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**The Apocalypse of Christina Rossetti
and Oscar Wilde:
A Comparative Reading of the Two Authors
Between Eco-Criticism and Eco-Theology**

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*I dedicate this final dissertation to my parents,
for their unparalleled sacrifices.*

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Introduction

The conceptualization of the end of the world in literature can address both an ecological apocalypse and a radical dismantling of anthropocentric paradigms. In this dissertation, the comparative reading of Christina Rossetti (1830-1894) and Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) will provide an integrated, multifaceted and complementary framework of the two authors' apocalyptic visions. However, before outlining the overall argument, it is essential to define several key concepts that will recur throughout this study. Namely, the concept of Ego-Hierarchy and the exact definition and difference between ecological apocalypse and apocalypse of the human.

John Lupinacci provides a theoretical framework to define the concept of Ego-Hierarchy when discussing 21st-century challenges in eco-critical education. Particularly, he addresses the difference between an Egotistical Worldview - a graphic pyramid that represents humankind on top, thus in a position of superiority to Nature – and an Ecotistical Worldview – which the author defines as “an ecologically balanced worldview often overlooked and devalued in Western *industrial* culture”. The key word of Lupinacci's definition is the adjective “industrial” because, as Chapter I will show, the ego-hierarchical scheme which envisions humankind in a position of supremacy over Nature was significantly aggravated by the relentless drive of industrial capitalism in the Victorian era.¹ This condition of Nature's exploitation has continued in the following centuries, slowly but progressively separating Nature and humanity. This ongoing condition of misbalance, however, will inevitably face a collapse. A two-faceted model of this collapse can be articulated through the concept of Apocalypse: specifically, an ecological apocalypse and an apocalypse of the human.

Timothy Morton defines the ecological apocalypse as the slow, ongoing process in which Nature is increasingly exploited by an industrial drive. This exploitation ultimately results in the degradation of the Earth manifested in climate change and other phenomena that indicate a biospheric decline. This ecological decay directly involves humankind. Munir Hossain Talukder discusses the concept of “Self-Realization” within the field of Deep Ecology, drawing on the work of Arne Naess. Naess employs the term “Self-Realization” in a comprehensive sense, distinguishing the two selves: the Self – with a capital S, with a meaning to the Indian *atman* - and self – with small s – referring to the individual self. According to Talukder “the individual self should achieve the universal Self

¹ John Joseph Lupinacci, “Addressing 21st Century Challenges in Education – An Ecocritical Framework”, *Impacting Education, Journal of Transforming Professional Practice*, Vol. 27, 2017, pp. 20-27, 21.

through the diminishing of ego or through the narrow self.” Only this process of narrowing can allow humanity to “joyfully” and “naturally” reconnect with the natural environment, creating a possible ecotistical world, in which humanity and Nature live harmoniously.² This “narrowing of the self” may be framed within an apocalypse of the human, in which humanity is humbled by the “levelling” and divine judgment of a godly Nature that places all living beings on the same level. The ecological apocalypse therefore provokes the collapse of an ego-hierarchy, ultimately disrupting the anthropocentric exploitation of Nature.

This conceptual transition from an ecological apocalypse to an apocalypse of the human finds an unexpected literary resonance in the works of Oscar Wilde and Christina Rossetti, whose writings disrupt anthropocentric dominance by redefining the human relationship with the natural world. The comparative reading of Christina Rossetti and Oscar Wilde unveils a sophisticated representation of a two-faceted apocalypse. First, their works depict the gradual and aggressive exploitation of the natural world, illustrating how environmental decay serves as an urgent, physical warning to humanity. Consequently, this ecological crisis paves the way for a deeper “apocalypse of the human,” enacted through the ultimate judgement of God. Rather than decreeing the physical extinction of humanity, this judgement radically levels the hierarchy between species, subverting humanity’s self-appointed supremacy. Ultimately, this apocalyptic rupture does not mark a definitive end, but a necessary threshold, which re-establishes an egalitarian harmony between humans and the other living beings.

Accordingly, this dissertation illustrates this two-faceted apocalypse by tracing its environmental and spiritual manifestations across a curated selection of Wilde’s and Rossetti’s works. Chapter I establishes the theoretical foundation of this study by examining the ontological separation between humankind and nature. Driven by the industrial expansion of the Anthropocene, this environmental rupture ultimately culminates in apocalyptic anxiety. Following a material and historical contextualization of the Victorian age, this human-Nature alienation is conceptualized through the philosophical and scientific frameworks of Spinoza, Carlyle, Darwin and Marx. The chapter then addresses the legacy of Romanticism and Romantic eco-criticism. It illustrates how Christina Rossetti and Oscar Wilde inherited Romantic paradigms and ecological sensibilities, which originally sought to heal the rift between humanity and the other living beings. Consequently, Rossetti and Wilde are compared on an introductory level, examining how the theme of nature, faith, and apocalyptic fear manifest within this fractured relationship. This comparative analysis highlights their

² Munir Hossain Talukder, “On “Self-Realization” – The Ultimate Norm of Arne Naess’s Ecosophy T”, *Symposion*, 2016, pp. 219-235, 221.

divergent roots yet shared thematic horizon. Ultimately, this shared horizon illuminates their respective conceptual frameworks of the end of time, balancing eco-critical and theological perspectives to complete the foundational background of this study.

The comparative framework of this dissertation begins in Chapter II, which provides a direct textual analysis of Christina Rossetti's "Bird Raptures" (1875) and Oscar Wilde's "The Nightingale and the Rose" (1888). The chapter first elaborates the nostalgia of the natural world, underlining her longing to reconnect with humanity. Within this dynamic, the nightingale figures in both texts are examined as heavily charged, Christological symbols that simultaneously function as literary eco-types. The analysis then investigates the concept of ego-hierarchy, revealing the environmental warning present in both works. A dedicated subsection on Romantic Eco-criticism connects Rossetti's and Wilde's configurations of the Sublime directly to the core principles of Deep Ecology. Finally, the chapter adopts a contemporary lens, re-evaluating both texts as urgent warnings for the twenty-first century and as foundational examples of the apocalyptic writing genre.

Building upon these eco-critical premises, Chapter III transitions into a rigorous eco-theological reading of Christina Rossetti's poem "De Profundis" (1881) and Oscar Wilde's homonymous epistolary text (1897). The chapter first traces the spiritual quests of both authors, demonstrating how their respective journeys culminate in an understanding of Nature as a manifestation of the divine. This exploration of the divine connotation of Nature deepens by framing it as an inheritance of Romantic sensibilities, particularly the concept of *Sehnsucht*, which responds to Nature's own longing for humanity. The analysis then charts a transition from the aesthetic Sublime to the sacred Divine, opening up a critical examination of Christian sacramentalism within their works. This investigation reveals both poets as "hierophants": mediators and ecological translators who decode a sacred natural order. Their intermediary function is actualized through a narrowing process of humility and spiritual kenosis. Ultimately, the central role of Jesus Christ in both texts introduces the possibility of a restorative parousia, reframing the Second Coming not as an ecological destruction, but as a cosmic renewal.

Chapter 4 serves as the culmination of the dissertation, explicitly evaluating the concept of the "apocalypse of the human" by comparing Christina Rossetti's *The Face of the Deep: A Devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse* (1892) and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). The chapter demonstrates how a pervasive feeling of impending doom arises from a rejection of the spiritual world and an embrace of Victorian materialism. This crisis precedes a levelling judgement executed through an egalitarian, godly Nature, before which all human beings stand equal. The analysis then explores a potential utopian aftermath, detailing a Christian configuration where

humanity and Nature harmoniously coexist under divine guidance. Finally, both texts are repositioned within a twenty-first-century framework. This closing section conceptualizes a contemporary archetype of Dorian Gray, mapping the sins of the Victorian character onto modern transhumanist upper-class ambitions that aggressively seek to transcend natural and biological boundaries.

By tracing this trajectory from material industrial degradation to eco-theological renewal and apocalyptic judgement, this dissertation establishes a comprehensive framework for re-evaluating the environmental consciousness of the late Victorian era. Ultimately, this exploration serves as a vital mirror for our contemporary reality, inviting the reader into a deep examination of how Christina Rossetti and Oscar Wilde navigate the ideological rifts that continue to fuel our contemporary ecological crisis and ongoing apocalypse.

Chapter I

The Separation Between Humankind and Nature

- A Comprehensive Background For the Comparison Wilde-Rossetti.

We have despised Nature; that is to say, the living Earth, and all its tokens...

And we have put our trust in the great inventions of the mechanist,

and the gigantic powers of the steam-engine.

(John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lillies*, 1997, 34).

1.The Victorian Background of Rossetti and Wilde – An Historical Overview

The Victorian age witnessed a massive transformation of the world landscape. This subsection demonstrates how Victorian economics and a hypocritical ego-centric society ruptured the relationship between humanity and Nature. Specifically, this structural shift was driven by intense population growth, rapid urbanization, and a transition to a fossil-fuel economy. Crucially, this environmental impact was obscured by the social hypocrisy of the upper classes, who prioritized material progress over ecological sustainability. After analysing the over-industrial thrive, this subsection will ultimately illustrate how industrialization altered the human perception of Nature, leaving society increasingly estranged from the natural world.

To effectively illustrate the over-industrial progression of the Victorian era, it is paramount to mention the socio-economic scenario of the 19th century. According to Bristow’s study, the Victorian period saw an unequal distribution of wealth, the development of what John Addington Symonds defined “huge, hideous towns” and a dramatic increase of poverty.¹ Pauperism and economic issues were consequences of the drastic population growth: between 1841 and 1901 the population of England and Wales more than doubled, towns of over 100,000 inhabitants increased from 6 in 1841 to 30 in 1901, while many rural areas became depopulated. Denser populations led to never before seen ranges of poverty, whose causes and dynamics have been continuously debated within several philosophers.²

POPULATION (in thousands).				
	1840.	1860.	1880.	1897.
England and Wales.....	15,730	19,902	25,714	31,055
Increase.....				97.42%
Scotland	2,600	3,054	3,705	4,218
Increase.....				62.23%
Ireland	8,155	5,820	5,202	4,551
Decrease.....				79.19%
Total, United Kingdom.....	26,485	28,776	34,621	39,821
Increase				50.35%

Data from “Empire and International Relations in Victorian Political Thought”, *The Historical Journal*, 2006, Vol. 49, showing the increase in population in the UK, between 1837 and 1900 (285).

Thomas Malthus’s argument in his “Essay on the Principle of Population” (1798) became one of the most consolidated statements: populations grow much more rapidly than “the means of

¹ Joseph Bristow, “Why “Victorian”? A Period and Its Problems”, 2005, compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1741-4113.2004.00055.x, accessed on October 15th 2025.

² Michael Strand, “The Genesis and structure of moral universalism: social justice in Victorian Britain, 1834-1901”, *Theory and Society*, Published by Springer, 2015, Vol. 44, pp. 537-573; 543.

subsistence”.³ This imbalance eventually leads to poverty and several times in his work Malthus addresses the act of marrying “without the prospect of being able to support a family” as an immoral act.⁴ Michael Strand’s mention of the Lancashire Cotton Famine adds an additional perspective on pauperism, which highlights famine and sanitary crises as one of the causes of the poor living condition endured by the Victorian lower classes: between 1861 and 1865, the sudden decrease in cotton imports from the southern states, as a result of the Union blockade of Confederate ports during the American Civil War, ravaged cotton mill towns in the northwest of England, causing a heavily-striking and “sudden” famine.⁵

The Victorian Era was also characterised by an important industrial and imperialistic expansion. A situation of over-employment originated from what was considered the Second Industrial Revolution (1870-1914) during which many new technologies were discovered: namely, new equipment for cotton textiles, such as the ring spindle and the automatic loom, electricity, the use of iron and steel, along with the large-scale projected chemicals.⁶ These new products, in conjunction with a powerful streak of colonialist missions exponentially increased the power of England. Moreover, from 1750, the British East India Company became the pre-eminent European imperial power in Asia, signalling the beginning of an exceptional economic imperialism. Land settlement during the years of British rule in India might be compared with the Enclosures in England,⁷ which impacted the rights of farmers and workers of the lower classes. The main difference is that enclosures were brought about by the economic motivation of English landed interest, being a well-established procedure by the late 18th century. Commissions set up by Parliament heard the claims of those who had access to the common land and if their claims were disallowed for lack of legal documentation or if they received too small a share for survival, they could only work as underpaid farm labourers.⁸

This situation of industrial proliferation and social imbalance was further stressed by the hypocritical attitude of the richer upper classes. One of the most debated issues of Victorian society

³ Malthus, Thomas “Essay on the Principle of Population”, Volume 1, Everyman’s Library; published by Aldine Press. Pp. 1-20

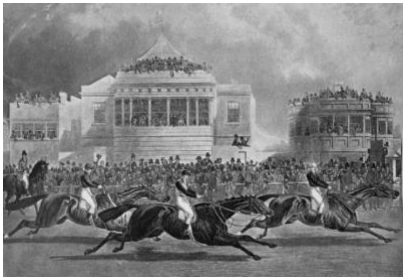
⁴ Ibid, 15.

⁵ Strand, op. Cit., p. 456.

⁶ Fabio Braggion et al., *The Economic Benefits of Political Connections in Late Victorian Britain*, Published by Cambridge University Press.2012, Vol. 73, No. 1, pp. 142-176; p. 156.

⁷ The Enclosures signed the capital life of England: common and untouched lands gradually became private, forcing the migration of numerous population in bigger cities, following the Inclosure Act (Gay, 1907).

⁸ Karl de Schweinitz, “What is Economic Imperialism?”, *Journal of Economic Issues*, September 1981, Vol. 15, No. 3, pp. 675-701; 681.



Royal Ascot, Emperors Cup, 1845 from *The Sphere* of Saturday 13 June 1953 – illustrating the huge crowds that attended sporting events at the time.

was leisure. The querulous tone of the article seemingly addresses leisure as a controversial topic that impacted on middle-class sensibilities. Although leisure and its activities were not a mid-Victorian invention, contemporaries developed new activities for spare time. Proved by several recordings and journals of the time, these pastimes included a constant round of amateur dramatics, discussion clubs, dancing, singing, athletic exercise, together with relaxations of fireside and garden. This expanding leisure was shared by all levels of society, but the upper-class, particularly the

proliferating group of rentiers, felt the most entitled to it.⁹ Despite the excessive possibility of pleasure for the elitist middle class, reformers and politicians pressed upon the working class a particular set of moral values that we recognise today as typically Victorian¹⁰: domesticity, industry and respectability.

Such rigid morality often clashed with the lived experiences of the lower classes, prompting writers to challenge these moral ideals. Among the many literary authors that dealt with morality and the social problems of the Victorian Era, Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot and Thomas Hardy particularly stand out. These authors dealt with poverty, grimness of industrialization, gender inequalities and constraints on women as well as on the working classes. They did not simply criticise the zeitgeist but looked towards the future and a more responsible society.¹¹ For instance, the moral tales in Dickens's *Oliver Twist* are intended to urge the readers to respond to the critical situation of England, in the conviction that it would have made a difference to those in need. Similarly, Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) deplores the moral apathy of the rich to the filth of the working profits, encouraging the two classes to have more fellow feelings for one another. These writings prove that morality in conjunction with social reform could awaken a more just society, one in which the moral imperatives of compassion and social responsibility overrode the controversy of Victorian respectability.

Beyond the economic and demographic changes, the over-industrial paradigm of the Victorian age created an unprecedented ecological rupture. Specifically, the Industrial Revolution severed humanity from the natural rhythms of the ecosystem, provoking a separation between humankind and Nature. Rishabh Mishra provides examples of the detrimental and long-lasting effects caused by

⁹ Peter Bailey, "A Mingled Mass of Perfectly Legitimate Pleasures": The Victorian Middle Class and the Problem of Leisure, *Victorian Studies*, Autumn 1977, Vol. 21, No. 1. Published by Indiana University Press; pp.7-28; 26.

¹⁰ Geoffrey Crossick, "The Labour Aristocracy and Its Values: A Study of Mid-Victorian Kentish London", *Victorian Studies*, 1976, Vol. 19, No. 3, Published by Indiana University Press, pp. 301-328, 310.

¹¹ Vinod Yadav, "The role of morality and social reform in Victorian literature" *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Trends*, March 2024. Published by Uttar Pradesh, India Press; pp. 62-66; 63.

several Victorian innovations. Particularly, through the analysis of Victorian literature and environmental history, the author illustrates the separation that resulted after the continuous pollution, the Rural Enclosure and the forced urbanization. Mishra's analysis starts from Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854):

Industrial centres like the fictional Coketwon in *Hard Times* are described with relentless imagery of pollution and artificiality. (...) The inherent beauty of nature is hidden or obliterated by coal dust, soot, and relentless machinery, with Dickens's prose painting the city as an "unnatural family, shouldering, and trampling, and pressing one another to death".¹²

This quote conceptualizes the violent expansion of Victorian industrial centres as a form of urbanization that aggressively consumed the natural landscape. Nature's beauty is therefore "hidden", "obliterated" by coal dust, a condition that has prevented man to truly enjoy Nature's beauty ever since. A similar analysis is offered for Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891):

Describing the march of progress, Hardy writes, "White dairymaids and trees in blossom... and machines, machines everywhere, stealing the work of men and the peace of rural life." The pastoral here is not romantic but declining. Hardy exposes both ecological and psychological displacement. Places lose intimacy; people lose rootedness. Landscape ceases to be a shelter and becomes the setting for loss, dispossession, and commodification.¹³

By framing Nature through the lenses of dispossession and commodification, this literary response exposes the definitive ontological fracture where humanity ceased to coexist within a living world, becoming alienated from it.

The over industrial drive of the Victorian era establishes the premises for a deep ecological fracture. This fracture is caused by a rapid demographic expansion and the hypocrisy of an upper-class who prioritized its well-being and leisure time. This industrialized landscape permanently altered human perception of Nature, leaving society increasingly estranged from the natural world. To complete this background, the underlying philosophical frameworks that historically justified and reinforced this separation must be analysed.

2. A Philosophical Background to Investigate the Separation of Humankind and Nature.

If the Victorian over-industrial thrive contributed to the separation between humanity and Nature, a further philosophical background must be analysed. The aim of this subsection is to demonstrate how 19th century philosophical and scientific thought (and its subsequent evolution) laid

¹² Rishab Mishra, "Reimagining Human-Nature Relationships in Victorian Literature of the Industrial Age", *International Journal of Advance Studies and Growth Evaluation*, Vol. 3, 2024, pp. 71-74, 72.

¹³ Ibid, 73.

the groundwork for the fragmentation of the Nature-Human relationship, moving from Romanticism to an anthropocentric and perhaps apocalyptic view of the world. Beginning from Spinoza's view of "Deus Sive Natura", the profound spirituality of Romantic poets will be analysed as a first demonstration of a godly manifestation in Nature. The analysis will then move into the Victorian transition from a spiritual engagement with Nature to a more scientific and mechanical view of the natural world. Karl Marx's theory of the "metabolic drift", moreover, illuminates the dangers of human's industrialization paving the way for an apocalyptic framework that stems from Nixon's idea of "Slow Violence".

Benedictus Spinoza (1632-1677) was one of the first philosophers in Western Europe who did not base his ideas of God on the traditional sacred texts of the monotheistic religions, such as the Torah or the Bible. He abandoned the path of a dualistic relationship between a Creator – God - and Creation - the universe - but stated instead: "Deus sive Nature" ("God, in other words, Nature"). There is no division or separation between "Nature", and God. Spinoza argues that God and the physical universe are the exact same substance. Nature is not the passive creation of a distant God; the natural world is the divine, living reality. Similarly, Romanticism experienced a feeling of a godly manifestation and spirituality in its encounter with Nature.¹⁴ Minakshi Chahuan effectively illustrates this Romantic vision. Chahuan mentions how Romantic poets, especially William Wordsworth and Samuel Talyor Coleridge, heavily drew inspiration from the divine wonders of the natural world. While Wordsworth celebrated Nature's beauty and power, Coleridge used Nature as a symbol to explore deeper philosophical and psychological themes, often blending the natural world with the imagination and the Sublime. In depicting the Romantic vision of Nature, Chauhan states:

Romantic poets viewed nature as a spiritual and moral guide, aiming to deepen understanding of life and the universe through their experiences. (...) Both Wordsworth and Coleridge held pantheistic views, seeing divinity manifested in the natural world. *They believed that nature was infused with spiritual meaning and that nature provided a refuge from the industrialized and urbanized world.* (...) The Romantic vision of nature in their poetry transcends mere description, allowing readers to explore *complex themes such as spirituality, emotional experience, the Sublime, and humanity's place within the natural world.* (Italics added)¹⁵

By addressing the "spiritual meaning" behind Nature, Chauhan confirms the godly vision behind the natural world and thus the importance of Romanticism in the investigation of the human-Nature relationship. The Victorian Era, however, saw a significant transition. In his work "Signs of the

¹⁴ Shoshannah Brombacher, "Spinoza's Deus Sive Natura visualized in a pastel drawing", 2015, www.academia.edu/11539676/Spinozas_Deus_Sive_Natura_visualized_in_a_pastel_drawing , accessed on May 16th 2026.

¹⁵ Minakshi Chauhan, "The Role of Nature in Romantic Poetry: A Study of Wordsworth and Coleridge", *International Research Journal of Humanities, Language and Literature*, Vol. 11, 2024, pp. 34-40, 38.

Times”, Carlyle’s commentary on the over-industrialization of the world extensively addresses this change:

Men have crossed oceans by steam; the Birmingham Fire-king has visited the fabulous East; and the genius of Cape, were there any Cameons now to sing it, has again been alarmed, and with far stranger thunders than Gamas. *There is no end to machinery.* (...) We remove mountains, and make seas our smooth highway; nothing can resist us. We war with rude Nature, and, by our resistless engines, come off always victorious, and loaded with spoils. (Italics added).¹⁶

Carlyle’s analysis of a Victorian world that has no limits in the use of machines and the exploitation of Nature seemingly makes the environment a sort of rival, rupturing the harmonious and spiritual relationship the Romantics had envisioned.

Among the philosophers who studied environment and society, Karl Marx’s contribution represents a turning point in the analysis of the fractured relationship between human and Nature. In the chapter “Metabolic Rifts and the Ecological Crisis”, Brett Clark commented the same transition from rural areas to the super-industrial cities which is described in the first subsection of this chapter, as follows:

The application of industrial power increased the scale of operations, transforming and intensifying the social metabolism while exacerbating the depletion of the soil nutrients. (...) In other words, the social metabolic order of capital progressively violated the earthly metabolism – in this case the law of compensation – creating a *metabolic rift* in the soil nutrient cycle. The demands of capital are imposed on nature, increasing the pressures placed on ecological systems and the production of wastes, generating distinct metabolic rifts (or ruptures) within both the social metabolism itself and the wider universal metabolism, consisting of various natural cycles and processes. (Italics added)¹⁷

The “metabolic rift” illustrated by Karl Marx’s theory addresses explicitly both the theme of an exploited natural world and Nature as an all-encompassing system in which both human and non-human are affected by this “metabolic anomaly”. However, while industrialization and capitalism increasingly proceeded to enlarge the abyss between human consciousness and the environment, science and philosophy started searching for a new vocabulary to study global interconnectedness. Wendy Parkins and Peter Adkins elaborate how Ernst Haeckel’s formulation of the term “ecology” occurred at a time when the ecology of the British environment was being transformed by the impact of industrial capitalism and imperialism. Their issue states:

Haeckel’s arrival at this new mode of studying nature was not isolated from broader scientific developments. Rather, it arrived as part of a shift in the sciences during the second half of the nineteenth century towards a reassessment of long-standing narratives of biophysical life and a more contextualized understanding of nature, perhaps most famously represented in Charles Darwin’s image of the “*entangled bank*” of plants, birds, insects, and worms with which he concludes *The Origin of Species* (1859). Haeckel’s illustration of a bank teeming with different species of moss in *Kunstformen*

¹⁶ Thomas Carlyle, “Signs of the Times”, www.unife.it/stum/lingue/insegnamenti/letteratura-inglese-ii/materiale-didattico-2021-2022/Thomas%20Carlyle-%20Signs%20of%20the%20Times-%201829.pdf, accessed on May 25th 2026.

¹⁷ Brett Clark et al., “Metabolic Rifts and the Ecological Crisis”, *The Oxford Handbook of Karl Marx*, Oxford University Press, 2019, 625.

der Natur (1904), and which provides the cover image for this issue, captures the liveliness inherent to this growing sense of life as an *entanglement*. At the same time that these epistemic revolutions within the sciences were taking place, the ecology of the British landscape – the physical and social relationship between human, other organisms, and their environments – was itself in the process of rapid change, fuelled by the transformative agency of capitalism, imperialism, and the rise of fossil fuels. (Italics added)¹⁸

Through Darwin's depiction of all species living on Earth as an entanglement, the eco-critical implication of Marx's metabolic drift addresses a dangerous misbalance, which causes an inequity between human and non-human.

This stark separation appears to have continued throughout the centuries, following a progressive and slow evolution which eventually meet a collapse, an apocalypse perhaps. In his chapter "The End of the World", philosopher Timothy Morton connects the concept of Hyperobjects (Climate change, pollution etc.) to a possible apocalypse. Firstly, he depicts an anthropocentric end:

A hyperobject has ruined the weather conversation, which functions as part of a neutral screen that enables us to have a *human drama in the foreground*. In an age of global warming, there is no background, and thus there is no foreground. It is the end of the world, since worlds depend on backgrounds and foreground. *World* is a fragile aesthetic effect around whose corners we are beginning to see. True planetary awareness is the creeping realization not that "We Are the World", but that we aren't.¹⁹

Not only does Morton express the concept of an excessively ego-centred humanity, he also stresses a "creeping realization" concerning a world that is not ours and has never been. In the following pages of his work, Morton further builds towards an apocalyptic collapse:

The spooky thing is, we discover global warning precisely when it's already here. It is like realizing that for some time you had been conducting your business in the expanding sphere of a slow-motion nuclear bomb. (...) All those apocalyptic narratives of doom about the "end of the world" are, from this point of view, part of the problem, not part of the solution. *By postponing doom into some hypothetical future, these narratives inoculate us against the very real object that has intruded into ecological, social, and psychic space. As we shall see, the hyperobject spells doom now, not at some future date.* (Italics added).²⁰

Morton's warning on the strong contemporary connotation of the "end of the world" specifies that this apocalypse does not occur suddenly, but rather results in continuous years of exploitation. This perspective is reinforced by Rob Nixon's concept of "Slow Violence", which addresses the gradual and continuous exploitation and violence of the environment, as follows:

By slow violence I mean a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all. Violence is customarily conceived as an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and as erupting into instant sensational visibility. *We need, I believe*

¹⁸ Wendy Parkins and Peter Adkins, "Introduction: Victorian Ecology and the Anthropocene", 2018, 19.bbk.ac.uk/article/id/1717/, Accessed on May 4th 2026.

¹⁹ Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects – Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, Minnesota University Press, 2013, pp. 99-133, 99.

²⁰ Ibid, 104.

*to engage a different kind of violence, a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales.*²¹

By depicting apocalypse as an event that is ongoing and highly related to over-industrial changes and environmental exploitation, Nixon's framework of a slow and gradual violence ultimately confirms the need to identify and analyse the literary representation of this slow violence. The analysis of the philosophical background behind the relationship between humankind and nature depicts the separation as the result of the over-industrialization of the world. Specifically, the anthropocentric shift from a godly and admiring view of Nature to a scientific and mechanical one underlines the slow and corrosive exploitation of the natural world, defined by Nixon as "Slow Violence". The correlation of this concept with the apocalyptic imagery of an ongoing end of time possibly questions whether any writers or literary movement ever attempted to reconnect with Nature.

3. The Role of Romantic Eco-Criticism in Recovering the Relationship Between Humanity and Nature.

If the over-industrialization of the 18th and 19th centuries created a profound rift between humankind and the natural world, producing apocalyptical anxieties, this separation also caused a powerful cultural reaction. Crucial to this resistance are the Romantics, who were among the first to actively seek a spiritual reconnection with Nature. This subsection demonstrates how Eco-Romanticism attempted to bridge this divide by examining the contribution of both Romantic poetry and Romantic Eco-criticism. First, the Romantic poetry will be analysed within the framework of "ecopoetry", which underlines the intrinsic eco-critical connotation of Romantic poetry and its important role in the reconnection with Nature. Second, the enquire of Romantic poets into the growing industrial interference within the relationship between humanity and Nature will be analysed to demonstrate the Romantic sensitivity to over-industrialization. Then, the analysis of the shared theme of imagination which not only reiterates the importance of Romantic ecocriticism, but also finds validation in modern scientific studies that explore how human senses and the mind interact with the environment. Ultimately, this analysis reveals that the Romantic quest to heal the human-Nature separation establishes a lasting legacy that reshapes subsequent Victorian literature, further confirming the importance of Romantic ecocriticism in the study of the relationship between humankind and Nature.

The Romantic poets can be considered among the category of poets who strived to reconnect with Nature during the Industrial proliferation of the Anthropocene. Specifically, their attempt to

²¹ Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011, 2.

mediate and represent a powerful and spiritual natural world can be framed within the concept of ecopoetry, confirming the attempt of Romanticism in reconnecting with Nature. The analysis of Romanticism, however, is rooted in the previous centuries of poetry and philosophy. In his essay “The Natural World in Greek Literature and Philosophy” Mark Payne offers a useful excursus on the major perspectives of the natural world in Greek Literature and Philosophy.²² His digression proves two important points: firstly Nature does not need to be harmonious and objectively beautiful; secondly the observing poet is not just a man loving the aesthetic facade of Nature, instead they are a mediator of a more intricate relationship between the human and non-human. Payne begins with Plotinus: in his work *On Beauty* (301 AD), the Greek philosopher recalls Pindar in order to criticize those who think that beauty depends upon our perception of a harmonious relationship of parts. As Plotinus states in his work, Nature is not always proportioned and harmonious, mentioning instances of disharmonic but beautiful Nature: minerals like gold, the sun-rays and the more distant astrophysics phenomena (stars, planets, constellations, etc.) which are still object of study and have not been fully explained yet. Furthermore, Schiller’s thought on the poet’s role in the relationship between humankind and Nature may be considered an even more important contribution, which by no coincidence is also repurposed by eco-critics of all ages:

By virtue of the very notion of a poet, *poets are everywhere the guardians of nature*. (Italics added) Where they can no longer completely be this, and where they have already experienced within themselves the destructive influence of arbitrary and artificial forms or have to contend with them, they will appear as nature’s witnesses and avengers. They will either be nature or seek the lost nature.²³

In this passage, poets are defined as guardians, witnesses and even avengers, proving their essential role in mediating with Nature, underlining their cohesion and symbiotic relationship with the natural world. Finally, Heidegger’s view on the natural sublime confirms the central and ever-lasting romantic role of the poet/observer:

Nature in these parts also stirs me more powerfully the more I study it. Storms, not just in their greatest manifestation, but seen as power and figure, among the other forms of the sky, the effect of the light, shaping nationally and as a principle and destiny, so that something is holy to us, the intensity of its coming and going, the characteristics of the woods and the coincidence in one region of different qualities of nature, so that all the holy places of the Earth are together in one place, and the philosophic light at my window, they are now my joy.²⁴

²² Mark Payne, “The Natural World in Greek Literature and Philosophy”, *Classical Studies and Ancient Greek History*, April 2014, pp. 1-22, 15.

²³ Friedrich Schiller, “On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry by Friedrich Schiller”, *Poet of Freedom*, The Schiller Institute, https://archive.schillerinstitute.com/transl/Schiller_essays/naive_sentimental-1.html Accessed on October 2nd 2025.

²⁴ Martin Heidegger, “On the Essence and Concept of Nature, History and State”, *Nature, History, State*, 1933. Translated and edited by Gregory Freid and Richard Polt; Bloomsbury Education. Available at https://www.academia.edu/78068276/Martin_Heidegger_Nature_History_State_1933_1934 Accessed on October 10th, 2025.

This passage proves the profound engagement that the human being feels when surrounded by Nature and perhaps the final stage of this empathic relationship: a unique feeling of joy, as if every place of Earth becomes all “in one place”, a sort of epiphany. As Forsyth writes in his paper “The myth of Nature and the Victorian Compromise of the Imagination”, the Romantic attitude towards Nature was essentially religious and mystical.²⁵ Shelley also expressed a similar idea on the matter:

Those who are subject to the stated called reverie, feel as if their nature were dissolving into the surrounding universe, or as if the surrounding universe were absorbed into their being. They are conscious of no distinction. And these are states which precede and accompany, or follow an unusually intense and vivid apprehension of life.²⁶

In this passage, Shelley articulates a vision that is similar to Heidegger’s human/nature duality, perhaps even anticipating it. He suggests that the feeling of community with Nature could be considered as the absorption of two beings - the human and the non-human - resulting in a “vivid apprehension of life”. On the same perspective, Jonathan Bate finds a similar feeling of community and union in Wordsworth’s major compositions within the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), defining them as “ecopoetic”:

when we commune with those forms (of nature) we live with a particular intensity, and conversely that our lives are diminished when technology and industrialization alienate us from those forms.²⁷

Therefore, Wordsworth, and Romantic poets broadly, may be considered as exemplars of ecopoetry, which is defined as the engagement with the natural world that resists bucolic idealization: the poet is actually aware of the true status of Nature, perhaps as the original form of life inhabiting the planet, and writes to encourage the reader to seek it and reconnect with it.

Romantic Eco-Criticism, moreover, is employed to enquire the exploitation of humankind and Nature in two societies, the Romantic and the Victorian, where the concept of labour and environment are completely transformed. Kate Castellano emphasizes how Wordsworth’s poetry interrogates the social and environmental impact of liberal individualism, social mobility and land development on traditional, agrarian England. Detached from their homes, disoriented, ghost-like figures appear to be some of the major protagonists of the *Lyrical Ballads*: the Ancient Mariner, Simon Lee, Martha Ray, Goody Blake and the Female Vagrant all appear bewildered by the changes wrought by progressive

²⁵ R. A. Forsyth, “The Myth of Nature and the Victorian Compromise of the Imagination”, *ELH*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 1964. Published by The John Hopkins University Press, pp. 213-240; 218.

²⁶ Percy Bysshe Shelley, “On Life”, *The Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley in Verse and Prose*, edited by H. Buxton Forman. Paragraph 8. Available at <https://www.grace.umd.edu/~djb/shelley/1880onlife.html> Accessed on October 4th, 2025.

²⁷ Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, London: Picador, 2000. Pp. 68-93, 73.

modern society.²⁸ ²⁹ As Raymond Williams specifies in *The Country and the City* (1973), the enclosures intensified agrarian capitalism leaving an indelible mark in the lives and ecology of thousands of territories.³⁰ Romantic ecoliterature could therefore be considered an act of exposure: the Industrial Revolution long-lasting effects are possibly denounced since the very start of the revolution, as the relationship between humanity and Nature is deeply and permanently impacted by the exploitation and modification of the environment. In Kate Rigby's "Romantic Ecocriticism", the author scrutinizes moments in Romantic writing where landscapes are figured as actively calling forth the poet's feelings and ideas. Specifically, moments where "the initiative lies with the phenomenon not with the gaze, repositioning the poet as recipient rather than as producer"—all the while keeping an eye on the ways in which the poet's experiences of the natural world "are inflected by cultural memory and social ideology". What ecocritics like McKusick, Oerlemans, and Rigby, indeed, share is a sense of Nature's agency, the idea that non-human creatures and environments have the active capacity to influence human thought and behaviour.³¹ These findings and eco-interpretations, thus, stress the emerging voice of a forgotten Nature, that is trying to communicate with humankind, perhaps trying to merge with it.

In this passionate – and at times tormented – interaction between human and non-human, the role of imagination and the neuro-scientific studies behind the contemplation of Nature are noteworthy. The emphasis on imagination – a core tool within Romanticism – reiterates the importance of Romantic Ecocriticism in the study of the Nature-humankind relationship, further reinforced by scientific investigations into the sensory and mental faculties when interacting with Nature. The Victorians and Pre-Raphaelites experience a feeling of imagination and psychic engagement which is similar to the Romantics' recollection in tranquillity. According to David Perkins, as he writes in *Sympathy with Nature*, there is an intrinsic imaginative act within the human which is spontaneous: the identification with hares, trees, even with lakes and mountains.³² This spontaneous act might originate from a more intrinsic urge of the human being, escaping from reality, merging with the non-human, considering Nature as the "very next" to the human being. Senses play a key-role, as Ruskin said that the "greatest thing" a human can possibly do in this world is "to see

²⁸ Kate Castellano, "Romantic Conservatism in Burke, Wordsworth, and Wendell Berry", *Substance*, 2011, Vol. 40, No. 2, Issue 125, Published by The John Hopkins University Press. pp. 73-91, 81.

²⁹ "The Female Vagrant" (1798), for instance, presents a first-person narrative of a woman whose life and family have been destroyed by war. Wordsworth details the destructions of war through a feminine lens, possibly presenting war not as a singular event on a battlefield, but as an event that harms *all* involved at various moments in time. The poem can be also interpreted as an allegory of the way enclosures laws and industrial revolution forced people from their homes, stripping them of both homeland and identity. Therefore war affects everyone, including nature.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 83.

³¹ Hutchings, op. Cited, para. 10.

³² David Perkins, "Sympathy with Nature: Our Romantic Dilemma", *Harvard Review*, 1995, No. 9, pp. 69-82.

something, and tell what it saw in a plain way”.³³ And David Perkins add “Human beings acquire information primarily through their eyes and that is the reason why much of Nature writing and natural poetry usually describe things that have been seen”.

Wordsworth’s poetry may be considered an instance of the essential role of sight in the imaginative act of the recollection in tranquillity. The sight of the daffodils inspired in William and Dorothy Wordsworth the need of writing down descriptions of the flowers, Dorothy in her Journal and William in the famous poem that will later be known as “Daffodils”. Dorothy's journal entry reads:

When we were in the woods beyond Gowbarrow Park we saw a few daffodils close to the water-side. We fancied that the lake had floated the seeds ashore, and that the little colony had so sprung up. But as we went along there were more and yet more; and at last, under the boughs of the trees, *we* saw (Italics added) that there was a long belt of them along the shore, about the breadth of a country turnpike road (Dorothy’s Wordsworth “Grasmere Journals”, qtd. In King et Al., 1979).³⁴

Dorothy uses the pronoun "we" several times in her journal, thus including William in the scene. William possibly converted Dorothy's notations into a symbolic landscape, a scene of sparkling light on land and water in which the wind is the divine spirit in everything. While Dorothy's response to the scene was mostly considered aesthetic, William possibly depicted the scene as an epiphany. Only Nature, thus, understands William Wordsworth’s sense of loneliness and emptiness, only Nature could outperform the close relationship between two human beings, in this case the Wordsworth siblings. The contribution of neuro-science further demonstrate the superior love of Nature: in a series of electro-encephalographic studies on Tibetan monks, Richard Davidson and other neuroscientists have shown that deep and sustained “objectless meditation” toward “all sentient beings” generates unprecedented levels of brain activity that shape consciousness and cognitive processes. This all-inclusive meditative love - what ecophilosophers call “ecological love” or “ecophilia”³⁵— is similar to the sensation Wordsworth achieves in “Daffodils”: the “blessed mood” he articulates is not an escapist, imaginary state but an actual state of mind produced by a love of Nature. Wordsworth’s love

³³ John Ruskin, *The Two Paths*, 1884, George Allen edition, Sunnyside Press, 92. Available at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=miun.abn4851.0001.001&seq=1> Accessed on October 3rd, 2025.

³⁴ King et al., op. Cited, 11.

³⁵ Ecophilia, the affinity for place-nature. Definition by Vineet Radhakrishnan, “Beyond the screen: The psychological significance of ecophilia in childhood.”

of nature thus reveals how an affective engagement with the natural world can unlock the bodily, material processes of a true state of organic interconnectedness.^{36 37}

Victorians seem to share the recollection of images and feelings experienced by the Romantics. The detailed and accurate descriptions provided by certain poets, such as the Pre-Raphaelites, suggest that ecophilia and the sense of spirituality experienced when encountering Nature were inherited by post-Romantic authors. In Victorian poetry, Nature is at times described in minute detail by Tennyson with scientific accuracy and by the Pre-Raphaelites with a similar attention on detail and symbol. Outside the poetic instance, though, it seems as if the Victorians struggled to acknowledge the actual eco-poetic implications of the Nature depicted by the Romantics, prioritizing a more scientific and empirical depiction of the “non-human” realm.³⁸ In part, this might be due to the fact that the Victorian society - as to intend the second half of the 19th Century - was even more ingrained in towns than the Romantics, possibly creating a more “industrialized” view of the surrounding environment. In terms of Pre-Raphaelite poetry, instead, Dinah Roe notes how from Rossetti to Ruskin the poems are generally set in rural landscapes with a peculiarity: while most of the poetry focuses on rural scenes, Pre-Raphaelitism was actually an urban movement, therefore, the natural world accurately described in their literature was not experienced on a daily basis. The Pre-Raphaelite landscape, indeed, was usually “remembered, imagined and conjured” as it highlights the altered sense of reality caused by the hyper-focused detail outlined in early reviews of their art. The landscape was therefore remembered by the Pre-Raphaelites as the Romantics possibly used to *remember* (Italics added). As Nicholas Jagger adds in relation to the PRB’s depictions of Nature:

Simple objects and the demotic are central to the performance of the real, felt if not analysed, by the reader. [...] What I suggest is that backgrounds in Pre-Raphaelite painting are important in two aspects; firstly they help to naturalise the impact of the implied narrative represented by the subject, and secondly, with reference to nature, they *disarm* (Italics added) the viewer’s critical faculties by implying a truthfulness to nature (Jagger, qtd. in Cooper, 1981).³⁹

The “recollection in tranquillity” that was experienced by the Romantics could thus be considered, in Pre-Raphaelite words, “disarming”. Nature is such a real and escapeless scenario that no philosophical perspective or artistic idealized beauty could capture its aesthetic potential. Similar to

³⁶ Reno, Seth “Rethinking the Romantic’s Love of Nature”, *The Anthropocene and the Humanities*, 1st Edition, 2021. Pp. 28-57; 32.

³⁷ In *Phytologia* (1800), Darwin proposes a theory of “the happiness of organic life” in contrast to a view of the natural world as “one great slaughter- house, one universal scene of rapacity and injustice”. The natural phenomenon of life, Darwin argues, is essentially one of happiness and pleasure.

³⁸ Forsyth, op.cited, 225.

³⁹ Robyn Cooper, “The Relationship between the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and Painters before Raphael in English Criticism of the Late 1840s and 1850s”, *Victorian Studies*, Summer, 1981, Vol. 24, No. 4. Published by Indiana University Press. Pp. 405-438; 415.

the Romantic imagination and recollection in tranquillity, the hyper-realism of the details is also used to elevate the subject of the poem to almost fantastical levels. As a paramount instance, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poem "The Portrait" (1870) could be analysed in these terms. The seventh stanza of the poem recites: "In painting her I shrined her face / Mid mystic trees, where violets lie; / And over them her shadowy hair / Did sweep with gold oars, many a fair / And tender heart, now stricken there, / Beats in the branches."⁴⁰ This Pre-Raphaelite instance possibly illustrates the very thin limit between realistic detail and natural sublime that the Pre-Raphaelite's representation of Nature was imbedded with. The human and the non-human seems to be a unique thing, signing a symbiotic relationship between humanity and Nature, a connection that rely both on symbolic images and on the sublime feeling of the vastness of the natural world.

In conclusion, the Eco-Romantic impulse to reconnect humankind and Nature permeated deep into the 19th century. The demonstration of imagination as a literary tool also supported by scientific studies further proves the importance of Romanticism in the inquiry of the relationship between humankind and Nature. This ecological awareness was directly transmitted to subsequent post-Romantic literature. Within the Victorian context, however, two prominent poets that can be analysed are Christina Rossetti and Oscar Wilde, whose complex relationship with Nature remains largely unexplored.

4.The Natural Worlds of Christina Rossetti and Oscar Wilde – Between Spirituality and Fin de Siècle's anxieties.

Having established the foundational role of Romantic ecocriticism in challenging the industrial rift between humankind and Nature, it becomes essential to trace how this ecological framework evolved in subsequent generations. To fully understand this lineage within the Victorian context, Christina Rossetti and Oscar Wilde should be compared as pivotal figures who inherited and uniquely adapted these principles. This subsection explores their shared ecological heritage by examining the divergence in their formal and conceptual approaches to the natural world. Initial contrast arises in their generic relationship with Nature, where Rossetti's Christian fascination with the natural world directly counters Wilde's highly aesthetic artificiality in Nature's depiction. This divergence seemingly deepens through their spirituality, as the Romantic sacred view of the environment fractures into Rossetti's Anglo-Catholic sacramental ecology and Wilde's sensuous pantheism. Wilde's sympathies with Catholicism, however, proves a possible interconnection with

⁴⁰ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, "The Portrait", www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45023/the-portrait-56d22459825d7, accessed on June 4th 2026.

Rossetti, that is the two poets' desire to convert and experience a spiritual reconnection with a God. A final, crucial intersection appears in their shared late-Victorian eco-anxiety, which manifests as a tension between Rossetti's biblical eschatology of cosmic renewal and Wilde's decadent condemnation of materialism and Nature's manipulation.

The contrast between Rossetti's admiration for Nature and Wilde's artificiality reveals a divergence in how both authors represent the natural world. Wilde's understanding of Nature can be analysed through the theoretical framework provided by Timothy Morton in his "Ecology without Nature". Morton's analysis of the aesthetic argument states that Nature is always an artificial, mediated construct rather than an objective reality.⁴¹ This argument directly illuminates Wilde's stance in *The Decay of Lying* (1889). Through the character of Vivian, Wilde explicitly claims that art does not imitate a pure environment; instead, it is art that teaches Nature its proper place by correcting its "curious crudities" and "extraordinary monotony".⁴² Consequently, Wilde treats the physical world not as an organic entity to preserve but as a flawed raw material that achieves values only when curated into an aesthetic landscape. Emma Mason, instead, depicted Rossetti's view of Nature as a paradisiac world of fellowship:

Through kenōsis and weakness, Rossetti suggested that the world can appear Edenic and paradisiacal, and revealed *creation as a multi-species kinship in which things receive grace* and flourish through intimacy and fellowship with each other and God.⁴³

By addressing the natural world as a "multi-species kinship", Mason highlights Rossetti's admiration and devotion for Nature, envisioning an underlying Almighty presence and a consequent superior connotation within the natural world.

The abiding faith of Rossetti, in contrast to Wilde's seemingly indifference towards religion and Nature's divine connotation opens to a comparison of their two religious experiences. This comparison, in fact, reveals profound similarities between the two poets, and a similar search for the divine in their world experience. To effectively introduce the two poets' spiritual search, the similarities between Christina Rossetti's tormented Christianity and Oscar Wilde's religion must be analysed. The comparison of the two spiritual experiences confirms how Wilde envisions a superior God behind his life on Earth, although through a more distressed experience. Christina Rossetti famously belonged to the Tractarians, who sought a renewal of Anglicanism that envisioned all believers as part of a communion of Saints, finally redeemed in the New Jerusalem. Several critics, moreover, have analysed her tormented vocation, constantly pending between a cloistered life and

⁴¹ Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature. Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, Harvard University Press, 2007, 49.

⁴² Oscar, Wilde, *La decadenza della menzogna*, Milano, Mondadori, 1995, 17.

⁴³ Emma Mason, *Christina Rossetti: Poetry, Ecology, Faith*, Oxford University Press, 2018, 4.

the institution of marriage. The most direct proof of her inner conflict comes from her brother and literary executor, William Michael Rossetti. In his memoirs and introductions to her collected works, he explicitly notes that Christina was a woman “replete with the spirit of self-postponement”. He documented that her rejections of love were not due to a lack of passion, but rather an agonizingly strict religious conscience that demanded she choose spiritual devotion over romantic fulfilment. In the introduction to “The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti: with memoir and notes”, it is stated:

No precept of the Christian religion was more indelibly impressed upon her mind and her sympathies than “Judge not, that ye be not judged”. She never – not even in thought, so far as thought was under her control – imputed a bad motive to any one (...) I have often thought that this trammelled her to some extent in writing, for she was wont to construe the biblical precepts in a very literal manner; and that she would in some instances have expressed herself with more latitude of thought and word, and to a more valuable effect, but for the fear of saying something which would somehow turn to the detriment of some timorous or dim-minded reader. She certainly felt that to write anything for publication is to incur a great spiritual responsibility.⁴⁴

This biographic evidence demonstrates how Christina Rossetti’s strong, although tormented, faith was directly channelled in her writing, confirming her strive towards God and her Christian will to convert.

Wilde’s religion was seemingly more anguished. The presence of references throughout his poetry to numerous religions makes Wilde’s faith particularly enigmatic to understand. Christopher Nassaar analyses the presence of multiple faiths in Wilde’s works, stretching from Atheism to Judaism and Christianity. Aside from the religious conflict within Decadence, Nassaar underlines the profound presence of spirituality, confirming a divine thrive in Wilde’s work.⁴⁵ As long as Wilde’s biography is concerned, his anti-Catholic family would often discourage him from abandoning Protestantism, even threatening to estrange him. However, as Noel O’Mahony recounts in his essay “Oscar Wilde and the Church”, the poet had always had a profound admiration and curiosity for Catholicism. His years of study at Trinity College added to his fascination with the Catholic church, bringing him close to conversion multiple times, especially during his visits to Rome in the late 1870s. After leaving prison, the author reportedly asked a Catholic Convent to spend a time retiring behind their walls. These biographical details prove Oscar Wilde’s desire to deepen and investigate his spirituality, possibly within Christianity. The same Noel O’Mahony commented on Oscar Wilde’s faith: “Art, he found, was not enough. God was wanted to fill a void in his soul.”⁴⁶ O’Mahoney’s analysis confirms Wilde’s sensibility to the presence of a God behind his life, exactly like Rossetti had.

⁴⁴ William Michael Rossetti, *The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti*, New York: The MacMillan Company, 1904, 87.

⁴⁵ Christopher Nassaar, “Wilde’s Salomé and the Victorian Religious Landscape”, 2005, victorianweb.org/authors/wilde/nassaar2.html, accessed on May 3rd 2026.

⁴⁶ Noel O’Mahony, “Oscar Wilde and the Church”, *The Irish Monthly*, Vol. 79, 1951, pp. 26-31, 30.

Facing late-Victorian industrialization and the degradation of the environment, both authors exhibit a deep eco-anxiety. While Wilde focuses on the terrifying material realities of decay and biological entropy, Rossetti expresses a possible warning through a biblical eschatology of ultimate renewal. In her article “Rossetti’s Weak Apocalypse”, Mason describes a “burn-out world”:

Rossetti also implicitly criticised a society founded on structures and strategies beholden to what she called “*the almighty dollar*”. In Jesus’s outright rejection of money and belongings Rossetti saw a refusal of both the logic of modernity and the commodification of creation as a resource to be mined and sold. (...) Rossetti turned the late eighteenth century and nine, little changed for those groups most vulnerable to a society driven by money. Rossetti turned to the apocalypse as that which would finally arrive to destroy, not the earth, but the “signs of the times” – materialism, consumption, greed, wealth, power and cruelty – that threatened to destroy it. Revelation thus announced the beginning of a new and shared perspective on reality, a promise that God would enter into creation in order to renew it from within.⁴⁷

According to Mason’s analysis, Rossetti’s apocalypse will happen to restore the Earth from industrial capitalism and exploitation. Instead of a total destruction, this collapse functions as a spiritual reset that terminates environmental degradation. Ultimately, the apocalyptic event restores humanity to its moral core, ending nature’s exploitation and initiating a balanced coexistence.

Wilde’s Dorian Gray similarly condemns materialism in an apocalyptic way. This idea is supported by Elizabeth Miller’s article “Only Nature Is a Thing Unreal”: The Anthropocene 1890s”, in which she states:

Dorian Gray’s new hedonism is an Anthropocene hedonism, not a classical hedonism, for it translates not just to the pursuit of sexual and sensual pleasure, but also to a denial of natural limits that manifests, most obviously, in the phenomenal acquisitiveness of title character Dorian Gray. Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued that the “mansion of modern freedoms stands on an ever-expanding base of fossil-fuel use,” and I would suggest that the pointed inclusion of Lord Fermor’s collieries in Dorian Gray is a nod to the economic roots of the freewheeling consumption enjoyed by the novel’s characters. Anthropocene, where *the agency of the natural world becomes manifest precisely in the wake of its abject commodification* (Italics added).⁴⁸

Dorian Gray’s “new hedonism” reduces the environment to mere aesthetic fuel, trapping the world in “abject commodification.” However, this obsessive consumption causes an environmental decay, as the physical world rebels against this commodification, proving that Earth cannot be endlessly consumed without affecting humanity in return.

In summary, this subsection lays the groundwork for understanding how Rossetti and Wilde uniquely approach Nature, faith, and apocalyptic anxiety. While Rossetti’s Anglo-Catholic sacramentalism contrasts with Wilde’s religion, both authors share a deep desire for spiritual

⁴⁷ Emma Mason, “Christina Rossetti’s Weak Apocalypse”, 2020, wrap.warwick.ac.uk/id/eprint/142171/8/WRAP-Rossettiss-weak-apocalypse-2020.pdf Accessed on April 4th 2026.

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Carolyn Miller, “Only Nature Is a Thing Unreal”: The Anthropocene 1890s”, *Nineteenth-Century Literature in Transition: The 1890s*, Cambridge University Press, 2023, pp. 170-186, 175.

reconnection. This shared spiritual drive unites them in their late-Victorian anxieties, where they both critique industrial materialism and the exploitation of the natural world. Ultimately their ecological concerns prove inseparable from their spiritual beliefs - especially for Rossetti - as both authors use environmental or bodily degradation to illustrate that human corruption directly provokes a rapture from Nature. To fully understand how these anxieties resolve, their overlapping apocalyptic frameworks must be analysed.

5. Apocalyptic Frameworks Between Theology and Eco-Criticism:

In developing the concept of apocalypse, it is important to further analyse the multiple meanings and connotations of this collapse. This final subsection aims to define Apocalypse not merely as a biblical “end of the world”, but as an unveiling (*apokalypsis*) and an anthropogenic ecological crisis, which will ultimately connect Rossetti’s theology and Wilde’s decadence. This collapse of Anthropocentric paradigms will be described on three levels. Apocalypse will first be analysed as a revelation within the Christian eschatological view. Then, the end of the time as the collapse of the anthropocentric paradigms which see humankind over Nature. Finally, Lawrence Buell’s framework on Environmental Apocalypticism will lay the groundwork in order to explore the ecological apocalypse, creating a two-faceted model of the end of time, the apocalypse of the human and the culmination of the slow ongoing ecological apocalypse.

The word “apocalypse” derives from the Greek *apoklypsis*, which means “revelation” or “disclosure”. It’s an event that occurs in the opening line of the New Testament, particularly the book



“The Day of His Great Wrath” Painting
by John Martin

of Revelation. According to Sidnie Crawford, apocalypses are characterized by the presence of “vision, symbolism, a human seer and an otherworldly mediator, an otherworldly journey, an emphasis on events in the cosmic rather than human realm, the notion of the transcendence of God.”⁴⁹ As Boston Historian Paula Fredriksen explains, in Christian theology the concept of

the apocalypse extends beyond global catastrophes to signify a divine “revelation”; early Christian apocalypticism functioned primarily as a theology of redemption and justice, offering hope to persecuted communities by promising the definitive triumph of good over evil. The Christian apocalyptic framework envisions a radical cosmic renewal, marked by the Parousia (the second return of Jesus Christ), transforming an apparent end into a new beginning. Fredriksen also specifies that

⁴⁹ Sidnie White Crawford, “Apocalyptic”, *Classic and Religious Studies*, Vol. 54, 2000, pp. 1-3, 2.

“Christianity began with the announcement that time and history were about to end”, enhancing the “impending” feeling of this event to the Christian followers. This foundational evidence is necessary to comprehend Christina Rossetti’s belief and attitude towards the end of the world, which envisions both a Parousia and an ecological apocalypse.⁵⁰

Apocalypse, however, is not only a divine intervention. The apocalyptic sense of an impending doom has also been framed within a cultural and human event, especially concerning the turn of the century, the so called *fin de siècle*. As Frank Kermode specifies in his chapter “The Modern Apocalypse”, every century in history, including our own, has experienced a feeling of “impending doom”.

The mood of *fin de siècle* is confronted by a harsh historical *finis saeculi*. There is something satisfying about it, some confirmation of the rightness of the patterns we impose. But as Focillon observed, the anxiety reflected by the *fin de siècle* is *perpetual, and people don’t wait for centuries to end before they express it. Any date can be justified on some calculation or other*. And of course we have it now, the sense of an ending. It has not diminished, and is as endemic to what we call modernism as apocalyptic utopianism is to political revolution.⁵¹

By addressing the concept of *fin de siècle* as “perpetual”, Kermode links our contemporary era to the *fin de siècle*’s anxieties, anticipating an apocalyptic reading of Oscar Wilde’s and Christina Rossetti’s works.

The cultural theme of the end of time eventually correlates to an ecological apocalypse. This is because Lawrence Buell has highlighted several times the implications of an apocalyptic imagery within the contemporary critic of eco-centrism. His chapter “Environmental Apocalypticism” comments on the image of apocalypse as follows:

The metaphor of Apocalypse is central to ecocentrism’s projection of the future of a civilization that refuses to transform itself according to the doctrine of the web. *Apocalypse is the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal*. (Italics added)⁵²

In light of Buell’s consideration, apocalypse is the most powerful tool to awaken ecological consciousness, eco-criticism and environmentalism. This finally transforms apocalypse from a solely “divine judgement” into the consequence of human action. The epistemological sequence in which the apocalypse is depicted by Oscar Wilde and Christina Rossetti will thus be discussed in two levels. Beginning from an ecological apocalypse - which is the final, slow, unavoidable destruction that may

⁵⁰ Paula Fredriksen, “Apocalypse and Redemption in Early Christianity – From John Patmos to Augustin of Hippo”, *Vigiliae Christianae*, Vol. 45, 1991, pp. 151-183, 160.

⁵¹ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 93-126, 98.

⁵² Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, nature writing, and the formation of American culture*, Cambridge University Press, 1995, 285.

eventually restore or end humankind - the apocalypse of the human will then be analysed through a profound feeling of impending doom and the disruption of the ego-hierarchy.

The theme of apocalypse reveals to be a two-faceted concept characterized by an ecological and slow apocalypse that resolves in the apocalypse of the human. Stretching from Christian definitions to a more cultural and philosophical framework of the end of time, the apocalypse of the human is finally framed as the destination of this discourse. However, before reaching this conclusion, certain texts from the two authors must first be analysed to reveal Wilde and Rossetti's conceptions of Nature, God, eco-criticism and ultimately their warning on the end of time.

Chapter II

“What is the Heart of a Bird Compared to the Heart of a Man?”

- An Eco-critical Analysis of Rossetti’s “Bird Raptures” and Wilde’s “The Nightingale and the Rose”**

The sedge is wither'd from the lake, / And no birds sing.

(John Keats, “La Belle Dame Sans Merci”)

1. Nostalgia of the Natural World Within “Bird Raptures” and “The Nightingale and the Rose”

In the last decades, criticism on Victorian poetry has paid little attention to the dimension of Nature’s feelings towards humankind in “Bird Raptures” and in “The Nightingale and the Rose”. Although each text belongs to a different genre and uses different poetic devices, both posit a Nature that is nostalgic for a connection with humanity, a bond which has been undermined by the materialistic thrive of the Industrial Revolution.¹ To demonstrate this argument, three main strategies employed by the two authors will be analysed: namely, the evocative language of the two texts, which emphasizes Nature’s attempts to persuade the human to listen to her; the potential Christian symbolism associated to the nightingale, which connects Nature to the act of sacrifice and ultimately highlights the intensity of this longing; finally, the motherly connotation of the nightingale, which further establishes Nature’s attempt to rekindle a relationship with the human.

The use of evocative language in both texts depicts Nature as a nostalgic presence which calls out to the human, in order to draw it closer to her, hoping for a re-connection. However, the authors employ different images and narrative structures in order to accomplish this depiction. In line 6 of Rossetti’s poem, the moon - whose rising signals to the nightingale “permission” to start its nocturnal activity - ² is described as “wistful”, a term associated with nostalgia and melancholy, as if it longed for the nightingale’s beauty: “Make haste to mount, thou wistful moon.”³ Secondly, in line 9, the archaic verb “hearken” is used: “To hearken to that wordless tale”.⁴ Although a first meaning is “to listen carefully”, the verb actually carries a deeper meaning, “to remember something from the past”,⁵ reinforcing the poem’s atmosphere of longing and remembrance. Finally, the verb “come” in the first stanza may evoke a call to action, urging both the natural world and the human to gather and listen to the nightingale’s song. Through these varying poetic devices, Rossetti points to an underlying sense of nostalgia that Nature feels, but also an urgency to act upon this feeling.

Similarly, the language of Wilde’s short story displays a nostalgic Nature aiming to re-establish a relationship with humanity. One significant example is the use of anaphora, that is, a repetitive pattern of words and expressions. As Anna Marchi explains, repetition and anaphora are linguistic devices through which nostalgia is expressed, as they evoke a past that is far and that is

¹ See Chapter 1.

² Jennifer York et al. “Singing in the Moonlight: Dawn Song Performance of a Diurnal bird Varies with Lunar Phase”, *Biology Letters*, 2014, pp.2-4, 2.

³ Christina Rossetti, “Bird Raptures”, accessible at allpoetry.com/Bird-Raptures, accessed on May 7th, line 6.

⁴ Rossetti, op. cited, line 9.

⁵ Cambridge Dictionary, meaning of “to hearken” as “to listen carefully” or “hark back to something in the past. Accessed on January 2nd 2026 <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/hark-back-to>

deeply missed in the present.⁶ In Wilde's tale, anaphora is employed to recount the times the nightingale used to sing to the young boy. The repeated phrase "Night after night..." underscores the nightingale's longing for those melodious evenings, perhaps hinting at a dialogue she had tried to have with the student in the past.⁷ The nightingale's appeals to the garden's inhabitants are also anaphoric: the repetition of the phrase "Give me the red rose" stresses the nightingale's strong will to fulfil the wish of the young boy, prioritizing the restoration of a bond between Nature and humankind, ultimately confirming a deep sense of nostalgia.

The silence and stillness narrated in the two texts evoke a religious imagery which recalls the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross, which also connects to nostalgia and unconditional love. In the first two stanzas of "Bird Raptures", Rossetti's biblical voice evokes two unsettling features: silence - which is in stark contrast with her idealized world - and the darkness of the night. Wilde, in a similar manner, depicts an atmosphere of eerie stillness and darkness, specifically in the moment following the nightingale's sacrifice:

Then she gave one last burst of music. The White Moon heard it, and she forgot the dawn, and lingered on in the sky. The red rose heard it and it trembled all over with ecstasy, and opened its petals to the cold morning air. Echo bore it to her purple cavern in the hills, and woke the sleeping shepherds from their dreams. It floated through the reeds of the river, and they carried its message to the sea.⁸

The nightingale's sacrifice is portrayed as so profound that the moon "forgets" to rise, leaving darkness on the Earth, similar to the mourning following Jesus's death on the Cross.⁹ Rossetti's poem is also preceded by an unmentioned sacrifice of the nightingale, which leaves the natural world nostalgic and grieving.¹⁰ In both texts, the nightingale could thus represent a Christological figure, whose sacrifice modifies the environment, casting a temporary darkness and despair on Earth. The potential Christian symbolism behind the two nightingales therefore confirms the immensity of Nature's nostalgia, which eventually has the nightingale sacrificing itself for the human.

⁶ Anna Marchi, "Get back! Methods for Exploring Discoursed of Nostalgia and Nostalgic Discourses Using Corpora", *Elephant&Castle*, 2023, Vol. 3, pp. 192-211; 202.

⁷ Oscar Wilde, "The Nightingale and the Rose", 1888, online edition accessible at pinkmonkey.com/dl/library1/rose.pdf, pp.1-7, 1.

⁸ Wilde, op. cited, 5.

⁹ Jessica Savage, "The Iconography of Darkness at the Crucifixion", *The Index of Medieval Art*, 2018, Princeton University Official site, paragraph 2 (I have some doubts, is this the correct way to site this online article?)

¹⁰ Holman Hunt's painting *The Shadow of Death* was realized during the author's years in the Holy Land. It depicts Jesus as a young man prior to his ministry, working as a carpenter. He is shown stretching his arms after sewing wood. As the shadow of his outstretched arms falls on a wooden spar on which carpentry tools hand, creating a "shadow of death" prefiguring the crucifixion, "Bird Raptures" mysterious background might prefigure a sacrifice as well.

E. Fonseka's interpretation of the nightingale's death as a mission also addresses the Christian symbolism underlying the two nightingales. Specifically, by recalling the bird's search between the garden's trees, Fonseka underlines the use of anaphora not only as a device that conveys nostalgia in the text, but that also presents the nightingale's action as a sacrificial mission, as in the following excerpt:

Thus the philanthropic mission the Nightingale embarks on comes to a turning point, through the three consecutive encounters she has with three potential sources of help. (...) On the whole this section of the story formulates a vast anaphora with a similar type of episodes, exchanges and figures of rhetoric. Wilde applies a sublime form of poetics to emphasize the noble intention of the *Nightingale's mission*.¹¹ (Italics added)

By describing the nightingales act as a "mission", the nostalgia felt by the bird is evidently igniting a



The Shadow of Death, 1873,
William Holman Hunt

pursuit of reconnection. The sacrificial act of the bird and the parallel with Jesus' sacrifice therefore confirm the great significance of the nightingale's longing for a reconnection with humanity. Although in "Bird Raptures" the nightingale's song is unexplained and has seemingly no intended aim, Rossetti shapes it into verses that urge mankind to reconnect with Nature, as in the rhyming couplets of the first stanza, "[Everything] that is so silent, sweet and pale / Come so ye wake the Nightingale."¹² Oscar Wilde's Nightingale, instead, sings with a precise intention - fulfilling the student's wish – thus explicitly conveying Nature's attempt to reconnect with the human. In light of this evidence, the poetic language of both texts depicts a Nature that is nostalgic for a genuine bond it used to have with humanity before the

Industrial Revolution, and a nightingale that is trying to facilitate this reconnection.

The motherly connotation of the two nightingales also reinforces a sense of Nature's nostalgia. The maternal role is traditionally associated with feelings of nostalgia towards the children who were once very young, and have since grown. Both Rossetti's and Wilde's nightingales display such connotations. In line 9 of Rossetti's poem, the nightingale's song is described as a "wordless tale", a phrase that may suggest the maternal dimension in the relationship Nature-human relationship, as the moment of telling stories before bedtime is conventionally connected to the maternal figure. In her article "Women's Voice and Images in Folk Tales and Fairy Tales", Al-Barazengi also specifies that

¹¹ Edirisingha Gamini Fonseka, "Sacrifice Unacknowledged: A Literary Analysis of "The Nightingale and the Rose" by Oscar Wilde", *American Research Journal of English and Literature*, 2020, Vol. 6, Issue 1, pp. 1-8; 4.

¹² Rossetti, op. Cited, line 6.

the act of telling stories and tales is typically associated with mothers and women.¹³ In a similar manner, Wilde's tale attributes to Nature a form of maternal affection towards humankind. His nightingale constantly observes the boy from an oak tree, as though keeping constant vigil over him: "From her nest in the holm-oak tree the Nightingale heard him, and she looked through the leaves, and wondered."¹⁴ The scene illustrates how the bird's care for humanity resembles a motherly type of care, which underlines further the deep sense of nostalgia implied in Wilde's natural world. This perspective has been similarly explored by Younes Poorghorban while describing Wilde's natural worlds - especially the "domesticated" garden - as the representation of a nature that actually cares for the human, as in a maternal way.¹⁵ Both texts, therefore, present a Nature that is nostalgic for its lost intimacy with humankind and expresses this longing through a maternal, sacrificial instinct.

A comparative reading of Rossetti's "Bird Raptures" and Wilde's "The Nightingale and the Rose" reveals a natural world that longs for a past bond once shared with humanity. The analysis of poetic language and the Christological sacrifice of the nightingales highlights the nostalgic feeling embodied by a natural world that wants to reconnect with a lost humanity and urges the latter to take action. This yearning is further reinforced by the motherly instinct attributed to the bird in both texts. As this chapter aims to offer an eco-critical analysis of the two texts, the exploration of nostalgia in the two works provides the foundation for investigating the type of relationship between the natural world and the "over-Industrial" human. Among the several lines of interpretation of this relationship, particular attention should be given to the hierarchy and inequity between humanity and Nature.

2. An Eco-Critical Analysis of the Two Texts: The Ego-Hierarchy of The Anthropocene.

Several passages in "The Nightingale and the Rose" articulate the theme of hierarchy and wealth, hinting at the strained relationship between humanity and Nature. The nightingales' song deal with a specific anthropocentric issue: the problem of inequality in an ego-driven hierarchical system which places humankind above the natural world. While the theme of ego-hierarchy in "The Nightingale and the Rose" has already been studied at length – allowing for the analysis of several textual references - in Rossetti's "Bird Raptures" the theme is less explicit. However, Emma Mason's recent study of the poet actually demonstrates the presence of an eco-critical sensitivity in Rossetti's work.

¹³ Luma Al-Barazengi, "Women's Voice and Images in Folk Tales and Fairy Tales", *International E-journal of Advances in Social Sciences*, Vol. I, 2015, pp. 47-53, 50.

¹⁴ Wilde, op. cited, 1.

¹⁵ Younes Poorghorban, "Wildean ecology: the representations of aesthetic culture and grotesque nature in Oscar Wilde's fairy tales", *Brno studies in English*, 2023, vol. 49, 00. 145-158, 151.

To elaborate this condition of ego-hierarchy, three main topics will be analysed. Firstly, the theme of hierarchy and the inferior condition which is attributed to small creatures in “The Nightingale and the Rose”. Secondly, Utilitarianism and materialism as possible causes of the ego-hierarchical structure shaping the relationship between humanity and Nature. Finally, the representation of a pale humanity and of a metaphorical winter as consequences of this hierarchy which has ruptured the once genuine relationship between Nature and humanity.

The first important instance of inequity occurs in Wilde’s text, when the nightingale reflects on the nature of her sacrifice. The bird suggests that the “inferior condition” that is usually attributed to these small creatures is nothing compared to the importance of humankind, as it states in the short story:

“Death is a great price to pay for a red rose,” cried the Nightingale, “and Life is very dear to all. It is pleasant to sit in the green wood, and to watch the Sun in his chariot of gold, and the Moon in her chariot of pearl. Sweet is the scent of the hawthorn, and sweet are the bluebells that hide in the valley, and the heather that blows on the hill. Yet Love is better than Life, and *what is the heart of a bird compared to the heart of a man?*” (Italics added)¹⁶

Although the nightingale recognizes the beauty of life on Earth, the last sentence of the passage questions whether the lifetime of such a small bird can be compared to the supposed magnitude of humanity, implicitly asserting the inferiority of her existence. Thus, the nightingale sacrifices herself naively thinking that humans and non-humans do not share equal value, which renders her a victim of the inequity between Nature and humanity. Laura Forsberg elaborates a similar idea through her analysis of Fitz-James O’Brien’s short story “The Diamond Lens” (1885). In the tale, the scientist Linley develops a powerful microscope through which he discovers a miniature female creature that he names Animula. Although she is never called a fairy, Animula’s grace, aspect and emotions suggest a fairy-like nature, which captivates Linley. Animula, however, dies of dehydration, killed by the scientist’s self-absorption and negligence. Forsberg states that this tale at once reflects “naive belief and natural science”, suggesting that human supremacy over insects and smaller animals may originate from old superstitions.¹⁷

O’Brien’s tale is relevant to a reading of Wilde’s eco-critical vision, because it was published only three years prior to “The Nightingale and the Rose”: O’Brien and Wilde seem to write about the same ego-hierarchical world, in which Nature is considered as smaller and less significant than humanity. The existence of Animula can be directly paralleled to the nightingale’s sacrifice, as their

¹⁶ Wilde, op. Cited, 4.

¹⁷ Laura Forsberg, “Nature’s Invisibilia: The Victorian Microscope and the Miniature Fairy”, *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 4 (Summer 2015), pp. 638-666, 642.

supposed “inferior” lives are not considered equal to mankind. The naive belief addressed by Forsberg therefore illuminates the student’s attitude in Wilde’s story: a man who, through scientific and intellectual self-confidence, assumes superiority over the non-human world. In this light, the nightingale-student relationship is framed within a naive conception of human-Nature subjugation, and consequently, one of inequity.

“Bird Raptures” is less explicit in terms of eco-criticism. However, Emma Mason provides a more specific insight of Rossetti’s eco-critical contribution, recounting the poet’s view on the consumerist and imperialistic tumult of her age. Mason’s analysis of Rossetti’s depictions of Nature demonstrates how the poet actually acknowledged the inequity between the human and non-human realms, stating the importance of envisioning them on the same level, as illustrated in the following passage:

Rossetti also shared her love of the nonhuman with her brothers, both of whom collected and wrote about animals. (...) Rossetti elevated the nonhuman as models of being and thought, *oblivious to ownership and property*, and living interdependently as visible symbols of invisible grace. (Italics added)¹⁸

In this passage, Mason highlights how Rossetti acknowledges the actual equity between humans and non-humans, particularly stressing the concepts of independence, defining Nature as “oblivious to ownership and property”. This line of interpretation can also be applied to “Bird Raptures”, specifically when the natural world depicted in the poem as an autonomous, self-functioning environment that does not need the human presence. The human, indeed, is seemingly not present in the text, while Nature assumes an active role, calling it out.

The theme of inequity and human hierarchy is clear when considering the Victorian background of Wilde’s story, specifically in the utilitarian and materialistic mind-set of the student.¹⁹ Utilitarianism appears to have contributed to the materialistic thrive of the Industrial Revolution. Historian Tim Horton confirms how utilitarians, especially Jeremy Bentham’s followers, were rigidly connected to science and to subjects that were inherently practical and useful to the increasing power of the Nation.²⁰ When the boy confronts the girl over her “ungratefulness”, she replies by asserting the economic and social difference between the student and her new suitor, the Chamberlain’s nephew:

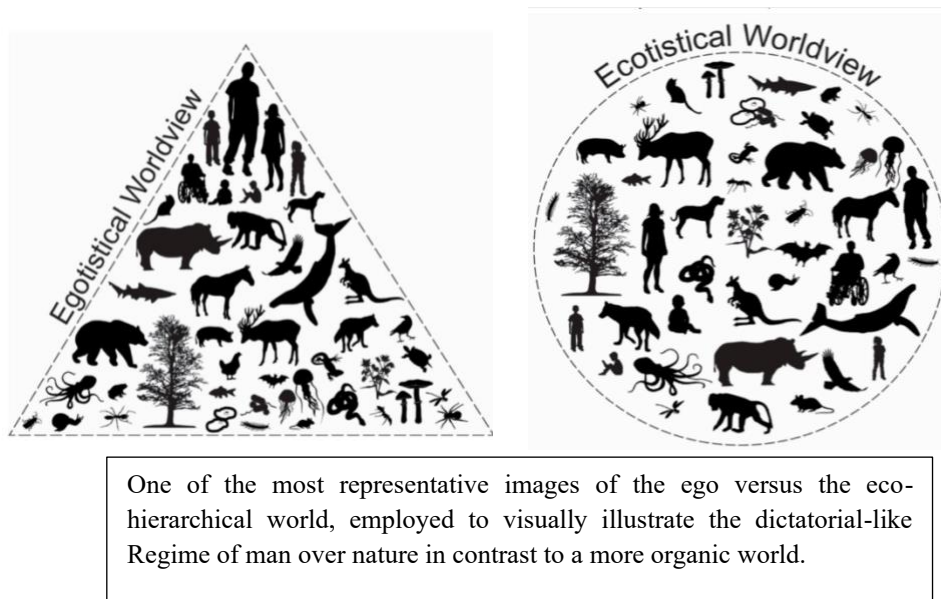
¹⁸ Emma Mason, “Pretty Beasts and Flowers: A Companiable Faith, 1863-1864”, *Christina Rossetti: Poetry, Ecology, Faith*, Timothy Larsen Edition, 2018, pp. 107-133, 111.

¹⁹ On the left, image taken from Facebook account “The Vegan Account”, contrasting a future made of an ego-hierarchy which sees humanity over Nature and a eco harmonious society.

²⁰ Neha Anand, “A Comprehensive Review of Victorian Age: General Characteristics”, *Characteristics of English Literature in Victorian Era*, Dominant Publisher Edition, 2022, pp. 1-8; 5.

“Ungrateful?!” said the girl. “I tell you what, you are very rude and, after all, who are you? *Only a student*. Why, I don’t believe you have even got a silver buckled to your shoes as the Chamberlain’s nephew had”; and she got up from her chair and went into the house. (Italics added)²¹

The focal point of the analysis is the sentence “[You’re] Only a student”, which addresses several interpretative perspectives. On a first reading the sentence reflects a strict social hierarchy where the upper class - in this case the Chamberlain’s family - have the highest possibilities to succeed in life. At a deeper level, the girl’s reaction may be understood as an existential judgement: the boy is “only a student”, he still has to acquire and complete his knowledge of the world and of the sacrifice the nightingale has made for him. A reason for the boy’s lack of sensibility can be the student’s prioritization of “practical” and scientific approaches towards the knowledge. As the passage specifies “he only knew the things that are written in books”,²² suggesting the young boy’s adherence to rationality and scientific knowledge that relates to the darker side of utilitarianism, which privileges efficiency, productivity, and material outcomes on the industrialization of the world.



The final passage of the short story reinforces this perspective:

“What a silly thing Love is,” said the student as he walked away. “It is not half as useful as Logic, for it does not prove anything, and it is always telling one of things that are not going to happen, and making one believe things that are not true. In fact, it is quite *unpractical*, and, *as in this age to be practical is everything*, I shall go back to Philosophy and study Metaphysic.” So he returned to his room and pulled out a great dusty book, and began to read. (Italics added)²³

²¹ Wilde, op. cited, 6.

²² Wilde, op. cited, 4.

²³ Wilde, op. Cited, 7.

The passage demonstrates the boy's growing disdain for anything that is not useful and practical, a perspective which echoes the industrial, imperialistic and economically driven age in which the text is written in, by implicitly referring to the utilitarian doctrine. Another instance of this attitude lies in the middle of the story, when the student cannot understand the gravity of the nightingale's sacrifice:

"Be happy," cried the Nightingale, "be happy; you shall have your red rose. I will build it out of music by moonlight, and stain it with my own heart's-blood. All that I ask of you in return is that you will be a true lover, for Love is wiser than Philosophy, though she is wise, and mightier than Power, though he is mighty. Flame-coloured are his wings, and coloured like flame is his body. His lips are sweet as honey, and his breath is like frankincense." The Student looked up from the grass, and listened, but *he could not understand what the Nightingale was saying to him, for he only knew the things that are written down in books.* (Italics added)²⁴

The student's focus on solely "useful" subjects can therefore be interpreted as the representation of a utilitarian and apathetic society, whose priority is to increase and advance the industrial progress of the world.

Both texts depict the effects of this inequity. Particularly, humanity is represented as pale and weak, and a metaphoric winter seems to dominate the background of both works. In the first stanza of Rossetti's poem everything that is silent, sad and has lost a true will to live, is urgently called out to gather and listen to the nightingale's song. "Come darkness, moonrise, *every thing* / That is so silent, sweet, and *pale*" (Italics added):²⁵ the noun phrase "every thing" refers to every species – implicitly including a pale humanity - invited to join the quiet evening and listen to the bird's song. In Wilde's tale, instead, when the nightingale reflects on the boy's suffering, she observes that his passions have transformed him into a pale and aimless being:

His hair is dark as the hyacinth-blossom, and his lips are red as the rose of his desire; but passion has made his face *pale like ivory* (...). (Italics added).²⁶

Thus, as the Poetic I of "Bird Raptures" evocatively gathers all that is pale and silent, Wilde's nightingale addresses a boy who, by extension, represents humanity itself: pale, agonizing and passion-driven. In both works, this condition of paleness may be interpreted as caused by a lost contact with Nature. The natural world, in turn, expresses a form of nostalgia and intervenes through the songs and sacrifices of the nightingales.

The winter season implied in the two works might also represent the paleness and despair of humanity, which is now confronted by an agonizing Nature. In Rossetti's poem, the reference to the

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Rossetti, op. Cited, lines 3 and 4.

²⁶ Ibid.

lark represents an intriguing detail. Addressed as the “herald skylark”,²⁷ the bird is traditionally associated, exactly like the nightingale, to the spring season.²⁸ Thus, the urgency to listen to the song of spring birds might indicate the importance of a transition from winter to spring or, metaphorically, from an indifferent attitude towards Nature to one of empathetic and symbiotic relationship. In Wilde’s short story, instead, the winter setting is more explicit: the vernal nightingale lives in a garden that is actually stricken from a *chilling* winter (Italics added). As the red-rose tree confirms:

“My roses are red,” it answered; “as red as the feet of the dove, and redder than the great fans of coral that wave and wave in the ocean cavern. But *the winter has chilled my veins*, and the *frost* has nipped my buds, and the *storm* has broken my branches, and I shall have no roses at all this year.” (Italics added)²⁹

The red-rose tree explicitly describes the winter as unusually severe, recounting a sudden temperature decrease that will prevent the production of any red rose for the remaining year. The expression “chilled my veins”, specifically, stresses the vitality of the tree, which suffers environmental changes just as other creatures do. Therefore, the presence of a lark in Rossetti’s poem and the lament of the red-rose tree in Wilde’s short story both imply a condition of metaphoric winter in both texts. Nature’s nostalgia for human sympathy is made even more evident due to the high impact of an unprecedented winter, which gradually destroys the environment, if this longing and inequity is not remedied.

“Bird Raptures” and “The Nightingale and the Rose” both foreground the theme of ego-hierarchy in the Anthropocene. A close reading of Wilde’s short story and the analysis of the Victorian Utilitarian background in which it was written, highlights the inequity between humankind and a subjugated natural world. The topic is further underlined by recent criticism on Christina Rossetti’s poetry, as well as by a comparative analysis of the representation of humanity and winter desolation in both works. However, further discussion can be developed on the difficult relationship between humans and non-humans. The ego-hierarchical tensions that characterise the Anthropocene not only expose issues of equity, but also the deep spiritual experience that can lie behind this encounter between Nature and humanity, conveyed through literature.

3. The Experience of the Sublime and the Epiphany: How Wilde and Rossetti’s Spiritual Frameworks of Nature connect to Deep Ecology

The eco-critical analysis of “Bird Raptures” and “The Nightingale and the Rose” opens the way for a deeper consideration of a possible message of warning sent by Nature. Particularly, a red thread

²⁷ Rossetti, op. cited, 7.

²⁸ James Baker, “The Lark in English Poetry”, *Prairie Schooner*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 1950, pp. 70-79, 73.

²⁹ Wilde, op. cited, 3.

shared by the two texts is the deep spiritual experience of the encounter between Nature and the human. This experience presents itself in two moments. Firstly, it emerges as a feeling towards Nature which resembles Burke's Romantic conception of the Sublime, as a profound sense of astonishment in which the individual's faculties are completely taken over by the power of the natural world. Secondly, it has the form of a sudden revelation, similar to epiphany for conciseness, through which Nature manifests itself beyond space and time, aiming to fully connect with the human. Rachel Carson's conception of Deep ecology provides a framework through which to interpret this radical spiritual experience, addressing the necessity of a radical shift from the traditional anthropocentric perspective to a more biocentric one. The spiritual force of Nature therefore becomes a further message that encourages mankind to recognize the detrimental effects of its ego-hierarchy before it is too late.

An experience which can be categorised within Edmund Burke's definition of the Sublime can be identified in the two texts. This experience unfolds a deeper significance: a Nature that through a deep spiritual experience, appears to warn the Human about the condition of the environment. In Section I of the Second Part of Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* the sense of astonishment that arises from the encounter between Nature and mankind is illustrated as follows:

The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. *In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it.* Hence arises the great power of the sublime, that, far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasoning, and hurries us on by an irresistible force. *Astonishment*, as I have said, is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree; the inferior effects are admiration reverence and respect.³⁰ (Italics added)

Burke's depiction of the Sublime foregrounds the condition of astonishment, stating how the "mind is so entirely filled with its object", and thus addressing the overwhelming and formidable power of the object that creates the Sublime. This dynamic can be found in two specific passages from "Bird Raptures" and "The Nightingale and the Rose". In line 13 of Rossetti's poem, the poetic I says that the nightingale's song will flood the environment "with sorrow and delight".³¹ The stark difference between the condition of sorrow and the condition of delight possibly resembles the Romantic astonishment that the encounter with Nature provokes. The senses are so overwhelmed and almost numb that both sorrow and delight seem to dominate together. In "The Nightingale and the Rose",

³⁰ Edmund Burke, "Of the Passion Caused by the Sublime", *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Excerpt from Part II, Section I. Found on http://sublime.nancyholt.com/Burke/index.html#_Toc430175935 Accessed on February 1st, 2026.

³¹ Rossetti, op.cited, line 13.

the sense of astonishment can be found in the last moment of the nightingale's sacrifice, when the bird has to press its bosom closer to the thorn and the song and the surrounding environment becomes gradually louder, almost unbearable: "So the Nightingale pressed closer against the thorn, *and louder and louder grew her song*, for she sang of the birth of passion in the soul of a man and a maid." (Italics added).³² The image of the song that grows "louder and louder" addresses the surrounding environment being completely enveloped by the ongoing event, recalling Burke's definition of Romantic Sublime. Moreover, through the elaboration of the Sublime and the epiphanic component, Nature appears not only a being capable of suffering and joy, but also an entity which reveals deeper and more complex dimensions concerning its current state in the text. Georg Drennig confirms a similar perspective:

The sublime is not only an experience in nature, but also a way of *experiencing* nature. The sublime is therefore also a gaze, a way the individual seeking an experience of transcendence may transform a "merely" beautiful sight into something of a *different register*. (Italics added)³³

Although the two nightingales' songs are different and happen in distinct narrative contexts, Christina Rossetti and Oscar Wilde elevate Nature to a completely different register: an entity endowed with the ability to create a mystical experience for humankind.

In both texts, an experience similar to the epiphany can also be found in the encounter between the human and the natural world. Monica Weis's analysis of Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, similarly engages with the epiphanic intensity of the encounter between human and non-human, underlining the temporal conciseness of such profound experience, as explained in the following passage:

Linguistically we would be more accurate to say a "time when" or a "place where" (...) but Wordsworth says very emphatically that these events are something else: they are "places when"-indicating the intense power of a place to unleash the imagination. (...) According to Wordsworth, these highly charged events contain a "renovating virtue" by which we are "nourished and invisibly repaired." The experience may have any of several results: it enhances pleasure: it penetrates to our core; it enables us to mount higher, or lifts us up when fallen. While there is no guarantee that such an *epiphanic* event will occur, nevertheless, the potential is always present because an "efficacious spirit" lurks in our experience.³⁴ (Italics added)

Weis's perspective depicts the epiphanic experience as both overwhelming and concise, a climactic moment which goes beyond the conventional limits of space and time. Although the epiphanic experience is empirically dispersed across multiple sites and temporal junctures, its affective force produces a phenomenological unity. The numerous places in which the experience takes place

³² Wilde, op. cited, 5.

³³ Georg Drennig, "Taking a Hike and Hucking the Stout: The Troublesome Legacy of the Sublime in Outdoor Recreation", *Culture Unbound*, Volume 5, 2013, pp. 551-568, 561.

³⁴ Monica Weis, "Beyond the Shadow and the Disguise: "Spots of Time" in Thomas Merton's Spiritual Development.", *The Merton Seasonal*, 1998, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 21-27; 21.

collapses as well into a felt continuity, while chronological sequence is subsumed into a singular, atemporal instant. Both Rossetti and Wilde respectively present instances of this kind of experience. In the last stanza of “Bird Raptures”, the long-awaited chant of the nightingale is anticipated by the flight of the herald skylark, which the poetic voice implores to remain suspended in the air “One moment”.³⁵ At a first reading, the flight of the skylark might seem a minor detail, but this act of hovering in the air for one exact moment crystallizes a concise and punctual experience, marking a climax in the poem’s evening. In Wilde’s short story, by contrast, the epiphany is contained in the death of the nightingale:

Then she gave one last burst of music. The white Moon heard it, and she forgot the dawn and lingered on in the sky. The red rose heard it, and it trembled all over with ecstasy, and opened its petals to the cold morning air. Echo bore it to her purple cavern in the hills, and woke the sleeping shepherds from their dreams. It floated through the reeds of the river, and they carried its message to the sea.³⁶

Five consecutive sentences explain what possibly happened in a singular moment. The death of the nightingale is an event of such magnitude and conciseness that it affects multiple characters and multiple places, however within very few seconds, and thus in a concise and punctual action. The epiphanic component of “Bird Raptures” and “The Nightingale and the Rose” therefore points to a universal and concise experience behind the encounter of human and Nature which goes beyond time and spatial limits. However, it must be specified that this encounter does not happen in the two texts. The songs of the two nightingales seemingly remain unnoticed to the pale humanity depicted.

The overwhelming but concise moment in which Nature and Human meet results in a profound and spiritual connection between the two, which further enhance the Sublime and epiphanic components of this experience. In his article “Mystical Experiences of the Natural World”, Paul Marshall lists all the features that characterize the mystical encounter with Nature. The fourth trait reads:

[4] ‘*not intellectual or emotional*’ The experiences are ‘not intellectual’ in the sense that they don’t consist of everyday, discursive thinking activity – but note that they do typically have a very strong cognitive or ‘noetic’ component, bringing direct, intuitive ‘knowledge’.³⁷ (Italics added)

The fourth trait, described as “not intellectual nor emotional”, addresses the concept of astonishment in the experience of “Bird Raptures” and “The Nightingale and the Rose”. In “Bird Raptures”, the image of a “wordless tale”³⁸ can be interpreted as the non-intellectual experience illustrated by

³⁵ Rossetti, op. cited, 12.

³⁶ Wilde, op. cited, 6.

³⁷ Paul Marshall, “Mystical Experiences of the Natural World”, *Mystical Encounters with the Natural World: Experiences and Explanations*, Oxford University Press, 2005. Pp. 1-19; 1.

³⁸ Rossetti, op. cited, line 9.

Marshall: the surrounding nature is waiting for the nightingale to chant and seal the communion between the bird and its surroundings, implicitly extending to humanity. As the tale is a song, it does not require the rational understanding of words, instead it calls for an intuitive recognition of an epiphanic and profound message sent by Nature. The fact that this message transcends both intellectual and emotional capabilities, but actually requires a deeper form of intuition, further addresses the spiritual aspect of the encounter between human and Nature. Yet, whether the human and surrounding nature actually receives or understands the message remains an open question in “Bird Raptures”. In “The Nightingale and the Rose” the student seems to openly reject the mystical encounter which Nature is trying to have with him. This refusal can be interpreted in the very middle of the short story:

“Be happy,” cried the Nightingale, “be happy; you shall have your red rose. I will build it out of music by moonlight, and stain it with my own heart’s-blood. All that I ask of you in return is that you will be a true lover, for Love is wiser than Philosophy, though she is wise, and mightier than Power, though he is mighty. Flame-coloured are his wings, and coloured like flame is his body. His lips are sweet as honey, and his breath is like frankincense.” The Student looked up from the grass, and listened, but *he could not understand what the Nightingale was saying to him, for he only knew the things that are written down in books.* (Italics added)³⁹

Because of his materialistic thrive, the boy cannot understand the gravity and actual meaning of the nightingale’s sacrifice, thus he eventually ignores the spiritual implication of the Nature surrounding him. The young boy in Wilde’s short story does not openly welcome the sacrificial and mystical nature that underlies the bird’s sacrifice, whereas in Rossetti’s poem, Nature itself is seemingly eager to listen to the “wordless tale” of the Nightingale.

The spiritual experience that Nature enacts to reconnect with humanity can be linked to the concepts of deep ecology. The principles of deep ecology encourage to radically change the traditional anthropocentric perspectives that brought humankind to dominate over Nature. American biologist Rachel Carson studied the detrimental effects of the hierarchical mind-set, stating that cyclical exploitation condition endured by Nature may lead to apocalyptic consequences on Earth. Alan Drengson and Bill Devall deepen her contribution to eco-criticism in their article “The Deep Ecology Movement: Origins, Development & Future Prospects”, as follows:

We [humans] are responsible for what we do and how we participate in local and global systems. Carson suggested that honouring this responsibility requires a basic shift in the way we see, feel and value the world. (...) *Carson showed the need for deep changes in our practices and ways of living.* Mainstream politicians and other people acknowledged that there are problems, but Economic growth

³⁹ Wilde, op. cited, 4.

and increased consumption are still considered central values of our society and so the status quo economy is placed before the environment.⁴⁰

Carson's warning highlights the need to change perspective, recognizing Nature as equal to humankind. These deep changes may be prompted by a deep spiritual experience through which Nature tries to communicate its situation of endangerment. Therefore, deep ecology is seemingly embedded in the eco-critical analysis of the two texts, urging deep changes in response to a deep spiritual experience. By emphasizing the actual value of Nature, deep ecology helps illuminate the spiritual experience narrated in both Rossetti and Wilde, envisioning a natural world that seeks to reconnect with humanity through a deep and radical experience. As Kevin Hutchings states in his essay "Ecocriticism in British Romantic Studies", deep ecologists envision Nature and humankind as existing on the same ontological level:

Simply stated, an advocate of "deep ecological" practice does not strive to protect the non-human world because human life depends upon nature's wellbeing (regardless of the important truth of this proposition); rather, the deep ecologist's concern for nature springs from an acknowledgment that all creatures deserve human respect and care because, as "theological centers of purpose", *they are valuable in and of themselves* and without regard to their (usually anthropocentric) uses. (Italics added)⁴¹

In light of this passage, Christina Rossetti and Oscar Wilde can arguably be considered two proto-deep ecologists: through their depictions of a nostalgic and almost glacial world, they lyrically encourage an anti-hierarchical attitude towards Nature, recognizing its dignity and its potential vulnerability. Abdul Razzaq's analysis of Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" highlights a similar perspective that resonates with Rossetti's and Wilde's eco-critical nightingales. In this reading, the nightingale becomes a manifestation of Nature's concern for the human condition.

It [The Nightingale] cannot be seen but is *deeply felt* by the characters of the poem. The nightingale eventually flies away, leaving *questions open*. (Italics added)⁴²

Razzaq adds that "The Nightingale is regarded as the means of escapism that Keats is searching for to get rid of the *misery* of the real world." (Italics added).⁴³ As in Keats's poem, Rossetti's bird is indeed unseen, but its presence is already "deeply felt" and anticipated by the surrounding natural imagery. Its mysterious and almost invisible existence leaves certain questions unresolved, particularly concerning the nightingale's role on Earth. Razzaq's conception can also illuminate

⁴⁰ Alan Drengson et al. "The Deep Ecology Movement: Origins, Development & Future Prospects", *The Trumpeter*, Volume 26, Number 2, pp. 48-69; 50.

⁴¹ Kevin Hutchings, "Ecocriticism in British Romantic Studies", 2007, *Literature Compass*, Volume 4, Issue 1, accessed on January 4th 2026 <https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1741-4113.2006.00417.x>

⁴² Abdul Razzaq, "The Significance of Symbols in Interpreting Keats' "Ode to A Nightingale and Ode on A Grecian Urn", *The Journal of Arab Gulf Volume Issue 1-2*, 2018, pp. 1-20, 14.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 15.

Wilde's nightingale: the bird's sacrifice to fulfil the boy's wish may be interpreted as emblematic of the misery of a world where Nature continuously surrenders to human needs. This reading confirms the "deep ecological nature" of the nightingale, a figure whose presence is deeply felt and anticipated by the characters in both works.

This research has analysed the underlying spiritual experience behind "Bird Raptures" and "The Nightingale and The Rose". These experiences verge on the Romantic definition of the Sublime and incorporate an epiphanic dimension. By interpreting these features as Nature's attempt to convey its condition of endangerment, the spiritual experience opens up to Carson's concept of Deep Ecology, which stresses the intrinsic dignity of Nature and the importance to take action against its exploitation. In the last decades, moreover, the discourse regarding a continuously exploited Nature has prompted the analysis of past literary texts as timeless instances of humankind's presumed superiority over the environment. This perspective, in turn, paves the way for a more contemporary – and perhaps apocalyptic – reading of "Bird Raptures" and "The Nightingale and the Rose".

4. The Representation of Our Nature in Two Victorian Texts

The theme of nostalgia, eco-critical analysis and the spiritual dimension of the encounter between human and Nature suggest a new, contemporary perspective of the two texts, which concerns the critically hierarchical relationship between humans and Nature in our century. This subsection demonstrates how the two texts speak to our present condition. To support this statement, three topics will be investigated. The first concerns the role of mediator and prophet that can be attributed to the nightingale. The second explores the possible involvement of the two texts in the genre of Apocalyptic writing, which connects them to future concerns. The third addresses the theme of time in the language of the two texts. The discussion of these points will show that "Bird Raptures" and "The Nightingale and the Rose" actually warns us about the condition of our contemporary relationship with Nature, extending beyond the limits of the Victorian Era or any other historical categorization.

The nightingale is trying to convey a message to the reader: the condition of exploited nature will inevitably have consequences. This attempt reveals a particular dimension within the nightingale, both as a character and as a symbol: the bird can be considered a mediator between Nature and humanity, employing literature as a tool to reach the human. As Dewey Hall argues in "Romantic Ecocriticism", Romantic animals mark the thin line between the natural world and the human species. Hall explains this as follows:

As specimens of scientific practice, Romantic natural figures represent, in a sense, what I call “ecotypes”: objects in nature that take on material value and significance through their association with the pressing scientific interests of the age. These Romantic ecotypes are not originary figures – or archetypes. Rather, ecotypes reflect the Romantic writer’s *growing awareness of the importance of the natural object interconnected with other objects in the environs*. The ecotypes, thus appear in the line and prose of Romantic writers as *markers* pointing the way for the mind of the ecocritic interested in traversing and perusing the printed page for those objects of proto-ecological importance imbued with meaning by the writer’s perception of naturalism. (Italics added)⁴⁴

Hall stresses the fact that ecotypes are not archetypes or primordial symbols, precisely because they are part of a developing and therefore changing awareness of the human poet. The two nightingales examined in this chapter may be considered eco-types because they possibly reflect Rossetti’s and Wilde’s growing awareness of the fate of a powerful but forgotten natural world. These eco-types are not only the markers of the Nature-human relationship: through their ecotypical nature, the nightingales represent literature trying to reach the human mind to warn them about the pressing condition of Nature. Thus, in both texts the nightingales takes on the role of mediator of a repressed and exploited Nature.

The potential categorization of “Bird Raptures” and “The Nightingale and the Rose” in the genre of Apocalyptic writing enhances the warning feature of the two texts concerning the present condition of Nature. In the short story the red rose desired by the student can represent one of the several ephemeral trends pursued by a society that continuously grows out of certain materialistic habits to achieve other and more expensive ones. The young girl, indeed, decides not to accept the rose because a more fashionable object has been given to her, “some real jewels” from the Chamberlain’s nephew. Younes Poorghorban also confirms a similar analysis of Wilde’s short story, denoting the red rose with a materialistic feature, as follows:

The object must be rare; now a red rose has no use-value per se but the sign-value accompanied by its exchange value accounts for its desirability. *The girl does not ask for a red rose on the basis of her needs*, and it does not account for her survival. As Baudrillard points out “all production and expenditure beyond the needs of strict survival can be termed *waste*.” (Italics added)⁴⁵

Poorghorban’s analysis further demonstrates how the red rose symbolizes the trend of a decaying humanity, which is gradually focusing on material and perishing things, increasingly producing waste, and therefore approaching Apocalypse. Morgan Benjamin similarly analyses the apocalyptic connotation of Wilde’s works in his article “Fin du Globe: on decadent planets”:

⁴⁴ Hall, op. Cited, p. 5.

⁴⁵ Younes Poorghorban, “The Commodified Happiness: The Only Established Source of Meaning in Oscar Wilde’s The Happy Prince and The Nightingale and the Rose”, *Prague Journal of English Studies*, Volume 11, No.1, 2022, pp. 51-64, 54.

Where the Romantic often understood this catastrophe in terms derived from a religious register of millenarian thought, by the end of the century, decadence had absorbed the insights of a Darwinian ecology in which extinction was not a disaster that arrived from elsewhere, but an immanent potentiality of natural systems. (...) In the manuscript [“The Picture of Dorian Gray”], Wilde had first used the more conventional phrase “fin du monde”, but he revised this to “fin du globe” prior to publication. We can’t know Wilde’s motivation, but the edit captures something precise about decadent planets. *Globe is material, singular, shaped; monde is abstract, potentially multiple, shapeless.* World may end in many ways, the kind of end of the world that is also an end of the globe invokes an *astrophysical repertoire of images and concepts.* (Italics added)⁴⁶

By analysing the difference between the term “globe” and the term “monde”, Benjamin’s perspective possibly addresses the apocalyptic and ecological beliefs of Wilde, as he similarly imagines a “Fin du globe” in the writing process of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. This evidence demonstrates Wilde’s sensitivity towards an Apocalyptic prospect of the world, illuminating his works as a possible warning towards the future.

Defining more concisely the apocalyptic features in Rossetti, Michael Malay’s definition of the Apocalyptic genre eventually seals the two text into a similar experience:

If apocalyptic writing is inadequate as a mode of intellectual engagement, it is nevertheless marked by *deep human feeling and urgency*. As Damian Thompson remarks, apocalypticism is a genre “born out of *crisis*”, designed to stiffen the resolve of an embattled community by dangling it in front of the vision of a *sudden and permanent* release from its captivity. (...) In Thompson’s conception, apocalyptic writing is connected to danger and the threat of disappearance. This is why it can be movingly *melancholic and desperate*, as well as violent and purgative. (Italics added)⁴⁷

Both texts can be considered “born out of crisis”, as “The Nightingale and the Rose” addresses the themes of ego-hierarchy and anthropocentric materialism and “Bird Raptures” the theme of something serious that is about to happen, a “rapture” in fact, that is going to be sudden and permanent.

The theme of time in the two texts eventually seals the two works into the same experience. Language continuously referencing the future recurs in both texts, and the problem of today’s ego-hierarchy seems to be implied. In Rossetti’s poem, a rapture will occur and “the sail will need to be hoisted”, implying that a part of Nature will be carried away and left in a state of despair. In Wilde’s narrative, the human dance ball – which is metaphorically suggestive of an intense pressure of social performance - tests the boy’s materialistic values and aspirations – leads to an environmental consequence: the Nightingale’s death. Rossetti’s and Wilde’s ecotypical nightingales may be considered as *timely* omens for the future, because their imagery is not “timeless” or archetypical, but

⁴⁶ Morgan Benjamin, “Fin du Globe”: On Decadent Planets”, *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 58, No. 4, 2016, pp. 609-635, 609.

⁴⁷ Michael Malay, “Raymond Williams and Ecocriticism”, 2014, *Key Words: A Journal of Cultural Materialism*, No. 12, 2014, pp. 8-29, 11.

rather a time-sensitive prophecy: the present natural world is sacrificing itself, and the future will inevitably endure its effects. A similar view is supported by Serenella Iovino, in her article “The Reverse of the Sublime: Dilemmas (and Resources) of the Anthropocene Garden”. In the following passage, which is an extract of the introductory lines of Iovino’s article, interesting questions concerning artistic gardens as a symbolic space of eco-awareness are raised:

Inescapably, I end up asking myself: what is the role of art in *this geopolitical machine that life on earth has become*? And what are the implications of thinking together the garden and the Anthropocene? In other words: What do we discover if we read all these natural-cultural figures with and through one another? (Italics added).⁴⁸

Iovino’s definition of the current life on Earth as a “geopolitical machine”, intensifies the temporal aspect, as the Victorian era has also been defined as an industrial-driven geopolitical machine.⁴⁹ The character of the nightingale therefore overcomes the very thin line between aesthetic tools – in this case literature - and the natural world, becoming the messenger and warner of a repressed natural world. The final stanza of “Bird Raptures”, moreover, possibly represents a warning towards the future condition of the environment. The future tense used by the author enhances this perspective of a Nature that will keep suffering if the following generations do not realize the detrimental condition of the natural world. The final lines of the poem read:

O herald skylark, stay thy flight
One moment, for a nightingale
Floods us with sorrow and delight
To-morrow thou shalt hoist the sail;
Leave us to-night the nightingale.⁵⁰

The stanza emphasizes the dimension of the present time through expressions such as “One moment”⁵¹ and “Leave us to-night”,⁵² which foreground the importance of considering the present time as a turning point. Metaphorically, the insistence on listening to the nightingale’s song stresses its role as a message from the natural world. The future is also evoked in line 14, “To-morrow thou

⁴⁸ Serenella Iovino, “The Reverse of the Sublime: Dilemmas (and Resources) of the Anthropocene Garden”, *RCC Perspectives*, No. 3, 2019, pp. 1-37, 4.

⁴⁹ Lauren Goodlad, “The Victorian Geopolitical Aesthetic: Realism, Sovereignty, and Transitional Experience”, *Review 19*, www.review19.org/view_doc.php?index=484 accessed on June 2nd.

⁵⁰ Rossetti, op. Cited lines 11-15.

⁵¹ Rossetti, op. cited, line 12.

⁵² Rossetti, op.cited, line 15.

shalt hoist the sail”,⁵³ suggesting that a departure - or, perhaps, a rapture – is imminent. Mason’s analysis confirm Rossetti’s thrive to encourage a more “timely” approach to Nature:

Rossetti presents heaven and earth as “chronometers” of nature that mark time through light and darkness. Art does not merely reveal this process, but adds to it clock faces and voices, both forms and expressions of the workings of heaven and earth that the human finds more accessible. *Rossetti is anxious that her reader might “wander out of time” because in doing so she might lose touch with a rhythmic movement towards the new creation.* She worked to keep her reader in time through the repeated cadences of her poetry, which she believed could train and familiarize the human with the rhythmic movement of *cyclical* time.⁵⁴ (Italics added)

In this extract, Mason highlights Rossetti’s forewarning to the readers. She fears her reader might “wander out of time”, possibly ignoring the detrimental effects of natural exploitation within the human realm. This anticipation of a future challenge may be paralleled with the short story’s reference to “to-morrow”: “The Prince gives a ball to-morrow night”. Since the upcoming ball prompts Nature to sacrifice herself, the repeated “to-morrows” in both texts can be read as symbols of an impending materialistic challenge, thus warning the reader about the future of a subjugated Nature.

The analysis of the nightingale’s role of mediator and of the genre of Apocalyptic writing highlights the timely feature of “Bird Raptures” and “The Nightingale and the Rose”. Particularly, the theme of time joins the two texts into a similar eco-critical experience, that is the present condition of a Nature which has been increasingly exploited by mankind. Rossetti and Wilde’s approach to this timely warning can also be discussed under several other perspectives, including what possibly comes after the end of time and the authors’ spiritual path towards a more spiritual vision of Nature

⁵³ Rossetti, op. cited, line 14.

⁵⁴ Emma Mason, “Green Grace and the End of Time, 1885-1894”, *Christina Rossetti: Poetry, Ecology and Faith*, Oxford, 2018, pp. 159-206; 176.

Chapter III

A Nature “Beyond My Range”:

An Eco-Theological Reading of Rossetti’s and Wilde’s “De Profundis”

“The world is charged with the grandeur of God.

It will flame out, like shining from shook foil.”

(Gerard Manley Hopkins, “God’s Grandeur”, 1877)

1. The Spiritual Quest in the two “De Profundis”

If the two nightingales of Chapter II can be seen as both mediators and Christological figures, this eco-critical analysis of Christina Rossetti and Oscar Wilde allows for a further investigation concerning the two poets’ spirituality and use of religious imagery. The purpose of this first subsection is to address and compare the spiritual path walked by the two authors during their respective periods of profound crisis: Rossetti’s acute struggle with Grave’s disease, and Wilde’s imprisonment in Reading Gaol. In order to accomplish this, a close analysis of the works composed during these years, namely Rossetti’s poem “De Profundis” (1881) – a Latin title which translates “Out of the Depths” – and Wilde’s homonymous letter (1897) will be completed. The analysis will demonstrate how the two experiences of pain and confinement illuminated the two poets into searching for a godly presence that is possibly found within Nature. To demonstrate this, the subsection develops across four main topics. First, the two authors’ realization of being “too bound” to Earth, which proves their refusal towards worldly things and thus the aspiration to a more divine experience. Second, the important correlation of both texts with Psalm 130, which demonstrates Rossetti’s and Wilde’s surrender to a possible spiritual presence that lies behind their pain. Third, the presence of an “earthly” God as possible addressee of their two works. Finally, the subsection will demonstrate how both authors find a divine presence in the natural world, adding to Nature’s intrinsic mystic quality.

Despite varying relations to God, both poets come to terms with the immense frustration they have feeling “too bound” to Earth. This frustration leads to a desire of communicating with a higher God by relinquishing themselves from material worldly pleasures. In his book “Christina Rossetti in Context”, Anthony Harrison illustrates the author’s continuous attempts in her works to renounce worldly pleasure in order to seek a higher experience:

As is clear to any student of Christina Rossetti’s poetry, *vanitas mundi* is her most frequent theme, and we have seen that this theme is as pervasive in her secular love poetry as it is in her devotional poems, where a whole-sale rejection of worldly values and experiences would be expected.¹

The key-expression of Harrison’s analysis is “*vanitas mundi*”, a Latin expression which indicates the ephemeral and transitory nature of earthly goods. As Diane D’Amico confirms, Rossetti would often associate herself with the preacher and the author of Ecclesiastes, promoting the idea that human life is vain. This is also exemplified in one of her religious poems where she repeats the expression “vanity of vanities” like a sort of spell.² In her “De Profundis”, this refusal can be found in the central part of

¹ Antony Harrison, *Christina Rossetti in context*, Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1988, pp. 1-231, 78.

² Diane D’Amico, *Christina Rossetti: faith, gender and time*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1999, 98.

the poem: “For I am bound with fleshly bands, / Joy, beauty, lie beyond my scope”.³ The expression “fleshly bands” addresses the temporary and ephemeral nature of human flesh, a worldly obstacle towards Rossetti’s conversion and desire to feel joy and beauty. Thus, Harrison’s analysis confirms Rossetti’s denial of worldly values, confirming the desire of a deeper mystical experience.

Wilde similarly rejects secular pursuits, acknowledging the time he spent attached to worldly pleasures as a waste of time in his spiritual search, as noted on page 162:

The gods had given me almost everything. But I let myself be lured into long spells of senseless and sensual use. I amused myself with being a flâneur, a dandy, a man of fashion. I surrounded myself with the smaller natures and the meaner minds. I became the spendthrift of my own genius, heights, I deliberately went to the depths in the search for new sensation. What the paradox was to me in the sphere of thought, perversity became to me in the sphere of passion.⁴

In “The Unmasking of Oscar Wilde”, Joseph Pearce confirms how Wilde underwent an “expurgation” during his time in prison, willing to redeem a life that did not satisfy him, and “to cleanse himself through confession.”⁵ Thus, as Rossetti feels “too bound” to Earth, Wilde feels entrapped in a past which was wasted away in pleasure and mundane aspirations. This experience and refusal prompted the decadent author to find a deeper spirituality within his life.

This pursuit of a deeper spirituality is confirmed by the influence of Psalm 130 on the two “De Profundis”, further highlighting the two poets’ spiritual search. Two particular moments of the ancient Psalm seems to have inspired Rossetti’s and Wilde’s “De Profundis”: the first biblical verse “*Out of the depths* I cry to you, Lord” and the fifth “I wait for the lord, my *whole being* waits, / and in his word I put my *hope*”. (Italics added).⁶ The incipit “Out of the Depths” directly translates into the Latin title “De Profundis” proving the literary correlation between the Victorian works and the biblical psalm. Moreover, Emma Mason has extensively investigated the connection between Psalm 130 and Victorian poetry, through the analysis of the imagery of atonement and hope. In her article “Hear My Voice”: Rhythmic Forgiveness and Psalm 130”, Mason analyses other major Rossetti’s works which explore the bond between spirituality and hope such as *The Face of the Deep* (1892) and “Verses” (1893). The author explores Psalm 130 in the context of Victorian poetry, stating:

Psalm 130 was especially pertinent to the Victorians’ anxieties about sin, which were exacerbated by the period’s jockeying around the doctrine of atonement. As one of the penitential psalms used for

³ Christina Rossetti, “De Profundis”, *Poetry Foundation*, www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44994/de-profundis Accessed on May 16th 2026.

⁴ Oscar, Wilde, *De Profundis – Epistola: In Carcere et Vinculis*, Oxford, Ian Small, 2005, pp. 160-193, 162.

⁵ Joseph Pearce, *The Unmasking of Oscar Wilde*, London, Harper Collins Publishers, 2001, 244.

⁶ Psalm 130, Bible Gateway, New International Version (NIV), www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%20130&version=NIV accessed on May 6th 2026.

confessing sins, Psalm 130 captured both a desperate need for forgiveness and a related sense of despair that it might not be granted.⁷

Mason's analysis underlines the theme of atonement within Psalm 130, which is also present in Rossetti's "De Profundis". Particularly, in line 15 of the poem, she seemingly implores God to forgive her sins: "I strain my heart, I stretch my hands",⁸ recalling the psalm's image of a whole being waiting for atonement. The images of a straining heart and stretching hands possibly depict the desperate need for forgiveness discussed by Mason, linking once again Rossetti's poem to Psalm 130.

With regards to Wilde, the concept of pain as a hope to change is conveyed through a sentence within the very second page of his "De Profundis": "Where there is sorrow there is holy ground."⁹ The association of sorrow to a possibility of "holy ground" and thus of hope, may address Wilde's aspiration to something divine behind his suffering, awaiting for this presence to sooth him. Joseph Pearce similarly analyses Wilde's "De Profundis",

He [Wilde] had forsaken all masks to brandish the inadequate, naked truth of his soul. He had sung the *de profundis* of the psalmist in the hope of the *vita nuova* of Dante. From out of the depths he sought the new life.¹⁰

Pearce's analysis supports the theme of hope and the awaiting of a new spiritual life in Wilde's "De Profundis", confirming the correlation between Wilde's "De Profundis" and Psalm 130.

Such analysis posits God as another possible addressee of the two texts, ultimately joining Christina Rossetti and Oscar Wilde in a similar need to deepen their experience on Earth. Although Michael Doylen identifies Lord Douglas and Wilde himself as the only two recipients of the letter,¹¹ a more in-depth analysis of Wilde's position in his "De Profundis" may demonstrate God as an additional addressee of the work. An important instance occurs when Wilde identifies with the outcasts of society, particularly the people in prison:

Oppressed nationalities, factory children, thieves, people in prison, outcasts, those who are dumb under oppression and *whose silence is heard only of God*; and not merely imagining this but actually achieving it, so that at the present moment all who come in contact with his personality, even though they may neither bow to his altar nor kneel before his priest, in some way find that the ugliness of their sin is taken away and the beauty of their sorrow revealed to them.¹²

In saying that the silence and suffering of the prisoners (and thus of Wilde) is only heard by God, Wilde's lament and discourse in his "De Profundis" therefore may also be addressed to a God too. In

⁷ Emma Mason, "Hear My Voice": Rhythmic Forgiveness and Psalm 130", *Victorian Review*, Vol. 37, 2011, pp. 26-30, 28.

⁸ Rossetti, op. Cited, line 15.

⁹ Wilde, op. Cited, 160.

¹⁰ Pearce, op. Cited, 252.

¹¹ Michael Doyle, "Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis*: Homosexual Self-Fashioning on the Other Side of Scandal", *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol. 27, 1999, pp. 547-566, 548.

¹² Wilde, op. cited, 174.

Rossetti's "De Profundis", the mention of stars and astronomical elements addresses the yearning towards God. This is proved by Li Li-Hong's study "On the Religious Emotion Revealed in the Poetry of Puritanical Christina Georgina Rossetti". Li-Hong states:

Because of her infinite longing for God and heaven, the poet repeats "heaven" in her poems, hoping that she could go to heaven to see God after death."¹³

The references to heaven and a longing for God thus suggests that Rossetti's "De Profundis" is ultimately a prayer addressed to the Almighty. This is expressed in the very first line: "Oh why is heaven built so far?"¹⁴ as to address the distance between her and God and, ultimately, the desire for God to hear her.

The spiritual search of both poets culminates in Nature's contemplation, seen as a possible symbol of divine manifestation. This perspective has already been studied in Brad Sullivan's essay "Rossetti's Darker Musing", which focuses on two of Rossetti's poems, "Twilight Calm" and "By the Sea". The following passage exemplifies Sullivan's perspective:

This view of nature runs counter to what many consider Rossetti's close alliance with Tractarians, saw "all natural phenomena" as "symbols of God and religious truth, *God's way of gradually leading men and women to an appreciation of his truth.*"¹⁵



The Weary Moon, 1911, Pre-Raphaelite depiction of the moon by Edward Hughes

Sullivan underlines Rossetti's reception of the natural world as a dimension leading to God and ultimate truth, sealing her "De Profundis" in a profound spiritual engagement with Nature. An example of this spiritual engagement occurs in the first stanza when it is said: "I cannot reach the nearest star / That hangs afloat",¹⁶ addressing a natural element, like the astronomical stars as a manifestation of a divine truth. Wilde's aim to undercover Nature's spirituality can be understood towards the end of his letter, when the author addresses the mystical feature of Nature:

Still, I am conscious now that behind all this beauty, satisfying though it may be, there is some *spirit hidden* of which the painted form and shapes are but modes of manifestation, and it is with this spirit that I desire to become in harmony. I have grown tired of the articulate utterances of men and things. The Mystical in Art, the Mystical in Life, the *Mystical in Nature* – this is what I am looking for. It is absolutely necessary for me to find it somewhere. (Italics added)¹⁷

¹³ Li Li-Hong, "On the Religious Emotion Revealed in the Poetry of Puritanical Christina Georgina Rossetti", *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Literature, Art and Human Development (ICLAHD 2020)*, 2020, pp. 408-411, 408.

¹⁴ Rossetti, op. Cited, line 1.

¹⁵ Brad Sullivan, "Grown Sick with Hope Deferred": Christina Rossetti's Darker Musings", *Papers on Language and Literature*, 1996, pp. 227-243, 240.

¹⁶ Rossetti, op.cited, lines 13-14.

¹⁷ Wilde, op.cited, 193.

Wilde's mention of a possible "spirit hidden" and of a Mystical feature in Nature possibly confirms his interest and deep yearning for a mystical presence that he may look for in the natural world.

The analysis of the two authors' desire to uncover a godly presence behind their experience on Earth proves Rossetti and Wilde similarities in their spiritual quest. By acknowledging their entanglement with earthly vanities, both poets systematically dismantle their worldly attachments to clear a path for the divine. This surrender, deeply rooted in the penitential echoes of Psalm 130, re-contextualizes their suffering not as an abandonment, but as an intimate dialogue with an "earthly" God who represents the ultimate addressee of their texts. Ultimately, this spiritual quest culminates in the natural world, whose intrinsic mystical quality must be further investigated.

2. Godly Nature – Simultaneously Close and Unreachable

After delving into the spiritual search of Wilde and Rossetti, the idea of Nature as a godly manifestation must be further explored. Rossetti and Wilde perceive the natural world as beyond their human range, envisioning a divine presence behind it. Consequently, their literary representations of Nature are charged with a profound mystical energy. This subsection will demonstrate in detail the superior and spiritual connotation given to the natural world by analysing three perspectives. First, the reading of Rossetti's and Wilde's depiction of a past time in which Nature and human were interconnected will reveal the state of harmony and the reconnection sought after by the two authors in the engagement with Nature. Second, the representation of Nature as a harmonious home and an Eden-like garden further enhances the divine connotation within the natural world. Ultimately, the ineffable dimension within the cycles and rhythms of Nature paves the way to the interpretation of a feeling of *Sehnsucht* experienced by the two authors, which mirrors the nostalgia felt by Nature in Chapter II.

Both authors recount a time when humanity and Nature were profoundly connected, reflecting a Christian vision of entanglement between the human and non-human. While Wilde's reference to this time is explicit in his "De Profundis", Rossetti's ideal can be interpreted through a Christological lens that dissolves the boundaries between humanity and Nature, envisioning them into one unified corpus. Wilde's "De Profundis" addresses the time in which Nature and human were connected while mentioning the relationship between the ancient Greek population and the natural world:

It seems to me that we all look at Nature too much, and live with her too little. I discern great sanity in the Greek attitude. They never chattered about sunsets, or discussed whether the shadows on the grass were really mauve or not. *But they saw that the sea was for the swimmer, and the sand for the feet of*

the runner. They loved the trees for the shadow that they cast, and the forest for its silence at noon. (Italics added)¹⁸

By describing the feeling of interconnection that the Greek felt with Nature, Oscar Wilde possibly recalls a time in which Nature and human were interconnected, expressing a fascination with it. Emma Mason completes Wilde's imagery with a Christian framework, discussing this concept while analysing the role of Creation and Nature in Rossetti's poetry:

At once *Christological* and ecological, her [Christina Rossetti's] distinctive and near mystical sense of "*all things*" as *part of one body* is influenced as much by the artistic as by the Christian context in which she was writing, a double lens through which the world revealed itself to her. (Italics added)¹⁹

Mason's analysis confirms the natural world to be both an inspiration to Rossetti's poetry and an underlying drive to bridge the divide between human consciousness and the non-human world. Although Rossetti does not specifically reference a historical era, Mason's analysis highlights a condition that transcends both time and space, a Christological framework within which Nature and humanity are inextricably bound. This theological paradigm complements and expands upon Wilde's imagery, wherein the human and the natural world are depicted in such close proximity as to being "part of one body".

The divine nuance of Nature is also implied in Rossetti's and Wilde's vision of the natural world as a harmonious and godly home, similar to a joyful Eden, in which both authors can escape. Mason analysed a similar implication in Rossetti's poetry, as follows:

While many of the poems are riddles, reserving their layered meaning in reticence and understatement, their ecological meaning is manifest in poems like "Hurt no living thing". Together they portray an *earthly Eden* as present and available, *embodied all around in the minutiae and interdependence of creation*. *Sing-Song* discloses this creation as a divine body, one comprised of both love and sorrow, innocence and experience, sleeping babies and orphaned infants, frisking lambs and cold dead birds. (Italics added)²⁰

Although Rossetti's "De Profundis" does not explicitly mention the dimension of Nature as an earthly Eden, Emma Mason's analysis of "Sing-Song" may successfully be applied to the "De Profundis". Rossetti's text describes Nature as "beyond my [human] range",²¹ recalling Mason's analysis of the natural world as a complex of intricate but interdependent processes that can only happen as a result of a divine intercession. As Peet Van Dyk argues, the garden of Eden is a place that exists completely outside ordinary human reality, operating beyond human range.²² This framework elevates Rossetti's

¹⁸ Wilde, op. cited, 192.

¹⁹ Emma Mason, *Christina Rossetti: Poetry, Ecology and Faith*, Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. 70-103, 70.

²⁰ Mason, op. cited, 107.

²¹ Rossetti, op. cited, line 8.

²² Peet Van Dyk, "In Search of Eden: A Cosmological Interpretation of Genesis 2-3", *Old Testament Essays*, 2014, pp. 651-665, 658-659.

description of the Moon to the same eco-theological description of Dyk's Eden, possibly identifying in Rossetti an Edenic Nature.

Wilde's depiction of Nature as harmonious home, or better, as a harmonious escape, has been thoroughly theorized by Aurora Aroca's "The Seafolk Have no Souls": On Ecophobia, Animality and Civilisation in Oscar Wilde's "The fisherman and his Soul", where she analyses Nature as a refuge:

All tales in *A House of Pomegranates* are indeed thematically connected by the presence of a clash between nature and civilisation, yet "The Fisherman and his Soul" is the only one where this distinction is presented in a different and more intricate way. Firstly, the divide between nature and culture is embodied by the contrast between the realms of the sea and the land, whereas in the other stories it is represented by the forest and the city. Furthermore, while the protagonists of the other three tales embark on a unidirectional journey from the forest to the city, the Fisherman's journey is more nuanced, as he deliberately abandons a civilised life to join the hybrid seafolk at sea, only to be lured back to land by his own soul. In light of all of the above, the application of an ecocritical approach to this story deepens insight into the potential meaning behind the tale's symbolic representations of the sea and the land, the heart and the soul. *Contrary to Bernardo's argument that there is a "lack of harmony" between the protagonists and both natural and civilised spaces in these tales, this article reveals that the ocean in "The Fisherman and his Soul" is presented as a realm of freedom and escape for the Fisherman.* (Italics added)²³

Aroca's depiction of the Nature within "The Fisherman and his Soul" as a realm of freedom and escape can be adapted to Wilde's "De Profundis". Oscar Wilde might be theorizing Nature as a harmonious refuge in the "Greek" section of his text. While Rossetti envisions Nature as a realm of several complex but harmonious details, Wilde seeks the simplicity and freedom of the Greek that admired Nature: "the sea was for the swimmer, and the sand for the feet of the runner." Moreover, he addresses the simple comfort provided by the trees and forests: "the trees for the shadow they cast, and the forest for its silence at noon."²⁴ Wilde's depiction of the natural world as a locus of solace and refuge underscores his profound yearning for a divine Nature, which inherently functions as both sanctuary and a source of comfort.

However, although Nature represents comfort, in both "De Profundis" the mystical feature of the natural world appears to be simultaneously unfathomable. This element enhances the divine feature of the environment, which embodies God. Emma Mason's once again confirms Nature's embodiment of God in the eyes of Rossetti through the analysis of another poem of the author, "Sing-Song":

The things on which *Sing-Song* lyricizes – lizards, crows, harebells, pigs, toadstools, frogs, caterpillars – are presented as part of an ongoing, but evolutionary incarnation of the Spirit. In Rossetti's ever-moving and dynamic world, snow falls, nests are built, trees blossom, apples tumble, boats sail, angels

²³ Aurora Murga Aroca, "Ecophobia and Social Class Identity: An Ecocritical Approach to the Nature/Culture Divide in Oscar Wilde's Fairy Tales "The Young King" and "The Star Child"', *Neophilologus*, 673-678, 675.

²⁴ Wilde, op. cited, 191.

fly, and stars spin to manifest the Spirit as both symbol and presence of God in a material world. (Italics added)²⁵

In Rossetti's poem, the conception of an unfathomable Nature is contained in the second stanza, while the author talks about the mysteries of the Moon, as follows: "I would not care to reach the moon, / One round monotonous of change; / Yet even she repeats her tune / *Beyond my range*." (Italics added).²⁶ The expression "Beyond my range" addresses the poet's limit in understanding the intricate and almost inaccessible mechanisms of Nature, hinting at a godly and superhuman presence behind it. This presence is proved by Masons' analysis of the stars spinning, considered a manifestation of a godly presence in the natural world, a presence that profoundly amazes Rossetti.



"The Garden of Eden", 1828, Thomas Cole

Oscar Wilde's profound sense of astonishment towards Nature, instead, can be found towards the end of his "De Profundis". John Pappas analyses Wilde's amazement of Nature as follows:

More frequently, in referring to birds, clouds, breezes, sunlight, and so forth, Wilde focuses on what for man are the immediately perceivable and recognizable aspects of the surrounding physical world. This external nature is at times presented as though it is no more than the sum of those aspects or qualities directly perceivable by man. At other times, however, Wilde suggests that the perceivable phenomena – the birds, the breezes, the flowers – are the function of an *immense, impersonal, and ineluctable process*, and that this process is the ultimate reality of Nature. (Italics added)²⁷

By describing Wilde's conception of Nature as the hypothetical existence of an underlying "immense" and "ineluctable" process, John Pappas confirms the superhuman and thus divine connotation that Wilde envisions in the natural world. This condition is further enhanced in the depiction of a scientist who weeps while admiring its natural surroundings, towards the end of Wilde's "De Profundis":

I tremble with pleasure when I think that on the very day of my leaving prison both the laburnum and the lilac will be blooming in the gardens, and that I shall see the wind stir into restless beauty the swaying gold of the one, and make the other toss the pale purple of its plumes so that all the air shall be Arabia for me. *Linnaeus fell on his knees and wept for joy when he saw for the first time the long heath of some English upland made yellow with the tawny aromatic blossoms of the common furze*; and I know that for me, to whom flowers are part of desire, there are tears waiting in the petals of some rose. (...) There is not a single colour hidden away in the chalice of a flowers, or the curve of a shell, to which, by some subtle sympathy with the very soul of things my nature does not answer. (Italics added)²⁸

Wilde's detailed description of Nature hints to a profound sense of astonishment towards the natural world, implying a possible superhuman feature within the environment. The mention of Linnaeus'

²⁵ Mason, op. cited, 107.

²⁶ Rossetti, op. cited, lines 7-8.

²⁷ John J. Pappas, "The Flower and the Beast: A Study of Oscar Wilde's Antithetical Attitudes Toward Nature and Man in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*", *English Literature in Transition*, Vol. 15, 1972, pp. 37-48, 37.

²⁸ Wilde, op. cited, 192.

emotion in the engagement with Nature, moreover, parallels Rossetti's conception of a Nature that goes beyond the limits of the human mind, confirming the presence of God behind it. Although Oscar Wilde has always been noted as being indifferent towards Nature, seeing life as a mere imitation of Art, this passage in the "De Profundis" represents a turning point in his belief and aesthetic paradigm: Nature not only has an intrinsic value, but it also may exist as a godly presence that astonishes the human.

The embodiment of a divine and distant presence in the two "De Profundis", seemingly addresses an experience of *Sehnsucht* which opens up an investigation into the Romantic realm and Romantic Eco-criticism. If in Chapter II Nature was depicted as nostalgic, in the two "De Profundis" Oscar Wilde and Christina Rossetti reciprocate this feeling through the concept of *Sehnsucht*, representing human nostalgia towards the natural world. Specifically, Wilde and Rossetti aim and encourage humanity to reconnect with the godly Nature. The definition given by Susanne Scheibe effectively explains *Sehnsucht* as a deep yearning towards the distant, as in the following excerpt:

In the German context, thoughts and feelings about one's optimal or utopian life are best captured by the concept of *Sehnsucht*. In the most comprehensive dictionary of the German language, *Sehnsucht* is defined as "*a high degree of intense, (recurring), and often painful desire for something, particularly if there is no hope to attain the desired, or when its attainment is uncertain, still far away*" (Grimm & Grimm, 1854 –1871/1984, p. 157). In Germany, the word *Sehnsucht*, more so than would be true for similar English words such as *nostalgia*, carries a solid dose of positivity and moreover possesses high everyday saliency. (...) *Sehnsucht* is proposed to involve feelings of *incompleteness and a sense of imperfection of one's life*. The longed-for objects or states are more than mere wishes – they are deeply enclosed in the search for a meaningful and complete life. (Italics added)²⁹

Scheibe's definition depicts *Sehnsucht* as a type of nostalgia which underlines the subject's sense of incompleteness of life, and thus yearning towards the distant. The sense of immensity and distance that the two authors experience may relate to a sense of "nostalgia for the invisible" that they envision in Nature. Several studies, moreover, have linked the *Sehnsucht* to a specific fascination and longing for Nature in the centuries that follow Romanticism. An intriguing evidence is James Helfers' analysis of C.S. Lewis's concept of *Sehnsucht*, further linked to Wordsworth's concept of Joy in admiring Nature. Helfers highlights the connection between *Sehnsucht* and a longing for Nature as follows:

"The experience is one of intense longing. It is distinguished from other longings by two things. In the first place, though the sense of want is acute and even painful, yet the mere wanting is felt to be somehow a delight. Other desires are felt as pleasures only if satisfaction is expected in the near future... *But this desire, even when there is no hope of possible satisfaction, continues to be prized, and even to be preferred to anything else in the world...* There is a peculiar mystery about the object of this desire. Inexperienced people... Suppose, when they feel it, that they know what they are desiring... But every one of these supposed objects for the Desire is inadequate to it." (...) [As Lewis states] The

²⁹ Susanne Scheibe, "Toward a Developmental Psychology of *Sehnsucht* (Life Longings): The Optimal (Utopian) Life", *Developmental Psychology*, Vol. 43, 2007, pp. 778-795, 780.

longing can be acute to the point of pain, though it is desired more than pleasure, and the fact that the object of his desire is ultimately inexplicable. (Italics added)³⁰

Helfers' analysis depicts the experience of *Sehnsucht* as a tension that continues to be preferred to anything else in the world, resonating with Wilde's and Rossetti's thrive towards spirituality and purification within Nature. The pivotal factor distinguishing *Sehnsucht* from the nostalgia examined in Chapter II, while maintaining their conceptual affinity, lies in its forward-looking projection. The sense of *Sehnsucht* in Wilde and Rossetti underscores not merely a nostalgic yearning for the natural world, but a prospective reconnection between humanity and Nature that both authors hope will occur in the future. The future aspect of *Sehnsucht* is confirmed by Scheibe's analysis of *Sehnsucht* as the "the desire for an optimal life (...) by outlining ideal life trajectories and producing powerful incentives to act towards the realization of these ideals."³¹

Interpreting Scheibe's study on Rossetti and Wilde, the "object of desire" in the two "De Profundis" is represented by Nature, which similarly engages the two poets in a painful and ethereal way. During her pain, Rossetti envisions Nature as a possible intermediary to a more mystical experience, as in the first stanza: "Oh why is earth set so remote? / I cannot reach the nearest star / That hangs afloat."³² In these lines, Rossetti can be seen as deeply meditating the stars which she manages to see but is not able to reach, highlighting the dimension of distance that lies between Man and Nature. Wilde, similarly, explicitly celebrates the engagement with Nature as a possible turning point in his life, as in the following excerpt:

Society as we have constituted it, will have no place for me, has none to offer; but Nature, whose sweet rains fall on unjust and just like, will have clefts in the rocks where I may hide, and *secret valleys* in whose silence I may week undisturbed. She will hang the night with stars so that I may walk abroad in the darkness without stumbling, and send the wind over my footprints so that none may track me to my hurt: she will cleanse me in great waters, and with bitter herbs make me whole. (Italics added)³³

Wilde's desire to reconnect with a Nature that may protect him and open up new horizons and possibilities of happiness underlines his fascination towards the more divine aspect that lies behind the natural world, close but unreachable at once.

Christina Rossetti and Oscar Wilde both demonstrate to experience a mystical presence in the encounter with Nature. By evoking a past era of human-Nature interconnectedness, both authors articulate a deep yearning for a lost state of harmony, while simultaneously sacralising the environment as an Edenic and harmonious refuge. The feeling of *Sehnsucht*, finally, mirrors the

³⁰ Ibid, 781.

³¹ Ibid, 782.

³² Rossetti, op. cited, lines 3-4.

³³ Wilde, op. cited, 193.

nostalgia felt by Nature in Chapter II, confirming the possibility of a Romantic eco-critical perspective in the analysis of Rossetti's and Wilde's "De Profundis".

3. Romantic Eco-Criticism in Rossetti and Wilde – The Sublime and Divine

Moving beyond the feeling of *Sehnsucht*, a deeper tie with the field of Romantic Ecocriticism can be analysed in Christina Rossetti's and Oscar Wilde's texts. The two authors' spiritual engagement with Nature align with an Eco-Romantic perspective, which ultimately culminates in a sacramental framework that links humanity to God. To demonstrate this transition, this analysis will first employ William Cronon's definition of the sublime to establish how both authors inherited a tradition that reshaped the natural world into a divine, sacred cathedral. Secondly, by applying Jonathan Bate's ecocritical concept of the poet as an ecological translator, this subsection examines how the authors decode natural elements to bridge the gap between humanity and the surrounding natural environment. Ultimately, by evaluating the specific spiritual and physical crises articulated in both "De Profundis" texts, it will be illustrated how Wilde and Rossetti move beyond simple aesthetic observation. In fact, they position interaction with the non-human world as a vital, restorative liturgy act that links humankind to God, transitioning from Eco-Romanticism to a more sacramental perspective. While the length of Wilde's "De Profundis" allows extensive analysis, the primary focus of Rossetti's evidence will be on the first stanza of her "De Profundis", which primarily validate these claims.

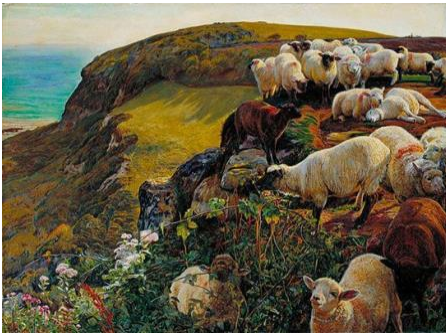
William Cronon's theory on the "Sublime" and the relationship between Nature and Human indicates a possible correlation between the two Victorian poets and Romantic Eco-Criticism. Both authors utilize a romantic framework where the sheer majesty of the natural world serves as a physical container for God. Therefore, the godly manifestation of Nature can be interpreted through a two-faceted model that embodies both a Romantic experience of Sublime and a more sacramental and liturgical event. Cronon focuses on the sacramental feature attributed to Nature, envisioning the natural world as a terrestrial canvas for the divine, as the following passages demonstrates:

By the eighteenth century this sense of wilderness as a landscape where the supernatural lay just beneath the surface was expressed in the doctrine of the *sublime*, a word whose modern usage has been so watered down by commercial hype and tourist advertising that it retains only a dim echo of its former power. In the theories of Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant, William Gilpin, and others, *sublime landscapes were those rare places on earth where one had more chance than elsewhere to glimpse the face of God*. Romantics had a clear notion of where one could be most sure of having this experience. Although God might, of course, choose to show Himself anywhere, He would most often be found in those vast, powerful landscapes *where one could not help feeling insignificant and being reminded of one's own mortality*. (Italics added)³⁴

³⁴ William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature", *Environmental History*, Vol. 1, 1996, pp. 7-28, 23.

By depicting sublime landscapes as the chance to see the glimpse of God, Cronon's analysis possibly aligns with how Nature is addressed in the two "De Profundis". In Rossetti's "De Profundis" the second stanza contains at once the overwhelming feeling of Sublime and Christian Devotion: "I would not care to reach the moon, / One round monotonous of change; / Yet even she repeats her tune / *Beyond my range.*"³⁵ (Italics added). The verse "Beyond my range" underlines Rossetti's awareness on the superiority of natural cycles to human cycles, acknowledging the divine connotation of Nature. Wilde also feels a deep yearning to unveil the face of God behind Nature, as he specifies towards the end of his letter:

Still, I am conscious now that behind all this beauty, satisfying though it may be, there is some spirit hidden of which *the painted forms and shapes may are but modes of manifestation*, and it is with this spirit that I desire to become in harmony. I have grown tired of the articulate utterances of men and things. (...) The Mystical in Nature – this is what I am looking for. (Italics added).³⁶



Our English Coasts, 1852, William Holman Hunt

In this passage, Wilde conceptualizes "painted forms and shapes" as phenomenal manifestations of an underlying, immanent divinity within the natural world. Consequently, his yearning for harmony with this hidden spirit represents a rejection of human artifice and conventional discourse in pursuit of a sublime, mystical unity with the absolute. This eco-romantic evidence further proves that any landscape and bit of Nature is for the two authors not a passive backdrop, rather a vital and overwhelming entity heavily charged with God.

A further step into the field of Romantic Eco-criticism is the analysis of Wilde's and Rossetti's poetic vocation as an intermediary of the divine truth contained within Nature. To illustrate this, Jonathan Bate's framework of ecopoetics must be discussed. In his book "Romantic Ecology", Bate states:

The poets, nevertheless, were not scientists. The poets claimed, in fact, that *they* more comprehensively and usefully discerned the proper relations of human beings to the natural cosmos. Wordsworth was explicit as to the superiority of poets to scientists, stressing, significantly, the poets' intrinsically social function. "The Man of Science seeks truth as a remote and unknown benefactor; he cherishes and loves it in his solitude: *the Poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion.*" Later Shelley would assert that "we have more knowledge than we can digest", urging that we must learn to "imagine what we know", an education clearly to be carried out less through scientific research than humanistic learning. (...) We will misunderstand the politics of the romantic poets so long as we underestimate their conviction of poetry's practical value. This faith in their art's usefulness in teaching interdependency arose from the persuasion that human consciousness is a natural process. Consciousness, they believed, is most effective when most harmoniously attuned to the activities of its nurturing environment. *Poetry is the*

³⁵ Rossetti, op. cited, lines 5-8.

³⁶ Wilde, op. cited, 193.

best means for such tempering, the mutually beneficial effects of which will do more for creating good societies than any political dogma. (Italics added)³⁷

By addressing poetry and literature as the “best means” to transmit the awareness of the environment, Bate effectively positions the figure of the poet as the intermediary of our “visible companion.” This reposition can be seen towards the end of Wilde’s “De Profundis”, where he expresses his desire of going back to Nature after rejecting human society:

As a consequence our art is of the moon and plays with shadows, while Greek art is of the sun and deals directly with things. I feel sure that in *elemental forces* there is purification, and I want to go back to them and live in their presence.³⁸

The key-expression of Wilde’s quotation is “elemental forces”, which addresses the raw, primal, and essential parts of Earth. By demonstrating that he wants to “go back to the elemental forces and live in their presence”, the author expresses a desire to realign his fractured identity with the non-human world. This desire represents Jonathan Bate’s framework of the poet attempting to inhabit and intermediate the natural world. While Wilde looks downward to the raw, purifying “elemental forces” of the earth – such as water, fire, and soil – Rossetti looks upward to the raw, unyielding geometry of the cosmos, depicting the majesty of Nature’s complexity. The first stanza of her “De Profundis”, once again echoes this point. While describing the Moon, Rossetti states: “I would not care to reach the moon, / One round monotonous of change; / Yet even she repeats her tune / Beyond my range.”³⁹ By depicting the “raw power” of the moon cycle, Rossetti becomes the intermediary of Nature’s genuineness, aligning with Jonathan Bate’s framework of ecopoetics.

After having established Wilde and Rossetti as prophetic intermediaries of a divine Nature, it becomes necessary to discuss the eco-sacramental themes within their texts. Specifically, both authors configure a restorative feature within the natural world, a liturgy act that allows humanity to connect to God. To effectively introduce this topic, the figure of Gerard Manley Hopkins must be discussed. Being a Catholic Jesuit, the poet had a strong perception of the divine presence within Nature. In analysing this feature, Raj Mishra states:

To him nature is not an object. Nature to him is a spiritual entity. It is to be worshipped, honoured and revered. Nature is seen phenomena of divinity. *One can link up one’s soul with God through nature.* So seems the vision of Hopkins in his various poems and prose works. Divinity manifests itself through indefinite transformations of nature. Nothing is beyond nature. Everything is subject to nature. (Italics added)⁴⁰

³⁷ Jonathan Bate, *Romantic ecology: Wordsworth and the environmental tradition*, New York: Routledge, 2013, 17.

³⁸ Wilde, op. cited, 192.

³⁹ Rossetti, op. cited, lines 5-8.

⁴⁰ Raj Kumar Mishra, “An Eco-spiritual Approach to Gerard Manley Hopkins”, *Lapis Lazuli: An International Literary Journal*, 2020, 41-48, 43.

Mishra's description of Hopkins' spiritual engagement with Nature can be easily paralleled to Wilde's and Rossetti's conception of a godly Nature, that is a natural world that embodies "phenomena of divinity." Mishra's analysis of Hopkins, however, adds a further and crucial aspect to the study of sacramental poetry and eco-conscious poets. He asserts that "One can link up one's soul with God through nature", a process that can be interpreted within Wilde's and Rossetti's poetic.

If Nature is God, Wilde's desire to reconnect his soul to the Almighty can be interpreted in the first paragraph of his "De Profundis":

With us time itself does not progress. It revolves. It seems to circle round one centre of pain. The paralysing immobility of a life every circumstance of which is regulated after an unchangeable pattern, so that we eat and drink and lie down and pray, or kneel at least for prayer, according to the inflexible laws of an iron formula: this immobile quality, that makes each dreadful day in the very minutest detail like its brother, seems to communicate itself to those external forces the very essence of whose existence is ceaseless change. Of seed-time or harvest, of the reapers bending over the corn, or the grape gatherers threading through the vines, of the grass in the orchard made white with broken blossoms or strewn with fallen fruit: of these we know nothing, and can know nothing.⁴¹

Within the static confines of Reading Gaol, Wilde experiences a violent form of ecological alienation. His description of a temporal vacuum – where time merely "revolves" and "seems to circle" – highlights a complete severance from the natural world. This profound sensory deprivation effectively bars him from the rhythmic, healing cycles of the physical environment. Consequently, because he "can know nothing" of seasonal progression, he cannot participate in the godly mysteries of Nature's cycles. As a consequence, Wilde is seemingly not able to link his soul to a divine presence, unlike Rossetti. Although Rossetti is confined in "fleshly bands", the author demonstrates that the human soul can actively transcend physical confinement. By tracking the moon as it "repeats her tune", she actively observes the manifestation of divine order. This cosmic cycles provides the exact spiritual continuity that Wilde's prison life is denied, envisioning the landscape as a vital sacrament which directly links humanity to God.

Wilde's and Rossetti's Eco-Romanticism extends far beyond a passive inheritance of the sublime; it culminates in a profound theology of eco-sacramental communion. In both "De Profundis" texts, the natural world becomes the physical vessel through which divine grace is mediated to the suffering soul. However, this material intersection of the cosmic and the earthly cannot be categorized merely as a generalized pantheism. Since both authors anchor their redemption within a Christian architecture, this eco-sacramental universe demands a specific, Christological evaluation. The material holiness of the cosmos finds its structural zenith in the figure of Jesus – the literal incarnation

⁴¹ Wilde, op. cited, 152.

of divinity into earthly matter – and the promise of the Parousia, the ultimate apocalyptic restoration of the entire creation.

4. The Possible Parousia – A Christian Apocalypse

The sacramentalism examined in the previous subsection must be investigated further. A deeper analysis of the two “De Profundis” proves the important role of Jesus Christ in the life and poetry of both authors. This role illuminates the possibility of Parousia, or Second Coming, which offers an apocalyptic and ecological answer to the anxieties of their era. The final subsection of this chapter will unfold across four key themes. The poets’ “hierophantic” connotation, which further elaborates their role of ecological translators through a sacramental lens. Humility and Kenōsis as the shared condition of the two poets, which is necessary to empty themselves from pride and worldly preoccupations. The analysis will then look to the figure of Jesus, which has been deeply admired by Rossetti and Wilde as the most perfect human instance of divinity and humility. Finally, a possible Second Coming provides the final eco-apocalyptic resolution, where humanity and the natural world redeemed.

Wilde’s and Rossetti’s positions as eco-poetic translators can be further understood through a “hierophantic” lens. Building on Stephen McInerney’s analysis of the poets as a hierophant, both authors upgrade their translation of the natural world from an eco-romantic experience to a deep, sacramental mediation of divine presence. In his article “Les Murray’s Sacramental Poetics”, Stephen McInerney’ analyses the role of a poet in religious poetry, starting from the poetic of Les Murray: “For Murray, the poet is rather a *hierophant*, a speaker for the tribe who offers “Unbloody” sacrifices.” (Italics added).⁴² The key-word of McInerney’s analysis is the word “Hierophant”, which indicates an interpreter of sacred mysteries and a guide who brings individuals into the presence of the holy.⁴³ Christina Rossetti and Wilde can be similarly interpreted as two hierophants, as they effectively represent a godly Nature calling out to humanity, and thus bringing individuals into the presence of the holy. Rossetti’s actions of straining her heart and stretching out her hands may be paralleled to a priestly function, in which the poet becomes medium and minister of a sacramental Nature to whom humanity must reconnect.

⁴² Stephen McInerney, “Les Murray’s Sacramental Poetics”, *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society*, Vol. 41, 2020, pp. 158-172, 159.

⁴³ Collins Dictionary, Definition of the word “Hierophant”, www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/hierophant, accessed on May 30th 2026.

Similarly, towards the end of Wilde's "De Profundis", the author represents Nature as a spiritual place of cleansing "through great waters" and "bitter herbs", almost replicating a ritual baptism, as on page 199:

Society, as we have constituted it, will have no place for me (...) but Nature, whose sweet rains fall on unjust and just alike, will have clefts in the rocks where I may hide... *She will cleanse me in great waters, and with bitter herbs make me whole.* (Italics added)⁴⁴

Through this depiction, Wilde acts as a sacred intermediary who reveals the divine mysteries hidden within the physical creation. Particularly, he mediates his human suffering to an ecological grace that can redeem him and "make [him] whole."

A further dimension of sacramentalism is expressed through the two authors' sense of humility. Although through different concepts and images, both poets depict humility as a necessary condition for their role of intermediary on Earth. Emma Mason analyses Rossetti's conception of humility within the theme of kenōsis, the self-emptying of Christ into the world. Mason states:

While lilies and birds help the human to consider what it means to prepare for the reception of Christ, the believer can only achieve unity with Christ and enter the new creation through the renunciation of power, authority, and transcendence through the (ecological) love command. *Weakened by kenōsis, the human opens herself to a thinking of the world already given in the communal being of the nonhuman, one in which things work together and ultimately transform into new species and genera, rather than defend selfishly their own being to erase competition from others.*⁴⁵

Although Rossetti's "De Profundis" does not explicitly mention humility and kenosis, Mason's analysis can be applied to the devotional text of Rossetti, in which she surrenders to her pain and "catch at hope", emptying herself of any worldly preoccupation and individual pursuit.

Wilde effectively embodies and represents Mason's analysis of humility and kenosis in his "De Profundis", while he ultimately surrenders to pain:

I was no longer the captain of my soul, and did not know it. I allowed pleasure to dominate me. I ended in horrible disgrace. There is only one thing for me now, absolute humility. (...) Now I find hidden somewhere away in my nature something that tells me that nothing in the whole world is meaningless, and suffering least of all. That something hidden away in my nature, like treasure in a field, is Humility.⁴⁶

In this passage, Wilde's shift from arrogance to "Humility" represents an instance of ecological kenosis. By admitting he is "no longer the captain of [his] soul," Wilde assumes the position of a humble intermediary on Earth, viewing Nature as a sacred space of grace.

⁴⁴ Wilde, op. cited, 199.

⁴⁵ Mason, op. cited, 182.

⁴⁶ Wilde, op. cited, 182.

The figure of Jesus Christ has a crucial role in the poetry of both authors, as the ultimate mediator between the physical world and the divine. Wilde's and Rossetti's shared fascination towards Christ possibly resides in the concept of Deep Incarnation, which further connects humanity and Nature. Un-Hey Kim explains the concept of Deep Incarnation within the role of Jesus Christ on Earth:

In this context [Environmental crisis of the Anthropocene], one needs to be reminded that incarnation is “a question of Christ being here and being there at the deepest levels of the material world of flesh as the Incarnate One who both shares and transcends the conditions of materiality.” Thus, to be incarnate is to be immersed within this web of relationships, and the core of incarnation is to *give the so-called physical world its orientation and sense*.⁴⁷ (Italics added)



The Light of the World, 1882, William Holman Hunt

This excerpt demonstrates that the material and divine presence of Christ gives the entire world a clear orientation. This unique framework confirms that humility is a mandatory precursor to a true condition of harmony within Nature. Secondly, Christ's omnipresent nature guides humanity to look at the environment as a sacred space that must be protected, rather than destroyed. This is further confirmed in a statement within the introduction of the same paper, when Kim states that the task of theology today is to construct a new humanism beyond anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism, adding that “it is to see humanism through the eyes of deep incarnation, which acknowledges the deep interwovenness of humans, non humans, and non-living beings.”⁴⁸

Finally, this Christological framework reaches its ultimate ecological conclusion in the anticipation of Parousia. Both authors view the Second Coming not as a destruction of the physical world, but as a cosmic renewal. The Parousia serves as the final apocalyptic resolution where the entire suffering biosphere is eternally redeemed and restored to its divine ideal. Ana Caetano discusses Christ's position within Wilde's “De Profundis”, stating: “His Christ is a poet, an artist creating Himself and *reshaping humanity* with the power of his imagination.” (Italics added).⁴⁹ Caetano's concept of a Christ “reshaping humanity” possibly addresses a literal, future return of Christ that will reshape humanity. Consequently, this final reshaping of humanity triggers a necessary apocalyptic event that will reposition human and Nature into harmonic cosmos. In Christina Rossetti's *The Face of the Deep*, a similar desire of Second Coming is expressed on page 29 of the commentary, while the authors discusses Apocalypse 1:16 (“And He had in his right hand

⁴⁷ Un-Hey Kim, “Christian Planetary Humanism in the Age of Climate Crisis”, *Religions* 13, 2022, pp. 1-10, p. 4.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 1.

⁴⁹ Ana Carolina Vilalta Caetano, “The Christ as Man: The Secular Jesus of Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis* and Richard Bruce Nugent's “Tree with Keriioth-Fruit”, *The Brazilian Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol. 27, 2025, pp. 125-139, 128.

seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two edged-sword: and His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strenght.”):

Christ is our fountain-head and our abyss; we begin from Him, we end in Him. What He maketh us we are; what He bestoweth upon us we possess. We, as it were, pour and empty ourselves and our treasures into Him, yet we enrich Him not: what have we that we have not received? The gifts He giveth us are and remain His: we only ourselves, unless we abide in Him, retain neither life nor portion.⁵⁰

This excerpt demonstrates how, according to Rossetti, human history and the material cosmos find their ultimate, circular destiny inside the divine order of Jesus. By stating that “we begin from Him, we end in Him,” Rossetti frames the Parousia not as a destruction of existence, but as a mandatory return to our divine point of origin. Ultimately, this apocalyptic return of Jesus parallels Wilde’s framework, proving that the final reshaping of humanity can only be completed when the broken world recognize its sacred, sovereign source in God.

In conclusion, this subsection has demonstrated a definitive Christological resolution within the eco-sacramental frameworks of Oscar Wilde and Christina Rossetti. By operating as hierophants, both authors reveal the sacred value of the physical environment. Furthermore, the material reality of Jesus Christ bridges the gap between the divine and the cosmos, establishing a clear spiritual orientation for human engagement with Nature. Ultimately, the shared anticipation of the Parousia transforms the apocalypse from a site of total destruction into an act of profound restoration. However, the exact fate of humankind during this cosmic collapse remains to be explored, paving the way to analyse the apocalypse of the human in greater depth.

⁵⁰ Christina Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep: A Devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse*, London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 29.

Chapter IV

The Apocalypse of the Human

- The Disruption of Ego-Hierarchy and the Reconnection with Nature

“And the King shall answer and say unto them,

Verily I say unto you,

Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren,

Ye have done it unto me.”

(Matthew 25:40)

1. The Impending Doom in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Rossetti's *The Face of the Deep: A Devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse*

Moving forward into the spiritual journey of Oscar Wilde and Christina Rossetti, the comparison between *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) and *The Face of the Deep: A Devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse* (1893) depicts the peak of the two authors' path. If the comparative reading between Rossetti's and Wilde's "De Profundis" represents a godly Nature and the possibility of an apocalypse within a Christian perspective, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Face of the Deep* effectively illustrate an apocalyptic rapture, a process in which humankind's illusions and worldly pursuits collapse. To demonstrate this end, this first subsection will address three aspects shared by the two texts. The rejection of Victorian materialism and worldly pursuits, which prompts the two authors to withdraw from society. The feeling of impending doom of a possible rapture, represented through the metaphor of a thief entering the world. Finally, the imagery of darkness as anticipatory stage to the apocalyptic rapture.

Reconnecting to the original awareness experienced in the "De Profundis" and in the two nightingale's poems, Rossetti's and Wilde's unease towards Victorian over-industrialisation recurs in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Face of the Deep*. Particularly, the authors' desire to withdraw from an hyper-mannerist society ultimately opens to a haunting, apocalyptic anxiety regarding the impending collapse of an over-materialistic and hypocritical world. The comparison between Wilde's novel and Rossetti's commentary demonstrates how the idolatry of worldly pleasure and beauty might soon suffer a collapse/apocalypse. In Chapter 11 of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the image of an idolatrized Dorian is depicted:

He would sit in his box at the Opera looking at the crowd in the house, and wondering if they were made of the same fabric as himself. (...) It was rumoured of him that he was seen creeping out of some dreadful house in Whitechapel, or that he was found in some gambling-den... But the world refused to believe anything to his disadvantage. The world, indeed, was not slow to forgive him. His wealth, his position, his beautiful youth, were all so many barriers to shield him from the scoffs of those who, if they had known what he really was, would have been the first to cry out against him. *Society – civilised society, at least – is never very ready to believe anything to the detriment of those who are both rich and fascinating. It feels instinctively that manner are of more importance than morals, and, in its opinion, the highest respectability is of much less value than the possession of a good chief.*¹(Italics added)

This passage of Chapter 11 depicts the most hypocritical aspect of the British society lived by Oscar Wilde, which is condemned through the illustration of an idolatrized young man, judged solely upon his manners and handsome apparel. Louise Bailly supports this analysis as a materialistic

¹ Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 1890, "The Literature Page Edition", www.literaturepage.com/read/doriangray-144.html Chapter 11, pp. 1-230, 144.

condemnation in her article “Aestheticism and Morality in Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*”, stating:

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the monstrous comes from within British society itself and from within culture (Basil’s art). In this modern tale of moral degradation taking place in the “native land of the hypocrites”, the Irish writer seems to point out the *potential drifts of the ennui and indolence pervading the advanced civilisation that British aristocracy embodies*.²

Not only does Bailly underline the sinful attitude of Dorian, proving his idolatrized nature, she also mentions the potential “drifts of the ennui”, which addresses the danger and perhaps the collapse that might follow an exaggerated idolatry of manners and worldly pleasures.

In her devotional commentary Christina Rossetti also rejects hypocrisy and excessive materialism. While commenting on Apocalypse 9:21, a chapter that signals to humanity the possible catastrophic end of human greediness, she states:

And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of God, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk. (...) PLEASE GOD. I will have nothing to do with spiritualism, whether it be imposture or a black art; or with mesmerism, lest I clog my free ill; or with hypnotism, lest wilful self surrender become my road to evil choice, imagination, conduct, voluntary or involuntary. (...) I ought to shrink from sin more sensitively than from punishment. In all my dealings temporal and spiritual I must adhere to a just weight, a just measure, even balances, a superhuman standard. I must set conscience above convenience, and Divine law above worldly conventions.³

Although Rossetti’s apocalyptical call to God seems unrelated to Wilde’s discourse on materialism on a first reading, her condemnation of worldly idolatries and non-Christian beliefs may be complementary to Wilde’s concern with the end of such idolatrous society. Both poets might be seeing a collapse in the industrial and over-mannerist paradigm of their era, and Rossetti’s idea of Apocalypse addresses this end.

Through their narratives, the authors portray a sense of impending doom, as a rapture is about to occur. This feeling is expressed through the metaphor of a thief entering a house and finding its inhabitants unprepared, framing apocalypse as an incursion into the self, which happens unannounced, exactly like a home invasion. The two poets, however, represent different reactions to this fear. On page 89 of Christina Rossetti’s *The Face of the Deep*, the author discusses Apocalypse 3:3, which reads:

² Louise Bailly, “Aestheticism and Morality in Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890)”, 2020, *La Clé des langues Anglais*, cle.ens-lyon.fr/anglais/litterature/litterature-britannique/aestheticism-and-morality-in-the-picture-of-dorian-gray Accessed on May 3rd 2026.

³ Christina Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep: A Devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse*, Brighton, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1893, 271.

³ Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and *thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee*.

Rossetti comments on this verse as follows: “Well may He Who beyond all others loves us, for that very love’s sake bid us “Remember”, *lest all too late we should remember*.” (Italics added).⁴ Through her comment, the author manifests her fear of being unprepared for the End of the World and the Parousia.⁵ Nonetheless, she promptly encourages herself and the reader to “remember” and be ready for the second coming of Jesus, who may come unexpectedly, as a thief.

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, instead, the protagonist possibly resists this incursion by segregating his deepest secrets - the portrait and thus the malediction - in the dusty attic of his house, as a burglar could possibly undercover his deeds. Hannah Philips confirms the dimension of secrecy within the attic in which the picture is hidden, as follows:

Intruders in the novel are those who get too close to *Dorian’s true self*, characters like Basil Hallward, James Vane, and Alan Campbell, who all die before the novel concludes: *to get too close to Dorian’s attic space is to see too much of the home’s owner*. (...) Dorian’s home and things are a mirror for his true self and are places the reader can view and visit in order to understand his hidden terror. By Gothicizing Dorian’s home space, Wilde presents it as having a sinister secret existing beyond the aesthetic cover of artistry and beautiful objects.⁶

Philips’ depiction of the attic as a space highly susceptible to incursion underscores the protagonist’s anxiety about being unmasked in his crimes and curse, demonstrating a feeling of impending doom. Moreover, by referring to the novel’s characters as “intruders”, Philips’ analysis of Dorian Gray’s attic further enhances the incoming rapture, an unveiling which may expose Dorian’s most profound secret.

The imminent doom within both narratives is manifested through the imagery of darkness, which addresses death as a mandatory threshold towards a rapture and the possibility of a new life. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* the revealing darkness can be interpreted before the final act, during which Dorian stabs the picture intending to destroy the evidence of his sins, but ending up killing himself. The scene of the picture’s destruction, opens up with the protagonist ascending the stairs of his house, with a lamp, a source of light that may help him illuminate his filthy sins:

He took the lamp from the table and crept upstairs. As he unbarred the door, a smile of joy flitted across his strangely young-looking face and lingered for a moment about his lips. Yes, he would be good, and

⁴ *Ibid*, 89.

⁵ The Parousia is a concept already mentioned on Subsection 3 of the third chapter of this Final Dissertation.

⁶ Hannah Philips, “Space and Sexuality in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*”, *Shawangunk Review Volume XXIX*, 2018, pressbooks.pub/shawangunktest/chapter/closeted-desire-deviant-decor-space-and-sexuality-in-the-picture-of-dorian-gray-by-hannah-phillips/, accessed on May 4th 2026.

the hideous thing that he had hidden away would no longer be a terror to him. He felt as if his load had been lifted from him already.⁷

In this passage, Dorian has no clue that destroying the picture will implicate his death, he is convinced that destroying it will eliminate from Earth the evidence of his sins and of the murder. This scene may thus be interpreted as Dorian's unawareness that he is about to end his mortal life, and therefore that



Image of the film "Dorian Gray". The frame shot involves the picture of Dorian, which gradually decays as the protagonist sins and commits deeds.

he is not immortal. The dim light of the lamp and the weak afternoon light that can be seen from the secret attic, however, are not enough to illuminate his life. The ultimate piece of analysis of the attic's darkness may be completed through Christina Rossetti's reading of obscurity. Several times in her commentary Christina Rossetti mentions light and its connotation of divine guidance⁸, in stark contrast to the sinful connotation of obscurity.

Rossetti's value of darkness, however, is not entirely vituperative, as the author might envision obscurity as an anticipation of light. This implication is contained on page 214 of her commentary, where she also recalls the darkness that followed Jesus Christ's sacrificial act:

[Commenting Apocalypse 12:6 "And I beheld when He had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood;"] *Darkness and earthquake waited on our Lord's Passion and Death*: "the sun was darkened" and "the earth did quake." If on a saving Passion and *life-restoring Death*, how much more on a vain passion and destruction-*preluding death*! "Great" now is the earthquake; the sun now becomes "black as sackcloth of hair." The done done, and the undone left undone, earth is preparing to pass away, and she quakes. We know not whether the sun is passing away, or whether he will be *relit*. (Italics added)⁹

In her comment, Rossetti explicates how Darkness awaits, and thus how it anticipates the Lord's Passion, implicitly evoking the possibility of a restoring light after this state of obscurity. This light appears symbolically on the third day following his Resurrection, as the women arrive at the tomb while the sun is rising. Therefore, as the restorative light of Jesus Christ's Resurrection cannot come before the darkness of his death, the character of Dorian Gray must first undergo his passing, which happens in a revelatory darkness that enlightens the ephemeral and mortal life of humanity. In light of this analysis, obscurity represents an illuminating stage towards the possibility of light, or a new

⁷ Wilde, op. cited, 228.

⁸ On page 151 of Rossetti's devotional commentary, the depiction of the majesty of a rainbow effectively exemplifies Rossetti's devotion to the imagery of light: "The rainbow has been thought to indicate that same Sacred Humanity, because surrounding the Throne it appears no less to surround Him Who sat thereon, like as the Blessed Body enshrined the "Incomprehensible" Divinity".

⁹ Rossetti, op. Cited, 214.

revelation, further highlighting the sense of impending doom and rapture that is about to happen according to both poets.

This comparative analysis of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Face of the Deep* reveals a feeling of impending doom and a possible rapture. Through the metaphor of a home invasion which finds the human inhabitants of Earth unprepared, the refusal of Victorian materialism and worldly pursuits by the two authors is further reinforced. Ultimately, the revelatory connotation of darkness further enhances the feeling of impending doom, which paves the way to effectively investigate the nature of the apocalypse narrated by Christina Rossetti and Oscar Wilde.

2. The Apocalypse of the Human Within Divine Judgement

If the feeling of impending doom in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Face of the Deep* culminates with human death, the actual apocalypse of the human may re-establish an equity between humanity and other living beings. In Rossetti's and Wilde's texts, the impending doom is followed by an apocalypse of the human being, represented by a divine judgement that manifests through Nature's power. This divine and natural manifestation humbles humankind and disrupts the ego-hierarchy which sees humanity over Nature. To demonstrate this apocalypse, this subsection will illustrate three main moments in which the godly Nature acts. The first is God's employment of Nature to prepare – and warn – the human for his final judgement. The second act is the actual Divine Judgement which reveals the ephemeral and fleeting life of humanity compared to the vast and undefeatable Nature. The third and ultimate act is the re-establishment of an equity between human and non-human which possibly opens to a utopic post-apocalyptic world.

God employs Nature to anticipate to the human an imminent divine judgement. This manifestation happens through a particular weather condition in Rossetti and a spiritual encounter between human and non-human in Wilde. In *The Face of the Deep*, Rossetti depicts the arrival of God from a climactic perspective:

[Commenting Apocalypse 9:7: “Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so, Amen.”] “And every eye shall see Him.” – *All impelled in one direction, all looking in one direction*. Even a very small crowd doing the same thing at the same instant has a thrilling, awful power; as once when I saw the chorus of a numerous orchestra turn over their music sheets at the same moment, it brought before me the Day of Judgement. “*He cometh with clouds.*” – “Clouds and darkness are round about Him; righteousness and judgement are the habitation of His throne.” But we know not whether at that supreme moment any one will even notice clouds, or angels, or subordinate terrors. Now is our time to notice and avail ourselves of them, if we aim at living by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. *Each common cloud in this out cloudy climate may serve to remind us of the cloud of the Ascension, and of the clouds of the second Advent*. Also of that great cloud of witnesses who already compass about, who one day will hear our doom pronounced; who perhaps will then for the moment

become as nothing to us when we stand face to face with Christ our Judge: “At the brightness of His presence His clouds removed.” (Italics added).¹⁰

The arrival of God is preceded by clouds and a “cloudy climate”, which prompts humanity to look “All impelled in one direction”. The cloudy climate and the clouds that accompany God represents a Nature that anticipates and escorts the divine judgement of God, reiterating the divine connotation and sacramentality within the natural world.

A similar manifestation, though with a different outcome, occurs in Chapter 7 of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Upon noticing the initial signs of decay in the cursed portrait, Dorian momentarily seeks refuge in Nature, convincing himself that its beauty speaks of a divine love:

The fresh morning air seemed to drive away all his sombre passions. He thought only of Sibyl. A faint echo of his love came back to him. He repeated her name over and over again. *The birds that were singing in the dew-drenched garden seemed to be telling the flowers about her.*¹¹

Dorian’s encounter with a Nature that seems to remind him of his humanity and of the importance of love may be interpreted as God trying to reach the lowest and deepest part of the protagonist’s soul. The godly Nature warns Dorian of the imminent collapse and of the vain aesthetic idolatries that the character is pursuing. In addition, the encounter with Nature in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* can also be paralleled to the attempts made by the christological nightingale to speak with the student in “The Nightingale and Rose”. As the young protagonist of the short story does not understand the bird’s will to sacrifice for love, Dorian trivialises the presence of Nature around him. He returns to the pursuit of pleasure and aesthetic idolatry, therefore dismissing at once both his love for Sybil and the divine presence within the natural environment.

Both texts represent a Nature that humbles humankind and shrinks its ego-hierarchical thrive. This humbling process provokes a collapse and thus an apocalypse within the conventional anthropocentric view which sees humanity over Nature. The event happens through the depiction of a natural world that long surpasses humanity in terms of size and life-span. Rossetti and Wilde, however, are not the first Victorian poets to represent a Nature that prevails over humans. In 1830, Alfred Tennyson published “The Kraken”, a poem that has long resonated within the field of Victorian Eco-Criticism. The text draws its images from the Norse legend of a gigantic sea-monster that supposedly preyed upon shipping off the coast of Norway. It was said to be capable of dragging down to the sea-bottom even the largest ships through a powerful whirlpool, known as the “Skagarag”. At a first reading, the connection of Tennyson’s sea-beast to the biblical end of time suggests the influence of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, through the depiction of a Leviathan-like beast. A more

¹⁰ Rossetti, op. cited, 120.

¹¹ Wilde, op. cited, 91.

recent eco-critical reading, however, suggests another influence, Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1833), which had challenged the geological time of the Bible: while biblical texts measured the age of the Earth in thousands of years, new scientific discoveries of the Victorian Era revealed that the Earth was actually billions of years old. The fascination behind the Kraken therefore resides not only in its gigantic connotations but also in the animal's capability to live thousands of years, almost paralleling geological ages. The Kraken thus represents a natural environment that outlive and outsize humankind.¹²

A similar discourse can be interpreted in Christina Rossetti's *Face of the Deep*, as two particular passages represent Nature's outsize of humanity. On page 261 of Rossetti's commentary, the author discusses the presence of human-sized animals tempering the man:

[Commenting Apocalypse 10:6 "And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of the man] The wording of this passage repeatedly suggests that we are being instructed not plainly but by figure, similitude, shadow; feature after feature being described as "like unto" or "as it were" or "as". Dark is the glass through which we are summoned to see, yet is it a glass. The mysterious horrible smoke whence the locusts issue teaches us something by analogy. *To pass unscathed through literal suffocating smoke, our way is to crouch low to the ground: and through that other more deadly smoke surely our way of safety is not dissimilar; to bow down, to "walk humbly".* (...) Very terrible are these preternatural locusts. Because one day such a trial may have to be faced by ourselves, and as yet we know not clearly what thus we may be called upon to face. (Italics added)¹³

By depicting two human-sized locusts, Rossetti subverts the usual ego-hierarchical scheme which sees humans over Nature, sealing this collapse and ultimately attributing power to the natural environment. Moreover, the actions of "crouching low to the ground" and "bow down" to the supernatural locusts represent the humbling process that human must undergo to disintegrate their pride, recalling the Kraken's majestic power of subduing fishermen.

In Wilde's novel, the signs of old age over the corpse of Dorian address the course of Nature as intangible and inevitable. The natural aging process ultimately prevails on the character:

When they entered, they found hanging upon the wall a splendid portrait of their master as they had last seen him, in all the wonder of his exquisite youth and beauty. Lying on the floor was a dead man, in evening dress, with a knife in his heart. *He was withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage.* It was not till they had examined the rings that they recognized who it was.¹⁴

By depicting the appearance of Dorian's corpse as an instance of profound physical decay, ageing and hideousness, Wilde's narrative may address the insignificance of the human life-span when set against the vast temporal scale of Nature. The analysis reveals the fatal limitations of the protagonist's

¹² Philip V. Allingham, Commentary and Notes to Lord Tennyson's "The Kraken" (1830), 2005, victorianweb.org/authors/tennyson/kraken.html Accessed on May 6th, 2026.

¹³ Rossetti, op. cited, 261.

¹⁴ Wilde, op. cited, 230.

desire of immortality, consequently showcasing how no curse or modification of the environment can truly overcome the natural aging process of humanity. Therefore, the very tools the protagonists uses to defy nature thus violently backfire, resulting in his human death. A Kraken may live thousands of years, but a human being cannot escape their far shorter life-span, not even through supernatural intervention.

Ultimately, both authors confirm the equality of all human beings in front of Nature's laws and God/Nature's Final Judgement, addressing a disruption of the ego-hierarchy which sees humanity over Nature. In his article "Creation in Context: Christina Rossetti's "A Vain Shadow" in *The Face of the Deep*" Ryan Sinni discusses Rossetti's representation of an harmonious equity between human and Nature in her poem "A Vain Shadow", which is also included in her first version of *The Face of the Deep*, in the section that condemns vanity and worldly pleasure. Sinni states:

Vanity is not only the aspect of the world that Rossetti highlights in this context. The very words that follow "A Vain Shadow" are the words of Revelation 5:13, which describes all creation praising God: "And every creature which is heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the Throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. Having just highlighted creation's vanity, Rossetti turns to a passage that describes creation's worship. Her commentary celebrates the praise the verse describes: "*Absolute unanimity among all creatures.*"¹⁵

By envisioning a condition of "absolute unanimity among all creatures", and thus of a harmonious experience of spontaneous and peaceful co-existence, Sinni confirms that the polar opposite to the worldly vanity denounced by Rossetti must be a reconsideration of humanity's place within Nature. Specifically, human beings are on the same level as all other living creatures, regardless of rank and social classes. On page 218 of her Commentary, Rossetti specifies the equality between humankind and Nature:

[Commenting the Verse 17 of the Apocalypse, Chapter X: "For the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"] This general levelling is accounted for by the final clause: "Who shall be able to stand?" All, each, must either stand or fall: such as cannot stand, fall. Herein consists a genuine distinction, here the man himself is in question: whereas those other points of difference enumerated in the text are accidental, temporary. *To be a king or a captain; to be great, rich, mighty; even to be bond or free; is no more than the individual's appointed form of discipline in his proper vocation.* Corruptible crowns perish in the using; sooner or later war will cease to be learned; greatness, riches, might of this world cannot be expected to outlast the world to which *they appertain; nor bonds or freedom of this mortal life, the mortality to which they are appended.* (Italics added)¹⁶

By addressing the concepts of human hierarchy and immortality, Rossetti underlines the fundamental equality of all creatures, illustrating a possible apocalypse in which humanity ultimately succumbs to

¹⁵ Ryan Sinni, "Creation in Context: Christina Rossetti's "A Vain Shadow" in *The Face of the Deep*", 2020, blogs.baylor.edu/19crs/2020/01/15/creation-in-context-christina-rossettis-a-vain-shadow-in-the-face-of-the-deep/, Accessed on May 13th 2026.

¹⁶ Rossetti, op. cited, 218.

the divine judgement enacted through Nature. In this judgement, the human is repositioned into a condition of equity with all other living beings.

Wilde similarly recognizes the natural, levelling judgement that envisions Nature and human beings on the same level, recognizing Nature's "indifference" to the social ranks crafted by the Victorian Era. During one of Dorian Gray's private events held at Selby Royal, Lord Henry Wotton expresses this idea while talking to the Duchess of Monmouth, in Chapter 17:

"You maximize the value of beauty" cried the Duchess. "How can you say that? I admit that I think that it is better to be good than to be ugly. Besides, Nature makes people beautiful, and *Nature is completely indifferent to our social ranks.*" (Italics added) ¹⁷

A first reading of this exchange between Lord Henry and the Duchess may suggest that Nature functions as a tool employed by the Lord to simply justify his aestheticism. A deeper interpretation, however, points at a growing realization within the nobleman, as the novel approaches the end and the aesthetic paradigm of Dorian finally collapse. The realization of Lord Henry concerns the actual equity between human and other living beings who will be judged regardless of their ranks and position within Nature.

This analysis has demonstrated how the impending doom is followed by an Apocalypse of the human being. The levelling judgement of a godly Nature who does not make any distinction or preferences between humans and other living beings leads to the apocalypse of the materialistic and egocentric human. This collapse, however, does not necessarily mean a complete destruction of the human realm. Perhaps, it may address a "utopia", a new model of life in which the ego-hierarchical structure that sees humanity over Nature no longer exists.

3. "Co-workers with God" – Rossetti's and Wilde's Utopian Aftermath Between Eco-theology and Eco-criticism

As mentioned earlier, the apocalypse of the human does not necessarily imply the end of the human realm. Both authors propose a utopian scenario in which Nature and humanity successfully reconnect and co-exist. Specifically, the analysis of Christina Rossetti's philosophy and Oscar Wilde's fairy tales reveals a Christian framework where Nature and humankind are co-equals in the eyes of God. To discuss this scenario, three main themes will be explored. The analysis begins with Wilde's disruption of the ego-hierarchy through an eco-critical reading of his tale "The Young King", in which the protagonist reconnects with Nature and challenges the materialistic thrive of humankind. Wilde's disruption is then followed by Rossetti's utopian vision of Nature and human coexistence, a

¹⁷ Wilde, op. cited, 200.

condition which can only become possible when humanity allows the spiritual dimension of Nature (God) to reconcile with them. Finally, a contemporary cinematographic adaptation will also be examined eco-critically to illustrate a further representation of this Christian utopia.

Oscar Wilde's "The Young King" (1891) represents a utopian kingdom in which human and non-human beings govern together. This utopia is obtained through humankind's reconnection to Nature, an event made possible by acknowledging the suffering and neglect endured by the natural world. The tale narrates the story of a young shepherd boy who discovers he is the grandson of the late king and is subsequently brought to the palace to be crowned. However,



Image of the "Young King" taken by the site "Inspire Literature". The illustration depicts the young king wearing a blue-sky tunic and a crown of thorns. His action of caressing a lamb enhances his christological connotation.

before his coronation, the boy experiences three haunting dreams that open his eyes to the poverty and suffering endured by the workers who create his luxurious garments and sceptre. This series of nightmares awakens the boy to the theme of universal vulnerability: Nature and humans suffer together under the weight of human greed. As a consequence, he decides to reject the gold,

silk and pearls that constituted his royal apparel, choosing a natural attire - a shepherd's tunic and a crown of thorns - aligning the kingdom and thus humanity with the rhythm and harmony of the natural world. Aurora Aroca confirms this interpretation in her paper "Ecophobia and Social Class Identity:

An Ecocritical Approach to the Nature/Culture Divide in Oscar Wilde's Fairy Tales "The Young King" and "The Star Child":

These three dreams open the Young King's eyes to the fact that "beauty is based on the abuse of workers." In other words, the dream help him become aware of the underlying "social injustice" that sustains the aesthetically pleasing lifestyles of the privileged "few".¹⁸

This directly contrasts with the young protagonist of "The Nightingale and the Rose", who remains indifferent to the sacrifice of the bird. "The Young King", instead, represents the protagonist's of the detrimental effects of the stark separation between social class and the exploitation of other living beings. Furthermore, the Christological imagery embedded in the Young King's actions underscores a reconnection with Nature, thereby reframing the tale's utopian vision through a Christian lens. Aroca substantiates the Christological dimension as follows:

After his revelatory dreams, the Young King does, in fact, reject society's impositions by refusing to wear his coronation robe, crown and sceptre. Having been made aware of their origin, the King to-be is now able to see that these beautiful objects are the result of exploitation: "...by the white hands of

¹⁸ Aurora Murga Aroca, "Ecophobia and Social Class Identity: An Ecocritical Approach to the Nature/Culture Divide in Osacr Wilde's Fairy Tales "The Young King" and "The Star Child"", *Neophilologus*, 2024, pp. 673-678, 674.

Pain, has this my robe been woven. There is Blood in the heart of the ruby, and Death in the heart of the pearl". Consequently, he decides to wear his "leathern tunic" and "rough sheepskin cloak" and takes his helper's staff as sceptre. *To complete his coronation attire, the prince puts on a crown made of wild briar; an element that further emphasises his identification with Christ, and confirms his connection with nature.* (Italics added)¹⁹

Through his identification with Jesus Christ, the Young King directly reconnects with Nature, suggesting a utopian scenario in which humanity lives harmoniously with other living beings, in a kingdom of mutual and Christian love.

Wilde's utopian vision is further complemented by Rossetti's idea of co-operation between living beings and God, all understood as creations of the same source and therefore under an equal state of co-operation and co-existence. In Rossetti's utopian vision, spiritual reconciliation with God is a necessary precursor to humanity's bond with Nature. In *The Face of the Deep*, Rossetti reconnects Nature with Humanity, by placing them on the same level – both under and co-operative with the divine order. Anna Rivers's enquiry on Neo-Platonism in the apocalyptic imagery of *The Face of the Deep* analyses this connotation:

Charles Stang, interpreting the first-century Neo-Platonist Dionysius the Areopagite, says that "deifying union consists in each of us, in our established rank, becoming "*co-workers with God*" (theou synergoi), that is, ciphers through which the activity (energeia) or the work of God (theourgia) moves," so "deification and union are achieved not by our moving closer to the divine source, or ascending the hierarchy rank by rank, *but rather by allowing the source to move more fully through us*". (Italics added)²⁰

Rivers' analysis may illuminate the "movement" of Nature – which in Chapter II has been defined as nostalgic – towards humanity. According to her analysis, Rossetti's humanity must allow God to reconcile with them, fostering a harmonious cooperation that ultimately leads to a perfect reconnection with the divine and, by extension, Nature.

A contemporary cinematographic adaptation of this utopia may be interpreted in Terrence Malick's film "The Tree of Life", in which the cruelty of the physical world is ultimately softened and redeemed by grace. This state allows a condition of cosmic harmony, where Nature and humanity coexist spontaneously. Laura Savu confirms this interpretation through her eco-critical analysis of the film:

A strong desire for achieving communion with God and others in one mystical body goes hand in hand with a longing to restore a dimension of depth – an aura of sacredness, even – to nature itself, by envisioning it as matter-spirit continuum, a vast "church" where we can find a sense of belonging, of being part of something greater than ourselves.²¹

¹⁹ Ibid, 675.

²⁰ Anna Rivers, "Apocalyptic ethics: Christina Rossetti's Neo-Platonism", *Nineteenth-Century Contexts – An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 2024, pp. 497-512, 498.

²¹ Laura Savu, "The Way to Grace: Terrence Malick's Ecotheological Vision in the Tree of Life", *University of Bucharest Review. Literary and Cultural Studies Series – UBR Volume, 2, Number 1, 2012*, pp. 101-110, 102.

By reconnecting with God, humanity reconnects with Nature, developing a sense of belonging to a greater divine perspective which envisions all beings in a state of permanent interconnection. This interconnection is allowed through the acknowledgement of Creation, which places humanity and other living beings on the same level. This acknowledgment is articulated in the first two scenes of the film:

Both the biblical account of creation and the Book of Job are relevant touchstones for the movie. The quotation from Job reads as follows: “*Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? ... What supports its foundations, and who laid its cornerstone as the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?*” (38: 4, 7). (...) The first words we hear are uttered by Jack, the oldest of the O’Brien’s three pre-adolescent sons: “Brother, mother, it was they that led me to your door.” The “door” is actually figured as a doorframe whose symbolic significance as the gate to heaven also resides in the passage that it opens from the natural to the spiritual world. The line between the two worlds is further blurred by the hauntingly beautiful images that Emmanuel Lubezki’s camera brings to the screen: *a window opening onto a field on which cows are grazing, birds and insects are heard chirping, children and their parents are playing, and the sunlight streams through the branches of an oak tree that towers above a shady lane in Waco, TX (Malick’s hometown) in the 1950s.*²² (Italics added)

Savu’s criticism outlines a paradigm shift where the acknowledgment of Creation becomes the foundational bridge that connects the human soul back to the natural world. By framing God as the

Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?...
When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of
God shouted for joy?

Job 38:4,7

In the picture, there is the first scene of *The Tree of Life*. The verses from the book of Job embody one of the ultimate dialogues between God and Job, reminding Job of the broader design of Creation, in which humanity constitutes only a part.

ultimate source, the text argues that all living beings are not isolated entities, but rather part of an interconnected web that transcends material boundaries. This realization effectively opens the door to a new world, initiating a new life that emerges directly from this divine framework. In this post-visionary reality, humanity moves away from an exploitative mind-set and steps into a sacred, co-dependent existence with Nature. Ultimately, this newly discovered perspective

alter human consciousness, turning the awareness of the divine into an active, lived experience of universal harmony and eternal kinship.

Rossetti’s and Wilde’s post-apocalyptic utopia are situated within an eco-theological framework that envisions a harmonious co-existence between humanity and Nature. Through the representation of a world in which non-human and human live together harmoniously, the two Victorian writers evoke an Eden-like state in which the ego-hierarchical thrive of humanity no longer

²² Ibid, 104.

prevails. This research, however, opens to multiple perspectives on the representation of post-apocalyptic scenarios and the afterlife, including the theological concepts of Heaven and life beyond death.

4. From Dorian Gray to Bryan Johnson – Is Our Collapse on the Way?

After investigating the model of post-apocalyptic utopia depicted by the two writers, it is important to frame the two works within a more contemporary perspective. Rossetti's and Wilde's depiction of the apocalypse of the human resonates with today's paradigm of ego-hierarchy in which the human thrives to overcome natural boundaries through a transhumanist ambition. In this context, the case of entrepreneur Bryan Johnson can be considered as the manifestation of an ongoing human apocalypse – one driven by the idolatry of immortality and the pursuit of biohacking, also embodied in the character of Dorian Gray. Through this parallelism, the comparative reading of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Face of the Deep* addresses the eventual collapse of our contemporary humanity. This argument will be developed into three topics. First, the context of transhumanism in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* which depicts human attempts to modify their body and avoid death. Second, the parallel of Dorian Gray's and Bryan Johnson's transhumanist drive, which allows Wilde's novel to be read as a warning about an ongoing apocalypse of humankind. Finally, the texts' representation of this collapse, which is respectively illustrated through the image of the stabbed portrait and the oceanic wave that swallows humanity's sense of superiority.

Framing Dorian Gray within the anthropocentric logic of transhumanism effectively situates the text in our own age. Through his pact with Satan which stopped his aging process, Dorian achieves his goal of biohacking his body, anticipating the contemporary drive to overcome natural boundaries. In his online article "Perspective: A future for me and not for thee – the hubris of transhumanism", Scott Raines analyses the rapid progress of longevity science aiming to bypass the biological limits of the human body, disregarding the soul. Raines begins his discussion by outlining the aims of Transhumanism, providing contemporary examples of it:

Transhumanism aims to march past the current biological limits of humanity through technological and medicinal advances. *In transhumanism, death is not an inevitable part of existence, but a condition to be treated, or even engineered out of our "systems"*. An example of these technologies is Elon Musk's "Neuralink", which builds technologies to synchronize our brains with computers. Cryonics are another pseudo-technology in which anyone with enough money can freeze their body in hopes that the future will have the technology to resurrect them. Some people freeze their whole bodies; others, just their brains. (Italics added)²³

²³ Scott Raines, "Perspective: A future for me and not for thee – the hubris of transhumanism", 2023, www.deseret.com/2023/1/28/23563101/transhumanism-mortality-cryonics-peter-thiel-elon-musk/ Accessed on May 27th 2026.

Raines’ analysis of the transhumanist goal to treat death as an illness parallels to Dorian Gray’s curse. By stopping Dorian’s ageing process, the protagonist’s death is “eternally postponed” through the achievement of eternal youth. Raines himself paralleled the transhumanist goal to Dorian Gray’s desire, engaging Balaji Srinivasan’s concept of “genetic reincarnation”. Srinivasan describes hypothetical technology through which a person could synthesize their DNA or genome sequence, clone themselves, and imprint the genome onto a newly fabricated body.

According to Srinivasan, you become “reincarnated” in a new body with the same DNA, and with old memories downloaded to your new body. Of course, amid these discussions, the most important questions, the *metaphysical ones*, are often ignored. As Srinivasan discusses longevity and genetic reincarnation with Fridman, he brings up Oscar Wilde’s 1890 novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. (...) Srinivasan uses this story as a metaphor for what he calls our limited understanding of what “might be”. We don’t have to age like the picture of Dorian, he says; we don’t have to build wings like Icarus which melt as they approach the sun – we fly commercially every day. What Srinivasan gets wrong, however, is that the decomposition of the picture does not reflect Dorian’s age, but the deterioration of his soul. His body lives on in youth while his soul languishes in dark ugliness on the canvas. This is the essential problem of transhumanism – the *longevity of the body comes at the expense of the soul*. Conveniently, the soul is a concept that transhumanists increasingly reject. (Italics Added)²⁴

By underlining the transhumanism’s rejection of the soul, Raines exposes the “denial”, which ultimately brings the collapse of humankind. Specifically, the thrive to extend the longevity of the body without limits gradually corrodes the soul, causing a disintegration of human identity and existence. In light of this, Dorian Gray can be framed within a transhumanist context, amplifying the novel’s relevance as a commentary on the contemporary and progressive apocalypse of the human.

Dorian Gray’s transhumanism can be paralleled to the contemporary trends within Silicon Valley, representing the ongoing apocalypse of the human. Among the several instances, billionaire and entrepreneur Bryan Johnson may effectively depict this reality. His million-worth “Project Blueprint” represents a medical experiment aimed to invert the biological age of Johnson’s organs in the hope to achieve biological immortality. In 2023, *Time*’s correspondent Charlotte Alter personally met Bryan Johnson and his girlfriend Kate Tolo, also part of the experiment, reporting conversations with them and several comments on their hyper-monitored “re-juvenating” daily routine.



Bryan Johnson, 48, Los Angeles, photographed here during one of his daily rituals of health maintenance.

“Most people assume death is inevitable. We’re just basically trying to prolong the time we have before we die” he [Johnson] says. Until now, he adds, “I don’t think there’s been any time in history where Homo sapiens could say with a straight face that death may not be inevitable.” (...) Some scientists do believe that limited age-reversal is possible. In still controversial and contested work, researchers at

²⁴ Ibid.

Harvard Medical School have claimed they've rejuvenated older mice, and are currently testing whether the aging clock can be turned back in human skin and eye cells. But those experiments are being done according to established scientific conventions. Johnson, in contrast has made himself a human guinea pig, adopting nearly every age-related treatment at once and seeing what works.²⁵

In light of Alter's response to the experiment, Bryan Johnson represents an instance of transhumanist pursuit of immortality and a radical disentanglement between Nature – that is to say the natural biological process - and the human. This transhumanist aim can effectively parallel Johnson to Dorian Gray, who preserves his appearance through a pact with Satan that allowed him to detach completely from the natural aging process. The comparative reading of the two figures illuminates an ongoing apocalypse of the human in the 21st century, one driven by the desire to overcome Nature by completely detaching from it. Although Bryan Johnson's "cursed portrait" has not collapsed yet, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Face of the Deep* together function as a warning for an impending collapse of human aesthetic idolatry, which continues to progress ignoring the decaying effects on the soul.



The image on the left is a photograph of Bryan Jhonson and his son, who donated a litre of his plasma to his father, in order to contribute to Project BluePrint. On the right, a frame of the film "Dorian" (2009), depicting Dorian Gray's obsession with this beauty and his youth,

Oscar Wilde and Christina Rossetti further intensify this warning through two apocalyptic images, which are complementary to one another. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the destruction of the horrific portrait represents the actual death of the human-Dorian. In *The Face of the Deep* Rossetti's image of an oceanic wave that swallows humanity's materialism and idolatry completes the imagery of apocalypse and the collapse of humankind. The apocalypse of humanity depicted by the two authors seals human death as inevitable – a truth that repositions human life as equal to all other living beings. In analysing the last moments of Dorian Gray, Laura Giovannelli addresses the dissolution of Wilde's soul within the act of stabbing the portrait:

²⁵ Charlotte Alter, "The Man Who Thinks He Can Live Forever", 2023, time.com/6315607/bryan-johnsons-quest-for-immortality/, Accessed on May 28th 2026.

Afferrando lo stesso coltello con cui aveva tolto la vita al pittore-creatore, egli [Dorian Gray] si accinge ad annientare la “creatura” che è, altresì, espressione della sua “monstrous soul-life”, senza i cui “hideous warnings,” “he would be at peace.”²⁶

Through her analysis, not only does Giovannelli confirm the destruction of the human self through the collapse of the portrait, she also highlights the “hideous warning” embedded in the life of the idolatrous creature, who ignores them. Giovannelli’s interpretation confirms that while the human focuses on aesthetic apparel, the soul undergoes a progressive decay that culminates in a final “stabbing” collapse, and the illusion of immortality fades away.

Wilde’s apocalyptic imagery is both confirmed by and completed by Rossetti’s vision in *The Face of the Deep*. In her commentary on Apocalypse 13:1, Rossetti presents the roaring sea as a symbol of human arrogance and pride – an overwhelming force which collapses under its own weight. On in page 320 of her *Commentary* she writes:

Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.” If this text may be construed as conveying a double lesson: the obvious admonition which deters from particular sin on pain of consequent disaster; and the distinct statement that pride it is which entails destruction, and an *haughty spirit it is which precedes a fall*; then is light thrown on the sin and downfall of angels.²⁷

By exploring how destruction inevitably follows pride, Rossetti illustrates the collapse of transhumanist ambitions. In doing so, she positions the apocalypse of humanity as a necessary reset to restore harmony between humankind and Nature.

Within this framework, Transhumanism context casts *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Face of the Deep* as two warning texts for a contemporary apocalypse. Through the parallel between Dorian Gray and Bryan Johnson, the eventual collapse of humanity becomes legible as the consequence of its attempt to overcome the natural boundaries of life on Earth. Rossetti’s depiction of an oceanic wave that backfires on humankind’s pride and Wilde’s image of the stabbed portrait as the destruction of this superiority reinforces this reading.

²⁶ Laura Giovannelli, *Il Principe e il Satiro – (Ri)leggere Il Ritratto di Dorian Gray*, Pisa, Carocci Editore, 2007, 230.

²⁷ Rossetti, op. cited, 320.

Conclusion

This dissertation has investigated the profound ecological and spiritual crises of the nineteenth century through the different yet intersecting lenses of Christina Rossetti and Oscar Wilde. By moving from conventional historical concepts, this study has shown that Victorian industrial proliferation did not merely alter the British topography, but instigated a profound ontological rupture between humanity and Nature. Through an interdisciplinary framework blending eco-criticism and eco-theology the chapters have offered a reading of these canonical authors as active literary intermediators of a crisis that is both ecological and anthropocentric. Therefore, the comparison of their writings reveals a complex, two-faceted apocalypse. Their texts map out the slow but gradual destruction of the natural world, illustrating environmental decay as an immediate, physical warning to society. This material collapse then leads to a deeper dismantling of human identity, brought about through the ultimate power of divine judgement. Rather than signalling the absolute destruction of humankind, this divine intervention acts as a radical leveller of the barriers between humankind and the rest of living beings. In the end, this apocalyptic break functions not as a final catastrophe, but as a necessary gateway that restores an equal, shared harmony between humankind and Nature.

This research provides several significant contributions to the field of Victorian literature and Environmental studies. First, it advances the growing scholarship on Oscar Wilde by offering a further addition to his eco-critical re-evaluation. Second, by drawing a direct parallel between Christina Rossetti and Wilde, this study presents a fresh analysis that assigns new value and critical credit to the texts. Third, this comparative reading underlines the eco-theological theme in Oscar Wilde and Rossetti, highlighting the role of faith in the relationship between humanity and Nature in the works of the two authors. Ultimately, this investigation looks beyond the 19th century by connecting these points of analysis directly to our contemporary reality. By framing these Victorian anxieties as a mirror for the ongoing climate crisis, this research transforms historical literature into an urgent, purposeful tool for understanding our 21st Century apocalypse.

Posthumanism offers an important prospective framework for future academic research to analyse the apocalypse of the human and its aftermath. While this study concluded with a focus on transhumanism which exposed the inevitable downfall and levelling of the upper classes, future inquiries could expand this scope further. A dedicated posthumanist reading could investigate not only the end of elite social hierarchies, but the literal end of the human realm. This perspective may

allow scholars to explore how literature envisions a post-anthropocentric world, where the human species no longer commands the biosphere. Investigating this radical shift would deepen our understanding of what lies beyond the apocalyptic threshold, transforming our view of the end into a study of non-human survival and cosmic realignment.

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