byron's *Darkness* mirrors fears of irreversible environmental damage, aligning with

warnings from climate scientists about tipping points and planetary boundaries. Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*, in contrast, aligns with resilience theory, emphasizing the potential for ecological systems to recover from crises.

Both poets thus anticipate key debates in environmental humanities, underscoring the urgency of ecological awareness and responsible stewardship of the planet. Their works invite reflection on the ethical responsibilities of humanity toward nature, reinforcing the enduring relevance of Romantic literature in contemporary ecological discourse.

Byron and Shelley offer distinct yet complementary visions of eco-anxiety, each addressing different aspects of environmental crisis and response^[17]. Byron's *Darkness* presents a dystopian warning about unchecked ecological destruction, emphasizing the dire consequences of human negligence. In contrast to more pessimistic portrayals of environmental decline, Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind* envisions nature as a force of both upheaval and regeneration, urging a visionary engagement with ecological transformation. Together, their works contribute to a foundational Romantic ecological consciousness that continues to inform modern environmental thought^[18]. By revisiting these texts through an eco-critical lens, we gain deeper insights into the historical roots of environmental anxiety and the literary imagination's role in shaping ecological awareness. As recent studies argue that technological culture has significantly reshaped global linguistic patterns and environmental discourse^[19], Byron and Shelley's poetic reflections on ecological crisis gain renewed relevance, offering a counterpoint to digital-era detachment from nature. In an age where digital communication transforms language into visual and symbolic formats like memes and GIFs^[20], revisiting the poetic language of Byron and Shelley invites a reappraisal of how literary expression continues to carry ecological critique with a depth often absent in postmodern digital forms.

6. Recommendation

The growing relevance of eco-anxiety in contemporary literary and environmental studies necessitates further scholarly exploration of the intersection between Romantic poetry and modern ecological discourse. The works of Byron and Shelley, as analyzed in this study, reveal a profound engagement with environmental concerns, offering valuable

insights into the historical roots of ecological consciousness. To build upon these findings, future research should adopt a multidimensional approach that examines how Romantic poets, beyond Byron and Shelley, grappled with ecological anxieties and their implications for present-day environmental thought.

One promising avenue of research involves comparative studies between different Romantic poets to uncover varying perspectives on nature, industrialization, and environmental degradation. While Wordsworth's pastoral idealism and Coleridge's metaphysical engagement with nature have been extensively explored, deeper analysis of lesser-discussed poets such as John Clare and Charlotte Smith could provide additional perspectives on eco-consciousness in Romantic literature. Investigating the ecological concerns embedded in their works could expand our understanding of Romanticism's contribution to environmental ethics and sustainability discourse.

Additionally, interdisciplinary research integrating climate science and literary analysis could offer a more comprehensive framework for understanding Romantic eco-anxiety. By drawing on contemporary environmental studies, scholars can examine how Romantic poetry anticipates modern concerns about climate change, deforestation, and biodiversity loss. For example, climate historians and literary scholars might collaborate to trace the influence of historical environmental events, such as the 'Year Without a Summer' in 1816, on Romantic poetic imagination. Such an approach would not only contextualize Romantic literature within real-world ecological crises but also highlight its ongoing relevance to contemporary environmental challenges.

Furthermore, digital humanities tools could be employed to analyze the language and themes of Romantic poetry on a broader scale. By using computational methods such as corpus analysis and thematic mapping, researchers could identify patterns of ecological discourse across a wide range of Romantic texts. This would allow for a more systematic understanding of how eco-anxiety evolved within the period and how it compares to modern expressions of environmental concern in literature and media.

7. Conclusions

Lord Byron and P. B. Shelley's poetic engagements with nature provide early manifestations of eco-anxiety, re-

flecting their deep concerns about environmental degradation and humanity's impact on the natural world. Their poetry not only captures the anxieties of their time—amidst the rapid industrialization and environmental changes of the early 19th century—but also resonates with contemporary ecological debates. Through vivid imagery, apocalyptic visions, and symbolic representations of nature's power and fragility, both poets articulate fears that remain relevant in today's climate crisis discourse.

Byron's *Darkness* presents a grim and dystopian vision of environmental collapse, where natural forces succumb to destruction, and human civilization deteriorates into chaos. This apocalyptic narrative underscores a fatalistic view of ecological decline, mirroring contemporary concerns about irreversible environmental damage. Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind* presents a nuanced understanding of nature's dual character—acknowledging its capacity to devastate while also celebrating its potential to renew and inspire transformation. The west wind functions as both a harbinger of destruction and an agent of renewal, reflecting Shelley's belief in nature's resilience and its potential for transformation despite human interference.

Byron and Shelley's poetry reflects the Romantic era's deep concern with nature, warning against the consequences of industrialization and ecological neglect. Their works offer early expressions of eco-consciousness, anticipating today's environmental crises. Viewed through an eco-critical lens, their verses emphasize both nature's vulnerability and resilience, demonstrating literature's power to critique human impact and inspire sustainable thought. In a time of escalating ecological uncertainty, their poetic insights remain relevant—reminding us that environmental awareness has long been rooted in literary imagination and continues to influence contemporary discourse on sustainability and ethics.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, methodology, investigation, and original draft preparation were conducted by H.A. Guidelines and Supervision were given by I.A.T. Review and editing were carried out by S.A. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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The data for this study will be available upon request. Please contact the corresponding author for access.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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