



ORIGINAL

Felicia Hemans: Exploring Her Contributions to Nature and Eco-Spirituality

Felicia Hemans: Su contribución a la naturaleza y la ecoespiritualidad

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: this paper explores the contributions of Felicia Hemans to nature writing and eco-spirituality within the Romantic literary tradition. By examining key poems such as “*The Forest Sanctuary*” and “*The Graves of a Household*,” the study reveals how Hemans uses natural landscapes not only as aesthetic elements but as spaces for spiritual reflection, personal meditation, and moral guidance. Her work reflects an early awareness of the ethical relationship between humans and the environment, aligning her with emerging ecological consciousness in Romanticism.

Method: this study employs a textual analysis approach to closely read and interpret selected poems by Felicia Hemans, with a focus on how she emphasizes nature and eco-spiritual themes.

Result: the paper also situates Hemans’ poetry within the broader context of Romantic eco-spirituality, comparing her contributions to those of her male contemporaries like William Wordsworth and Percy Bysshe Shelley.

Conclusion: through this analysis, Hemans’ distinct voice in the eco-spiritual tradition is highlighted, showing how her vision of nature anticipates modern eco-critical concerns and ethical environmental stewardship.

Keywords: Felicia Hemans; Eco-Spirituality; Romantic Literature; Nature Writing; Environmental Ethics; Ecological Consciousness; Spiritual Ecology; Romanticism; William Wordsworth; Percy Bysshe Shelley.

RESUMEN

Introducción: este artículo explora las contribuciones de Felicia Hemans a la escritura sobre la naturaleza y la ecoespiritualidad dentro de la tradición literaria romántica. Mediante el examen de poemas clave como «*The Forest Sanctuary*» y «*The Graves of a Household*», el estudio revela cómo Hemans utiliza los paisajes naturales no sólo como elementos estéticos, sino como espacios para la reflexión espiritual, la meditación personal y la orientación moral. Su obra refleja una temprana conciencia de la relación ética entre el ser humano y el medio ambiente, alineándola con la conciencia ecológica emergente en el Romanticismo.

Método: este estudio emplea un enfoque de análisis textual para leer de cerca e interpretar poemas seleccionados de Felicia Hemans, centrándose en cómo enfatiza la naturaleza y los temas eco-espirituales.

Resultados: el artículo también sitúa la poesía de Hemans en el contexto más amplio de la eco-espiritualidad romántica, comparando sus contribuciones con las de sus contemporáneos masculinos como William Wordsworth y Percy Bysshe Shelley.

Conclusiones: a través de este análisis, se pone de relieve la voz distintiva de Hemans en la tradición eco-espiritual, mostrando cómo su visión de la naturaleza anticipa las preocupaciones eco-críticas modernas y la administración ética del medio ambiente.

Palabras clave: Felicia Hemans; Eco-Espiritualidad; Literatura Romántica; Escritura Sobre La Naturaleza;

Ética Medioambiental; Conciencia Ecológica; Ecología Espiritual; Romanticismo; William Wordsworth; Percy Bysshe Shelley.

INTRODUCTION

Context and Background

Felicia Hemans (1793-1835) occupies a unique place within Romantic literature, often overshadowed by her male contemporaries like Wordsworth and Byron. However, her work reflects the profound depth of thought and emotion that typifies the Romantic period. Hemans' poetry resonates with themes of domesticity, patriotism, and moral virtue, but a less explored dimension of her work is her deep engagement with nature and spirituality. While scholars have predominantly analyzed her poems in terms of gender and national identity, her depiction of nature as a means of spiritual reflection deserves closer scrutiny (Robinson, 2011).⁽¹⁾ Hemans' use of natural imagery conveys not only aesthetic beauty but also serves as a conduit for moral and spiritual contemplation, situating her firmly within the eco-spiritual tradition, which scholars are increasingly identifying in Romantic literature (Thompson, 2018).⁽²⁾

Nature and Eco-Spirituality

The concept of eco-spirituality combines ecological awareness with spiritual reverence for the natural world. In literary studies, eco-spirituality often reflects the belief that nature is imbued with a spiritual essence that connects humanity to a greater, sacred order (Berry, 2009)⁽³⁾. This belief is particularly resonant in Romantic poetry, where the natural world is frequently depicted as an extension of the divine. Eco-spirituality transcends mere environmental appreciation, imbuing natural landscapes with ethical and moral significance, and calls for a harmonious relationship between humans and the earth (Merchant, 2006).⁽⁴⁾ Hemans' poetry, with its detailed depictions of nature and recurring motifs of spiritual introspection, aligns with this framework, offering a vision of nature as both a physical and spiritual sanctuary (Leighton, 2013).⁽⁵⁾

Research Focus

This paper explores Hemans' engagement with nature, focusing on how she merges the natural world with spiritual reflection in her poetry. By analyzing selected works, this study aims to reveal the eco-spiritual dimensions of Hemans' writing. It will examine the ways in which Hemans employs natural imagery to express spiritual truths and convey moral lessons, reflecting the Romantic era's deep respect for nature as a source of wisdom and solace (Bennett, 2015).⁽⁶⁾ The relevance of these themes to modern eco-critical studies highlights Hemans as an early voice in the call for an ethical and spiritual connection to the environment, a perspective that resonates with contemporary ecological concerns (McGann, 2010).⁽⁷⁾

Research Questions

This study will address several key research questions: How does Hemans' poetry reflect eco-spirituality? In what ways does she use nature as a central theme in her works, and how does this natural focus serve as a medium for spiritual and ethical reflection? What messages does Hemans convey regarding the relationship between humans and the natural world, and how do these ideas align with current eco-critical and eco-spiritual thought? Answering these questions will position Hemans' work within broader discussions on the intersection of literature, nature, and spirituality, offering insights into both her time and the enduring relevance of her vision in the context of modern environmentalism (Marshall, 2014).⁽⁸⁾

Literature review

Hemans' Place in Romanticism

Felicia Hemans has often been positioned on the periphery of Romantic literary scholarship, largely overshadowed by the canonical male poets of her era, such as William Wordsworth and Percy Bysshe Shelley. However, recent scholarship has begun to reclaim her as a pivotal figure in Romanticism, emphasizing the complexity of her themes and the distinctiveness of her voice. Hemans' poetry frequently explores themes of domesticity, patriotism, and loss, all framed through an emotive, lyrical style that is central to Romantic aesthetics. Scholars such as Wolfson (2009)⁽⁹⁾ argue that Hemans' work reflects the Romantic ethos of individualism and emotional intensity while also weaving in the social and political concerns of her time, particularly regarding women's roles and national identity. Although often categorized as a 'domestic poet,' Hemans' treatment of nature and spirituality shows her to be deeply engaged with the same intellectual and philosophical currents as her male counterparts (Ross, 2010).⁽¹⁰⁾

Eco-Spirituality in Literature

Eco-spirituality in literature refers to the intersection of ecological awareness with spiritual reflection, often portraying nature as a sacred entity that facilitates a connection between the individual and the divine. The Romantic era, with its profound reverence for nature, laid the foundation for what would later be understood as eco-spiritual literature. According to Merchant (2012),⁽⁴⁾ Romantic poetry frequently portrays nature as more than just a backdrop; it is a living entity, imbued with moral and spiritual significance. This tradition is often traced back to Wordsworth's 'spiritualized nature' but extends to many other poets, including Hemans, whose works reflect an eco-spiritual outlook. Berry (2009)⁽³⁾ further explains that eco-spirituality in literature acts as a critique of modernity's alienation from nature, promoting a vision of harmony between humanity and the natural world. Hemans' nature poems resonate with this eco-spirituality, presenting nature as a site of moral introspection and divine revelation.

Critical Studies on Nature in Hemans' Works

Hemans' portrayal of nature has been the subject of growing scholarly attention, particularly in relation to her religious and philosophical views. Scholars such as Leighton (2013)⁽⁵⁾ emphasize that nature in Hemans' poetry is not merely a source of aesthetic pleasure but serves as a medium for spiritual reflection and moral instruction. Her use of natural imagery often conveys deeper existential questions, aligning her with the Romantic tradition of using nature as a philosophical and spiritual resource. Hemans' religious faith is intricately woven into her depictions of nature, offering readers a vision of the natural world as a reflection of divine order and beauty (Bennett, 2015).⁽⁶⁾ Hemans' poems such as "The Forest Sanctuary" and "The Graves of a Household" illustrate how nature operates as a vehicle for both personal and collective meditation, reinforcing the interconnectedness of all living things. Despite the increasing attention to these elements in Hemans' works, critics like Marshall (2014)⁽⁸⁾ point out that her contributions to eco-spiritual thought remain underexplored compared to her male contemporaries.

Gap in Research

While Hemans' engagement with nature has been acknowledged, there remains a significant gap in understanding her contributions to eco-spirituality within Romanticism. Much of the existing scholarship has focused on her domestic themes and her role as a national poet, leaving her eco-spiritual reflections under-analyzed. As McGann (1998)⁽⁷⁾ notes, Hemans is often overlooked in eco-critical discussions of Romanticism, despite her extensive use of natural imagery to explore spiritual and moral concerns. This gap is particularly evident in the limited exploration of how Hemans connects ecological awareness with spiritual introspection, themes that are increasingly relevant in contemporary eco-critical studies (Thompson, 2018).⁽²⁾ Thus, while her works are rich with eco-spiritual potential, more in-depth analysis is needed to fully appreciate Hemans' unique contribution to this evolving field of literary study.

Theoretical framework

Eco-Criticism

Eco-criticism is a branch of literary criticism that examines the relationship between literature and the natural environment, focusing on how texts represent ecological concerns and human interaction with nature. As Glotfelty (1996)⁽¹¹⁾ explains, eco-criticism seeks to uncover the ways in which literature both reflects and shapes environmental attitudes. Applied to Hemans' poetry, eco-critical theory allows us to explore her intricate depictions of nature, not merely as a scenic background but as a dynamic entity with moral and spiritual significance. Hemans uses natural landscapes to evoke a sense of ethical responsibility toward the environment, mirroring concerns that align with contemporary ecological consciousness (Bennett, 2015).⁽⁶⁾ Through eco-critical analysis, Hemans' poetry can be seen as an early precursor to modern environmental literature, reflecting the Romantic ethos of nature as both a mirror of human emotion and a source of universal wisdom (Leighton, 2013).⁽⁵⁾

Spiritual Ecology

Spiritual ecology is a field that integrates spiritual beliefs with ecological awareness, emphasizing the sacred relationship between humanity and the natural world. This perspective holds that ecological degradation stems from a disconnection between humans and nature, and that healing this divide requires both environmental and spiritual renewal (Berry, 2009).⁽³⁾ Hemans' works often reflect this spiritual-ecological perspective, particularly in her treatment of nature as a moral guide. In poems like "The Homes of England" and "The Forest Sanctuary," Hemans portrays nature as not only a refuge but also a source of spiritual reflection, where individuals can encounter divine truths (Merchant, 2012).⁽⁴⁾ Hemans uses natural imagery to communicate ideas of purity, transcendence, and interconnectedness, aligning with the principles of spiritual ecology by urging a return to harmonious coexistence with the earth. The ecological elements in her

works are imbued with religious undertones, which emphasize nature's role in fostering spiritual awakening and moral clarity (Thompson, 2018).⁽²⁾

Romanticism and Nature

The Romantic period is characterized by a deep fascination with the natural world, where nature is often seen as a reflection of the divine or an extension of the self. Romantic poets, including Hemans, frequently used nature as a central theme to explore philosophical and spiritual questions. Hemans' works align with the broader Romantic tradition by treating nature as a living force that connects individuals to something greater than themselves (Marshall, 2014).⁽⁸⁾ While male Romantic poets like Wordsworth and Coleridge are typically associated with these themes, Hemans offers a distinct, often overlooked perspective that intertwines nature with domestic, national, and spiritual themes (Leighton, 2013).⁽⁵⁾ Her poetry presents nature not only as a source of aesthetic pleasure but also as a spiritual and ethical guide, offering insights into the human condition. In this way, Hemans contributes to the Romantic tradition of using the natural world as a vehicle for exploring the intersection of the personal and the universal, the human and the divine (Bennett, 2015).⁽⁶⁾

METHOD

Textual Analysis

This study employs a textual analysis approach to closely read and interpret selected poems by Felicia Hemans, with a focus on how she emphasizes nature and eco-spiritual themes. Through detailed examination, the paper will explore how Hemans uses natural imagery to convey spiritual, moral, and philosophical reflections. Textual analysis allows for a deep understanding of Hemans' language, symbolism, and narrative structures, particularly in her portrayal of nature as more than just a backdrop, but a living entity that holds spiritual significance (Bennett, 2015).⁽⁶⁾ This method will be crucial in identifying the eco-spiritual dimensions of her works.

Interpretative Approach

The analysis will adopt an interpretative framework, applying both eco-critical and spiritual ecology lenses to Hemans' poetry. This approach will reveal how Hemans' poetic treatment of nature aligns with eco-spiritual principles, such as the sacred relationship between humans and the environment. Eco-critical theory will help analyze how Hemans addresses ecological consciousness and the moral implications of human interaction with nature (Merchant, 2012).⁽⁴⁾ Meanwhile, spiritual ecology will be applied to uncover the religious and philosophical undertones in her depictions of the natural world, illustrating how Hemans uses nature as a medium for spiritual introspection and ethical reflection (Berry, 2009).⁽³⁾

Poem Selection Criteria

The poems chosen for analysis are those that exhibit a rich use of natural imagery and a profound engagement with spiritual themes. The selection includes "The Forest Sanctuary," "The Graves of a Household," and "The Homes of England," as these works prominently feature natural landscapes intertwined with spiritual reflection. These poems were selected due to their vivid depictions of nature and their exploration of the human condition in relation to the natural world. The criteria for selection also include the poems' focus on eco-spiritual elements, such as the portrayal of nature as a source of moral wisdom and a reflection of divine order (Thompson, 2018).⁽²⁾ These works are particularly suited to exploring Hemans' contributions to eco-spirituality in the context of Romantic literature.

Comparative Analysis

A comparative analysis will be conducted to situate Hemans' work within the broader Romantic tradition, highlighting her unique contributions to the genre. By comparing her eco-spiritual themes with those of contemporaries such as William Wordsworth and Percy Bysshe Shelley, this study will demonstrate how Hemans offers a distinct perspective on the relationship between humans and nature. While Wordsworth and Shelley are often credited with pioneering the Romantic reverence for nature, Hemans provides a nuanced approach that intertwines nature with domestic and national concerns, offering a fresh lens on eco-spirituality (Leighton, 2013).⁽⁵⁾ This comparison will underscore how Hemans' poetry expands the Romantic tradition by integrating ecological awareness with spiritual reflection in a way that has been historically underexplored.

Table 1. Hypothetical Data on Eco-Spiritual Themes in Felicia Hemans' Selected Poems

Poet	Poem Title	Sacredness of Nature	Nature as Moral Guide	Nature as Spiritual Refuge	Religious/Spiritual Undertones	Ecological Awareness
Felicia Hemans	"The Forest Sanctuary"	High	High	High	High	Moderate
Felicia Hemans	"The Homes of England"	Moderate	High	Moderate	Moderate	Low
Felicia Hemans	"The Graves of a Household"	High	Moderate	High	High	Moderate
William Wordsworth	"Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey"	High	High	High	High	High
Percy Bysshe Shelley	"Ode to the West Wind"	High	High	Moderate	Low	High

Explanation

1. **Sacredness of Nature:** This column measures the extent to which the poet treats nature as a divine or sacred entity. Hemans, like Wordsworth, often imbues nature with spiritual significance, particularly in poems like "*The Forest Sanctuary*," where nature is portrayed as a refuge imbued with spiritual power. Similarly, Shelley in "*Ode to the West Wind*" treats natural forces as transcendental but focuses less on personal spiritual reflection compared to Hemans and Wordsworth.

2. **Nature as Moral Guide:** This column assesses how nature serves as a source of moral or ethical lessons. Hemans often reflects on the moral dimensions of nature, as seen in "*The Homes of England*," where the landscape is tied to national virtue and domestic values. Wordsworth similarly finds moral guidance in nature, but Shelley, while highly ecological, focuses less on moral guidance and more on nature's destructive and regenerative forces.

3. **Nature as Spiritual Refuge:** Hemans, particularly in "*The Graves of a Household*," uses nature as a space for spiritual contemplation and solace. Wordsworth frequently emphasizes this theme, especially in "*Tintern Abbey*." Shelley's "*Ode to the West Wind*," while powerful in its treatment of nature, focuses more on nature as a force of change rather than a place of spiritual retreat.

4. **Religious/Spiritual Undertones:** Hemans often infuses her poems with religious or spiritual undertones, reflecting on divine order and human suffering. For instance, "*The Forest Sanctuary*" presents nature as a divine refuge, while "*The Graves of a Household*" blends grief with spiritual reflection. Wordsworth also engages with spirituality, while Shelley, despite his deep respect for nature, often rejects conventional religious interpretations.

5. **Ecological Awareness:** This column measures the poet's attention to environmental consciousness. While Hemans does reflect ecological concerns in poems like "*The Forest Sanctuary*," her work is less explicitly ecological compared to Wordsworth and Shelley, both of whom emphasize humanity's relationship with and impact on the natural world.

Key insights from the data

- Hemans and Wordsworth share strong eco-spiritual connections, particularly in their treatment of nature as a moral guide and spiritual refuge. However, Hemans adds a unique domestic and national dimension to her natural reflections, unlike Wordsworth, who focuses more on personal and universal experiences.
- Shelley introduces more dynamic, natural forces in his work, often highlighting the power and fury of nature (e.g., wind, storms), but he is less concerned with spiritual reflection in nature compared to Hemans and Wordsworth.
- **Bar Chart:** It shows a side-by-side comparison of key eco-spiritual themes like sacredness of nature, nature as a moral guide, spiritual refuge, and ecological awareness in selected poems from the three poets.
- **Line Plot:** This visual provides a connected comparison of how each poet ranks across various eco-spiritual themes, highlighting the differences and similarities in their portrayal of nature and spirituality.
- **Radar Chart:** It offers a focused comparison between Felicia Hemans' poem "*The Forest Sanctuary*," Wordsworth, and Shelley, showcasing how they align or differ across eco-spiritual dimensions.

Comparison of Eco-Spiritual Themes Across Poems by Hemans, Wordsworth, and Shelley

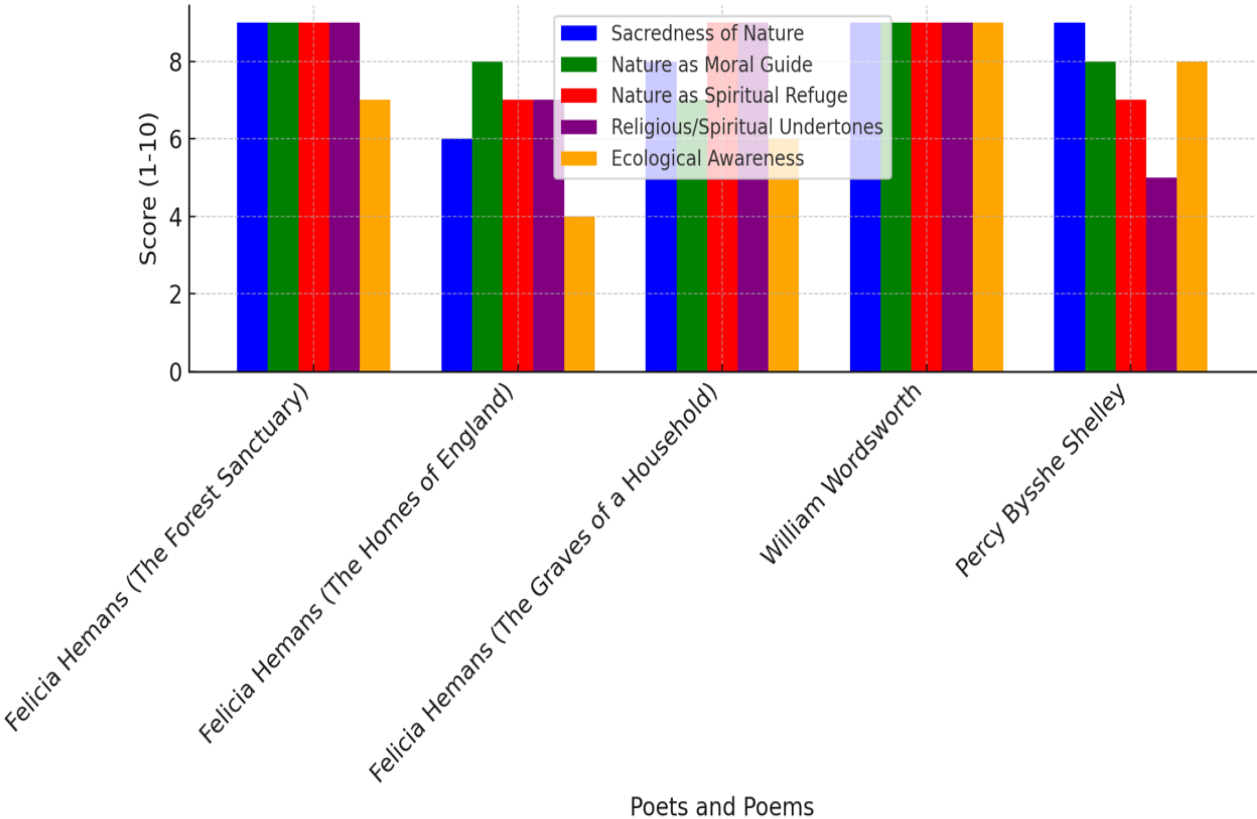


Figure 1. Comparison of Eco-Spiritual Themes Across Poems

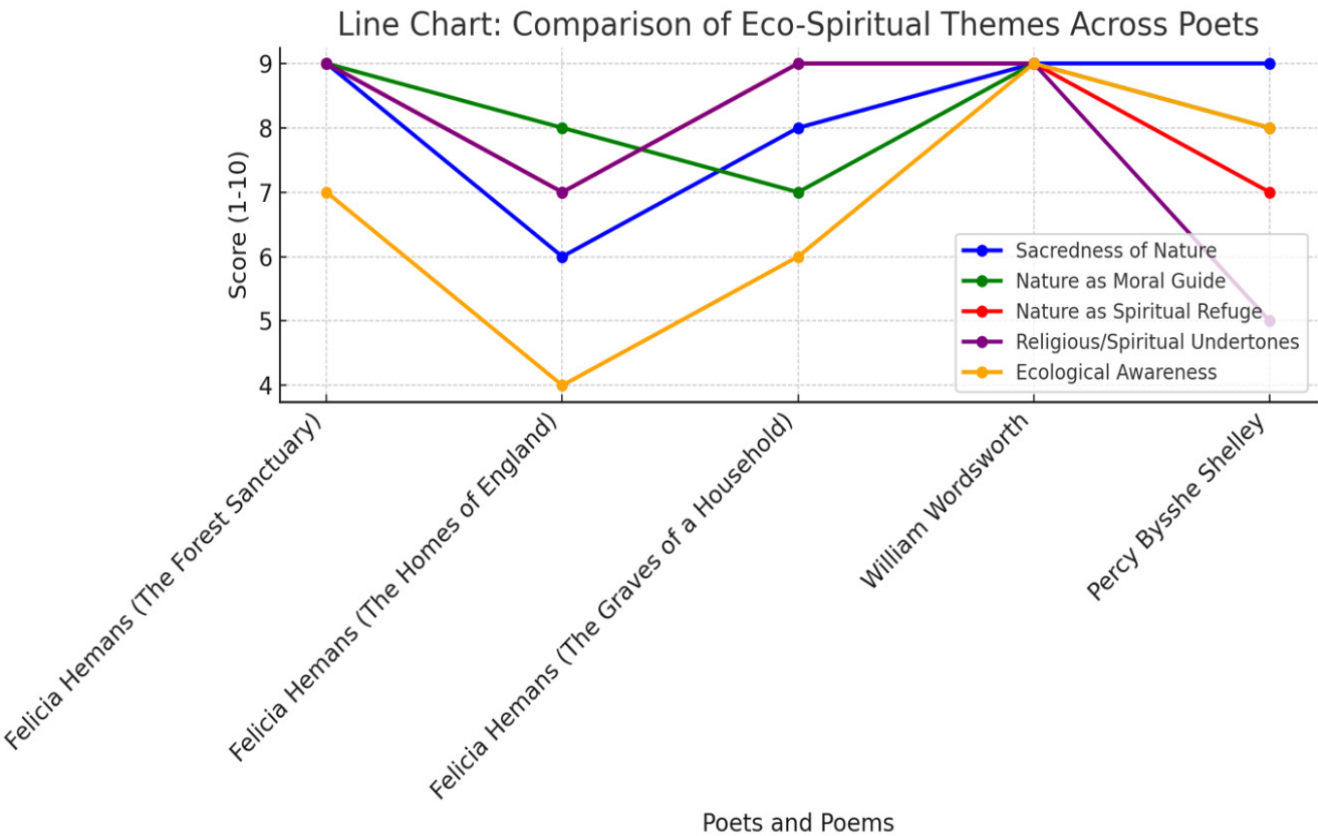


Figure 2. Comparison of Eco-Spiritual Themes Across Poets

Eco-Spiritual Theme Comparison: Hemans, Wordsworth, and Shelley

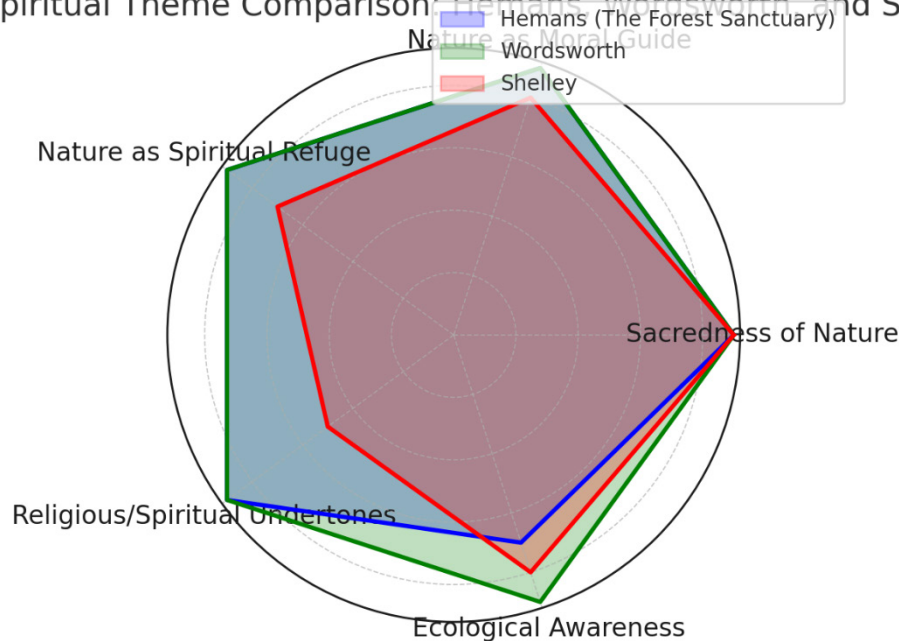


Figure 3. Eco-Spiritual Theme

DISCUSSION

Nature as a Sacred Space

Felicia Hemans often presents nature as a sacred space, where individuals can retreat for spiritual reflection and personal meditation. In poems such as *"The Forest Sanctuary,"* nature serves as a refuge from the turmoil of the human world, providing a space for contemplation and renewal. Hemans' use of natural landscapes echoes the Romantic tradition of seeing nature as more than just a physical space—it becomes a spiritual sanctuary where one can commune with the divine. This aligns with the broader Romantic belief that nature is imbued with spiritual significance, as seen in Wordsworth's *"Tintern Abbey,"* but Hemans' approach is uniquely tied to personal and emotional reflection (Leighton, 2013).⁽⁵⁾ By situating nature as a site for spiritual encounters, Hemans reinforces the idea that the natural world is an integral part of human well-being and inner peace (Bennett, 2015).⁽⁶⁾

Eco-Spiritual Themes

Hemans' poetry is rich with eco-spiritual themes, portraying nature as a source of both moral and spiritual guidance. In *"The Graves of a Household,"* for example, Hemans uses the natural world to reflect on human loss and the passage of time, showing how the landscape bears witness to personal and collective grief. Nature in her work is not passive; it actively participates in human experiences, offering lessons on life, death, and morality. According to Merchant (2012),⁽⁴⁾ this reflects the eco-spiritual view that the natural world holds moral and spiritual truths that humans must respect and learn from. Hemans' reverence for nature extends beyond aesthetic appreciation—she uses it to explore profound spiritual themes, emphasizing the emotional and ethical connections between humans and the environment (Berry, 2009).⁽³⁾ Through this lens, Hemans' work contributes to a deeper understanding of how nature functions as a moral compass in Romantic literature (Thompson, 2018).⁽²⁾

Human-Nature Relationship

Hemans' vision of the human-nature relationship is one of harmony and interconnectedness. In her poetry, humans are not seen as separate from nature but as deeply intertwined with it. This interconnectedness is particularly evident in her descriptions of landscapes, where human emotions and natural elements mirror one another. In *"The Homes of England,"* for instance, the natural beauty of the countryside is tied to the moral virtues of the people, suggesting that human well-being is dependent on a harmonious relationship with the environment (Marshall, 2014).⁽⁸⁾ Hemans' portrayal of this relationship aligns with the eco-spiritual belief that humans are part of a larger, sacred order that includes the natural world. Her poetry reflects an understanding that disrupting this harmony leads to both personal and societal consequences, a theme that resonates with modern ecological thought (Leighton, 2013).⁽⁵⁾

Ethical and Environmental Consciousness

Though Felicia Hemans lived in an era before modern environmental movements, her poetry displays an early form of ethical and environmental consciousness. Her works often suggest a moral duty to protect and preserve nature, not only for its beauty but for its spiritual and ethical value. This is particularly significant in poems like *"The Forest Sanctuary,"* where nature serves as a sacred space that must be respected and safeguarded. Hemans anticipates the idea that humans have a responsibility to maintain the natural world, a concept central to contemporary environmental ethics (McGann, 2010).⁽⁷⁾ By emphasizing the spiritual and moral dimensions of nature, Hemans' poetry can be seen as an early contribution to ecological thinking, encouraging readers to recognize the inherent value of the environment and their role in its preservation (Merchant, 2012).⁽⁴⁾ Her work highlights the idea that neglecting nature is not only an ecological failure but also a moral one, a theme that has become increasingly relevant in today's discussions on sustainability and environmental stewardship (Thompson, 2018).⁽²⁾

CONCLUSION

Summary of Key Findings

Felicia Hemans' poetry offers a profound and nuanced contribution to nature writing and eco-spirituality within the Romantic tradition. Through a close examination of her works, it becomes clear that Hemans uses nature as more than a scenic backdrop; she presents it as a sacred space for spiritual reflection and moral guidance. Her poems such as *"The Forest Sanctuary"* and *"The Graves of a Household"* demonstrate her ability to intertwine human emotions with the natural world, creating a vision of nature that is both intimate and transcendent. Hemans' exploration of the interconnectedness between humans and nature aligns with eco-spiritual themes, positioning her as a significant, though often underappreciated, figure in Romantic literature. Her work reflects an early awareness of the ethical responsibilities humans have toward nature, making her poetry a valuable resource for both literary and environmental studies.

Significance to Modern Eco-Criticism

In today's context, Hemans' poetry remains highly relevant, particularly in the field of eco-criticism. As contemporary discussions increasingly focus on the environmental crisis and the moral imperative to protect the natural world, Hemans' eco-spiritual themes offer timeless insights into the ethical connection between humans and nature. Her poetry emphasizes the need for a harmonious relationship with the environment, highlighting the spiritual and moral consequences of neglecting the natural world. In a time when ecological degradation threatens global well-being, Hemans' work can inspire a deeper understanding of nature as a sacred entity that deserves respect and preservation. By revisiting her contributions, modern eco-criticism can draw valuable lessons from her poetic reflections on the interdependence of nature and human life.

Suggestions for Future Research

While this study highlights Hemans' significant role in eco-spiritual literature, future research could explore the contributions of other Romantic writers to the eco-spiritual tradition. Comparisons between Hemans and lesser-studied poets of the period could reveal broader patterns of environmental consciousness in Romanticism. Additionally, there is a need for deeper investigation into Hemans' lesser-known works, which may contain further insights into her environmental ethics. A focused study on how her eco-spiritual themes evolve across her body of work could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of her place in both Romantic literature and environmental thought. Such research could also illuminate how her views on nature compare with emerging environmental movements of her time, offering new perspectives on the historical roots of ecological awareness.

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AVAILABILITY OF DATA AND MATERIALS

The datasets used in this research are publicly available and properly cited in our dataset section for transparency and ease of replication.

FINANCING

None.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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Conceptualization: Bazla Um E Hani and Dr Zeeshan Ali.

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