



# World Literature: A Critical Outlook

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**Zitkala-Sa's "Why I Am A Pagan":  
A Study in Spiritual Ecology**

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To her fair works did Nature link  
The human soul that through me ran;  
And much it grieved my heart to think  
What man has made of man.

The insightful preamble cited from William Wordsworth's lyrical poem "Lines written in Early Spring" stimulates the readers to meditate more upon the wretched predicament of man which ensued from his relentless craze for material possessions and his absurd trust in the burgeoning innovations in the field of science and technology. Although Industrial revolution marks a turning point in the evolving human civilization by making life easier on earth, its major onslaught is manifested in the painful divorce between man and his immediate verdant environment comprehended as Mother Nature. While observing the seamless harmony and mutual reliance displayed by the flora and fauna, Wordsworth is awestruck at the unfathomable 'holy plan' which binds all aspects of Nature's creations in profound unity. Unfortunately, Man who is believed to be the crown of God's creations is out of harmony with himself and also with the world outside. This propels Wordsworth to raise a rhetorical question – what man has made of man?

Though the poem was written in 1798, Wordsworth's recognition of the divine nexus between Man and Nature is strongly rooted upon Rudolf Steiner's theory of Spiritual Ecology which came into existence two centuries later when the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) suggested that,

the effects of climate change may be 'abrupt and irreversible' and that humanity has only a very limited

period left in which to address the environmental problems it has itself unleashed. (1)

The existing literary scholarships focus on Zitkala-Sa's assertion of the native identity against the tussle between her dual identities – father's Christian identity and her mother's Sioux identity. Many researchers have explored the writer's penchant towards translation as a tool to disseminate the indigenous myths and legends. Most others have argued how Zitkala-Sa deftly handled the imperial English to establish the American Indian characteristics. However, this research paper titled "Zitkala-Sa's "Why I am a Pagan": A study in Spiritual Ecology" deliberates to analyze Zitkala-Sa's lyrical prose "Why I am a Pagan" in the Wordsworthian perspective and to elaborate on the premise of Rudolf Steiner's scholarship at a deeper level thereby finding the spiritual sublimity embedded within the doctrine of pantheism. Greg Garrard rightly observes that "since the Romantic movement's poetic responses to the Industrial Revolution, pastoral has decisively shaped our constructions of nature" (33). While pantheists feel the divine presence in all manifestations of Nature and enjoy a therapeutic impact through worship, spiritual ecologists transcend sensorial impressions to find sublime spiritual connotations. In Zitkala-Sa's "Why I am a Pagan", such awe-inspiring truths are unveiled if a judicious combination of Wordsworth's pantheistic philosophy and Steiner's theory of spiritual ecology is attempted.

Zitkala-Sa (meaning 'Red Bird'), popularly known as Gertrude Simmons, was born to a Sioux Indian mother and a Euro American father. Sa was a writer, musician and political activist who daringly recorded the struggles of her hybrid identity. She was one among the very few Indian American women writers to bring to light the charm and distinctive qualities of the Native American legends by translating them into Latin and English. In spite of her partial genetic affinity towards the mainstream culture, it was the tribal characteristic of her Sioux mother that shaped Sa's sensibility as a writer. Her memories of childhood include