In the first chapter we have discussed how, in his early life, Wordsworth confronted Nature with his native endowment and the racial traits of his character. In the second, we have tried to follow him through the adolescent period up to the age of twenty-seven. In that chapter we have discussed how he was alienated from Nature by his growing interest in Man, how he fell into the trap of the French Revolution, and his release from it, how he became involved in a love-affair and his subsequent separation from the object of his love due to various external circumstances. We have also seen how he fell an easy prey to the Godwinian philosophy as a result of his revulsion from the French Revolution and how on account of it his mental and spiritual health was impaired. In the previous chapter we have discussed how he was restored to normal health and the contributions of his sister Dorothy and his friend Coleridge in this respect, who opened his eyes once more to the beauties of Nature.

It is interesting to note how these three periods of Wordsworth's life correspond with the three stages of man's attitude towards Nature beginning from the dawn of civilisation. During the first, that is the savage state of the Primordial era, Nature worked upon the mind of man by inducing astonishment and a sense of beauty. The first emotion to affect his imagination as he faced the mysterious forces of the universe was fear, to which were added beauty and dignity. Referring to the
impressions that Wordsworth received from Nature in early life
M. Legons says, ............

"Though Wordsworth has been the only one to express them, it is impossible to conceive an age or clime in which they have not been felt. They are so elementary, that it seems as if only in the childhood of humanity could they have been experienced with such intensity and interpreted with so much freshness. Such must have been the impressions which inspired the creators of myths, the earliest members of the human race."  

As civilisation advanced, man made immense progress in the material world. He built towns and cities and developed social and other mundane interests, which turned him away more or less from Nature. European civilisation may be said to have reached the culmination of this state during the pseudo-classical age, that is, during the first half of the eighteenth century. During the final phase, Nature came again into the foreground. By this time, man, after he had suffered a great deal living in the midst of artificial social circles, turned to Nature once again with loving eyes, seeking there peace and solace. Europe may be said to have reached this stage during the latter half of the eighteenth century. It was at this time that all European nations started feeling a sort of general awakening to the presence of Nature. In France it found its best exponent in Rousseau, in Germany, Goethe, and in England, Wordsworth.

The general attitude of the English poets to Nature immediately preceding Wordsworth is best indicated in the account:

1 Early Life, P 45

2 J.C. Sharp, Poetic Interpretation of Nature, Chapter, XIV, pp 225-227
given by Sutherland.

"Human affairs and human feelings are universally interesting. There are many who have no great relish for the poetry that delineates only irrational and inanimate beings; but to that which exhibits the fortunes, the characters and the conduct of men, there is hardly any person who does not listen with sympathy and delight....... Mere descriptions, however beautiful and moral reflections, however just, became tiresome, where our passions were not occasionally awakened by some event that concern our fellowmen." Of course Beattie did not mean to say that the eighteenth century poets were completely indifferent to Nature. What he meant to say, he preferred to give a more prominent place to man than Nature. Natural descriptions do figure in their poems as in Thomson's "Seasons" or Savage's "Wanderer". But it invariably occupies a secondary place in poetry and it is an interesting study only when it is involved with man.

In another book, "The Art of Poetry on a New Plan", he says :-

"Do not all readers of taste receive peculiar pleasure from those little tales or episodes, with which Thomson's descriptive poem on the 'Seasons' is here and there enlivened? And are they not sensible, that the thunderstorm would not have been half so interesting without the tale of the two lovers, nor the harvest-scene, without that tale on P^pemelon and L^avinia, nor the

driving snows, without the exquisite picture of a man perishing among them? 1

Man is the centre of interest of the eighteenth century readers. They are interested in Nature only in so far as it is his background and a cause of his happiness or unhappiness.

In other words, Nature is studied for the sake of Man, and not for its own sake. Referring to the writings of a few eighteenth century poets, James Sutherland says:

"Man therefore is the measure of all things in eighteenth century poetry, and by adapting his mood and treatment to his theme, the poet was able to deal with a surprisingly wide range of human actions." 2 Then in his characteristic, incisive and humorous style he adds:

"From the publication of Thomson's 'Seasons', however, Nature plays a more and more important part in the poet's thoughts, until scenery ends by becoming a spiritual blight on the minor poetry of nineteenth century." 3

Whatever may be the implications of the passage quoted above, the author states clearly enough that Man was the burden of song of the eighteenth century poets, and that from the time of Thomson, there was a general awakening to Nature which supplied an exclusively new interest. And, we may add here, that this awakening reached its culmination in the poetry of Wordsworth.

Now the question arises how are we to explain this great awakening of Wordsworth to Nature after a lapse of nearly ten years? For Nature receded into the background of his mind when he went to Cambridge in 1787, and it did not appear as a

1 The Art of Poetry on a new plan, 2 Vols, 1762 (quoted by James Sutherland) : A Preface to Eighteenth Century poetry P-112.
2 A Preface to Eighteenth Century poetry P-117.
3 Ibid.
principal interest again until 1797, the year in which he became intimate with Coleridge. It is true that his sister Dorothy and Coleridge were in a sense partly instrumental in effecting this transformation but there were other factors also responsible for it. Even Dorothy's or ten Coleridges could not have brought about the change without Wordsworth's instinctive love for Nature from the very beginning. We hear so often about Wordsworth's indebtedness to Coleridge that we are likely at times to underestimate the poet's genius. While Coleridge's influence is a fact, it is clear that nothing could have come out of it if Wordsworth did not possess originality and initiative in a marked degree. We are prone to forget this fact very often in our anxiety to trace his indebtedness to this or that author. The grand edifice that he built out of the material based on his own experiences, or collected from other sources, is his own work. The design, the structure, the architecture are all his own achievement. From the records of his early life it is obviously clear how passionately fond he was of roaming about all alone among the woods and rocks and on the shores of lakes and rivers. His own Nature, no less than that of Dorothy and Coleridge, was responsible for the great revolution that came over his mental life, revealing as it were, the whole face of the earth in its supernal beauty, by a light that issued out of his own soul.

Basil Willey is of opinion that Wordsworth's passion for 'mute insensate things', for green grass and mountain bare can be understood if we trace the growth of Wordsworth's political
It was political emotion, he says, that made the poets of Wordsworth's generation turn to Nature with ardent feelings. The warmth and depth of feeling that we find in the poetry of his 'inspired decade' owes its origin to his political emotion. It has become habitual with us to think of Wordsworth as a great recluse, but some modern critics including Harper have described him as the most political of all English poets (with the exception of Milton of course). Yet in the work of Wordsworth politics and poetry did not effect a happy union. "What breathes in his best work," writes Basil Willey, "is rather the rapture of an escape from the uncongenial political preoccupations, and the joy of the discovery that amidst:

'Calm oblivious tendencies of Nature,
Mid her plants and weeds, and flowers,
And silent overgrowings,
he could correct his despondency and find tranquil restoration'.

But this experience is not something new, he says. From Horace to Cowper all preached the maxim of plain living and high thinking and that peace and contentment are to be found in rural retirement. But none could feel or realise it so intensely as Wordsworth and Coleridge did. So he is of opinion that the intense emotion with which they entered into the life of Nature was derived partly from the rejection of the mechanical philosophy, but mainly it was derived from their thwarted political ardours being directed into imaginative

1 The Eighteenth Century Background, Chapter XII.
channels. They held high hopes for humanity and thought that millenium would be established in all the countries of Europe, but alas, they were badly disappointed by the Terror, The War, the harsh chain of necessity. So they retired quietly from the world of men and thought to deliver the world not by political action, but by poetical imagination. They thought that they would be able to convince the people by showing the bond that truly existed between Nature and the soul of Man. The mind of man and Nature were so perfectly adjusted to each other that the product they thought of the union must necessarily be beautiful and true. It was with this object in view, to achieve a fine balance between true observation and imagination that the two poets dedicated themselves to poetry while they lived in intimacy in Alfoxden and Nether Stowey.

Sir Herbert Read is of the opinion that Wordsworth became conscious of the close bond that existed between him and the external world only after that link was broken by his departure from Hawkshed for Cambridge in 1787. But at that time he failed to realize fully the significance of his early mode of life, as will be evident from a perusal of the poems "An Evening Walk" and "Descriptive sketches" and from comparing them with later fruits of his poetic achievement. He became fully aware of his feelings for Nature, sometime after his second visit to France. His return to Nature has been described by Sir Herbert Read as an issue from the emotional storm that descended upon him in France. After the storm had quieted down, the feelings which
were first roused and then frustrated, led at a later date to an outburst of creative activity during one wonderful decade. At a later period of his life, Sir Herbert says that Wordsworth must have felt a cooling down of his passion for Annette, and, as he did so, he unconsciously transferred this coolness for the object of his deadpassion to things associated with it, that is to France, to the Revolution, and finally in his bitterest moment, to humanity itself. This is one way of seeking emotional compensation. There was another way of compensation for Wordsworth, that was, the poetic sublimation of his feelings.

"Art exhausts the fund of emotion - it crystallizes emotion, breaks it off from the personality, leaves the mind calmer. The emotion of life finds its counterpart in the emotion of art"^2

Sir Herbet declares that Wordsworth's philosophy of Mind and Nature is the result of the emotional turmoil of his experiences in France, followed by subsequent remorse and anguish. Out of this remorse is born a desire to understand self and to seek an expression of the experience in art. Gradually as the passion cooled down, the mind regained its original calm and out of this calm were born the greatest works of art. Prof. Read points out that Wordsworth was drawn to Nature-poetry by the frustration of his emotion of

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1 H. Read, Wordsworth - P. 49
2 Ibid, 117
of love for Annette, which provided a suitable impulse for self-expression, stirring into life a passion for Nature he had imbibed from his early childhood.

In my humble opinion, politics, or no politics, Annette or no Annette, Wordsworth would have sooner or later turned to Nature as a main source of his poetic inspiration. Wordsworth was not the only poet to be affected by the ideas of the French Revolution or Godwinism followed by the disillusionment from both, but none of the poets of his generation approached Nature in the way we did. The love of Nature was part of his blood and bones. He turned away from her for a period of ten years. This was a temporary distraction under pressure of circumstances and not a loss of interest. But she must have been weaving her magic net in the poet's unconscious mind during all these years which found such wonderful expression in his later poetry. Nor do I think that the Annette-episode had anything to do with the lending of a heightened tone to his nature-poetry. He must have suffered from the frustration of his love for Annette, if any, before he came under the influence of Godwin, and the very fact that Nature does not find a prominent place in "Guilt and sorrow" or "The Borderers," which were apparently written after the frustration goes to prove that Annette had nothing to do with the heightened tone of his nature-poetry. But what Sir Herbert says about the other reason, that Wordsworth felt from the beginning a great attraction for Nature appears to me to be the true cause of his return to Nature. It was after he had left the beautiful natural surroundings of Hawkshed, in the midst of which he grew...
up that he became conscious of a link existing between him and the external world. But Professor Read says that the fact that the emotion did not become strong enough would appear from a study of the two poems that he composed during his Cambridge days. For this, he says, Annette-Vallon episode was necessary. It is true that the emotion was not felt to have sufficient strength at that time. But that may be due to his immaturity of intellect and his inability to assume as yet the full stature of a literary artist. The love of Nature was a strong impulse in the poet. About the year 1797, there is distinct indication of a deep feeling for Nature which seemed to have been in a state of suspense during the tumultuous period of his life dating from his tour in France. Various distractions might have caused its temporary eclipse. Its revival and restoration might be due to the healing power of time, rather than to any more clearly assignable cause. Ordinary experience seems to confirm the view I have taken.

So far we have been discussing the actual background of Wordsworth's nature-poetry, by actual background I mean his mental equipment, his natural surroundings, his reaction to them and the revival of his interest in Nature. We shall now discuss briefly the historical background, or rather the eighteenth century background of English poetry, particularly nature-poetry, against which the nature-poetry of Wordsworth thrived.

Imaginative delight in Nature was not a new thing in the history of poetry. It appears in the Choruses of Sophocles, in the Georgies of Virgil and the sonnets of Shakespeare. And
as for sensuous delight in natural objects, the Elizabethans, particularly Spenser and Shakespeare are superior to Wordsworth. In Shakespeare's poetry nature has been used very often to reflect man's thought and feeling. But shortly after this age, for nearly a century and a half, nature receded into the background until she assumed a significant position in the poetry of Wordsworth's forerunners, that is Chatterton, Blake, Thomson, Cowper and Gray. Nor would the history of modern interpretation of Nature be complete without the mention of the great philosopher Rousseau. So it would be wrong to say that Wordsworth applied imagination of a high order for the first time to nature-poetry. What he did was to interpret her life in a way that no one else before him had done. Such interpretations were often implicit in the poetry of his forerunners, but these assumed full consciousness for the first time in the poetry of Wordsworth. This imaginative consciousness with which Wordsworth penetrated the heart of nature depended on a second quality, that is, close and loving observation. Poets before Wordsworth sought more or less to bedeck nature with the splendour of their fancy rather than seek her full revelation. The Elizabethan poets paid glowing tributes to the beauty of Nature, but this originated from a sense of pure delight in all natural objects rather than from the deep reverence with which Wordsworth invested nature-poetry. A poet in the romantic tradition interprets rather than bedecks nature, and this can be done by close and loving observation.

Sutherland thinks that the eighteenth century poets were not less observant than Wordsworth but they thought it less profitable to describe their particular observations than
those having a universal value. One peculiarity of the
eighteenth century, Sutherland says, is that it is attracted by
that kind of truth which is universal and demonstrable and this
is due to man's increasing interest in nature. Referring to
the eighteenth century, he says, "It tended to view with increasing suspicion that sort of thought which was merely personal,
or worse still, peculiar." ¹

According to him one reason for originality being more or less under a ban in the age of Pope and Johnson is:

"The critics were never tired of repeating that it was the poet's duty to avoid the minute and particular and concentrate on the general. If the poet did so - and most of them did - he was more than ever likely to tread where others had trod before him." ²

This view that the artist should address himself to the general, not copying what is before him, but offering an idealistic picture of life, has been initiated by the critics of the neoclassical age from Aristotle. Critics like Joseph Warton ascribe this tendency to the lack of sensitiveness on the part of poets of the eighteenth century to the particular. Between the publication of the 'Paradise Lost' and 'The Seasons' there was hardly "a single new image of external nature". So Wordsworth thought, and, "certainly not a single image with which the people are usually acquainted and which will indicate that the eye of the poet has been steadily fixed upon his object! Wordsworth is rash, Sutherland thinks in making such a sweeping remark. The reason why the eighteenth century poetry is lacking in the quality of minute observation is that the poets of this century attached a great importance to the descriptions.

¹ A Preface to Eighteenth Century poetry, P. 9 and Background. ² Wordsworth's Literary criticism, 185 (Essay Supplementary to the Preface) ³ The writings of William Blake ed. Geoffrey Keynes.
of nature having a universal value. The modern poet, on the other hand, is more interested in the particular than the general. Blake's remark—to generalize is to be an idiot, to particularize is alone the distinction of merit—is perhaps too strongly worded. But it foreshadows in a sense a change in the critical attitude. Wordsworth's "Thorn" and many other poems are instances to the point. Generalisation involves repetition, whereas particularisation involves personal observation—a means by which repetition can be avoided. Referring to this tendency of the eighteenth century poets, Sutherland says:

"When in the course of time, the desire to particularise grew more and more insistent and we find Wordsworth spending several stanzas in describing an aged thorn which he had observed on the Ridge of Quantock Hill on a stormy day ........... then not unnaturally the old gods must go with the kind of poetry that made their continuing existence possible."

The eighteenth century critic attached no importance to the enlargement of human experience in their anxiety to prove that poetry must have for its basis some kind of recognition to have a universal validity. But there may be a kind of experience which we recognise to be truly applicable to our experience, but which we can recognise imaginatively only. That is what the poets of the romantic period tried to deal with, of whom Wordsworth was the leader. Most of us may not have come across any girl of whom it may be said—"Beauty born of murmuring sound passed into her face" but we can imaginatively apprehend what Wordsworth says to be true. Wordsworth's revolt directed against this particular phase of eighteenth century poetry has been evidently expressed in "Lyrical Ballads" where a particular incident chosen from the common life of men in a particular

2. Preface to Eighteenth century Poetry p.143
3. Three years she grew.
situation and natural surrounding forms usually the subject matter of a poem. Even "The Prelude" and "The Excursion" are instances to the point. Nothing of a general character appeals to him. Every subject in order to be poetically treated must pass through the sieve of the poet's own experience and intensely coloured with his own emotion and imagination. His poetry is highly individualised and particularized as opposed to the maxim of generalisation of an eighteenth century critic.

Secondly we find that eighteenth century poetry is fundamentally aristocratic. "The poet of the period," Sutherland says, "is not much a man speaking to men, as a man speaking to men like himself, or to one rather higher in the social scale. His standards, his values, his emotions and intellectual interest, his mode of expressing himself, are often characteristic of the upper class." 1

Wordsworth, he says, has justly criticized this attitude by saying that it is addressed to a particular class of society and not to mankind in general. It is in this way that the universal heart of man is neglected. Wordsworth's poetry on the other hand, we know, derived its sap from the common life of men. It dealt powerfully with the elemental passions of the human heart. "English poetry," says Helen Darbishire, "has known many leaders of revolt. Wordsworth's was the revolt of a nature and importance which perhaps no literary revolt had before. It was a revolt against literature, or the literary

1 A Preface to the Eighteenth Century Poetry, 50.
element in poetry, an assertion of the supreme value of life at all costs in poetry".

Wordsworth's preference for the common man even in the language of his poetry may be an aftermath of his political sympathies with the French Revolution. The ideals of this Revolution were an assertion of the rights of the common people. His dissatisfaction with the existing order of society may have led him in his poetry at least to seek a better order and this made him seek the matter as well as the manner of his poetry, in the common life of man. We shall elucidate the point further when we take up the "Lyrical Ballads" for examination.

Another characteristic feature of eighteenth century poetry was reticence. Writing about an eighteenth century poet, Sutherland says:

"His poetry was more deliberately submitted to the public. The eighteenth century poet's consciousness of this public inhibited the expression of emotion unless it was of a recognised and acceptable kind. It is not that eighteenth century poetry is lacking in feeling but there is no direct expression of feeling in it, particularly feeling which is connected in some way with the personal life of the poet. In this sphere too, we find that Wordsworth was a leader of revolt. His poems mostly have their origins in his own personal experiences. His poetry, particularly of the great decade, is nothing but a record of the inner life of the poet, or of another person lived, or imaginatively lived in contact with the surroundings, the world of man and the world of nature. He writes so much about himself, in his poetry that he

1 The Poet Wordsworth, 35
2 A Preface to Eighteenth Century poetry, 67
has been termed the 'Egotistical Sublime' by one of his contemporaries. A majority of his poems will testify to this fact:

"Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep,"
"Strange fits of passion have I known,"
"I heard o thousand blended notes,"
"O mercy! to my self I cried,
If Lucy should be dead,"

"The Prelude", "Tintern Abbey," "Ode to Intimation" are all records of the poet's inner life in relation to Nature. Hazlitt in his review of "The Excursion", wrote that "an intense egotism swallows up everything ........... The power of his mind preys upon itself. It is as if there were nothing but himself and the universe. He lives in the busy solitude of his own heart; in the deep silence of thought."

Eighteenth century poetry is far from being "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings". It was written for a poetic society which hated the display of all powerful and personal feelings. Eighteenth century poetry does not have any direct contract with experience. But experience directly derived first hand from Nature, tinged with powerful feelings, is the central theme of Wordsworth's poetry. He makes us feel what he himself has felt at any time. Referring to the world that Wordsworth reveals to us in his volume of 1798, Helen Darbishire writes:

"It breathes the freshness of mountain air, the poetry seems to come from the earth like a mountain spring: its language is as colourless as water. The poet is looking into the heart of man and into the life of nature as if he saw things for the first time."

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1 My First acquaintance with Poets by Hazlitt, quoted by John Jones in "The Egotistical Sublime", p. 29.
Any of his mind poems even will illustrate this fact that Wordsworth had a marvellous power of expressing the most elementary passions of the human heart through the medium of the simplest, yet the most effective language.

"My child! They gave thee to another,
A woman who was not thy Mother,
When from my arms my babe they took,
On me how strangely did it look!
Through his whole body something ran,
A most strange something did I see;
As if he strove to be a man
That he might pull the sledge for me;
And then he stretched his arms, how wild!
Oh mercy, like a little child!!!

The above passage describes the misery of an Indian mother who is being forsaken by her companions in the midst of a desert, as she is ill, and cannot continue the journey, and from whom the baby is being snatched away by some other woman, so that he at least may be saved. How beautifully the elementary feelings of the heart, a mother's love for her child and her agony at the thought of being separated from him, have been delineated in this poem. Here the poet is transmitting an imaginative experience in all its uniqueness to us - how it feels like to be a mother from whom her only baby is being snatched away, how the tender emotions of the mother are roused, how she imagines him to be a grown up man, so as to save his mother, how he wants to cling to her desperately, so that he may not be separated from her. Here the human passion

1. The Poet Wordsworth
2. The Forsaken Indian Woman
has been described in the simplest terms. As we read the poem, we are able to live through an experience somewhat analogous to that lived through by the poet who could project himself so wonderfully into the mind of the character he described.

Since poetry in the eighteenth century was written for a certain section of people, that is, the polite society, the poet was expected to show a refinement of taste which involves restraint and does not favour fulness of expression. Certain statements, words and phrases have to be avoided as they are too crude according to the standard of polite society and arouse feelings of disgust. This is how "the poetic diction", about which we hear so much from Wordsworth and Coleridge, arose. It was not enough for the poet to embody refined thoughts in his poetry, he must strip the language bare of all vulgarity and coarseness prevalent among the lower classes in society. Language is the dress of thought, so it has to be made free from all mean and vulgar associations. The most deliberate revolt against eighteenth century poetry proceeded mainly along this line. He has pronounced his idea most powerfully in his Advertisement to the "Lyrical Ballads" of 1798. "The majority of the following poems," he says, are to be considered as experiments. They were written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purpose of poetic pleasure."

He then asks the readers if they find in the book of a natural delineation of human passions, human characters and human incidents, and if they find it to be so, to be pleased in spite of most dreadful enemy to our pleasures, our pre-established codes...
One of the aspects of eighteenth century refinement is the exclusion of the poor and the humble from serious poetry. The poets of that century could not wholeheartedly concur with Wordsworth in his opinion expressed in these lines:

"Howe'er disguised in its own majesty,
Is littleness, that he who feels contempt
For any living thing, hath faculties
Which he has never used, that thought with him
Is in its infancy."

Another limitation of eighteenth century poetry is its servile imitation of the ancients. Coleridge refers to this in his Biographia Literaria. He tells us about an intelligent schoolboy at Christ's Hospital, of whom Coleridge was one, when they tried to lend an added charm to their English compositions by an imitation of the words used by classical authors and by making frequent references to pagan gods:

"Lute, harp, lyre, Muse, Muses and inspirations, Pegasus, Parnassus, and Hyppoc... were all abominations to him. In fancy I can almost hear him now, exclaiming 'Harp? Harp? Lyre? Pen and ink, boy you mean? Muse, boy, Muse? Your nurse's daughter you mean? Pierian Spring? Oh aye the cloister-pump, I suppose."

A more pronounced objection to the continued imitation of the classics was made by Henry Mackenzie in 1785: "Another
bad consequence of this servile imitation of the ancients

...has been to prevent modern authors to draw it as it really appears; and instead of giving genuine descriptions, it leads them to give those only which are false and artificial.

The pagan deities very frequently entered into the poetry of this period:

"There see the clover, pea, and bean,
Vie in variety of green
Fresh pastures speckled o'er with sheep,
Brown fields their fallow sabbaths keep,
Plump golden tresses wear,
And poppy top-knots deck her hair,
And silver streams thru' meadows stray,
And Naiads on the margin play,
And lesser nymphs on side of hills
From play-thing thens perown down the rills."

Sutherland thinks that if Wordsworth were to pronounce his criticism upon it, he would have approved in a way the first four lines but would have condemned the rest. But to an eighteenth century reader and Naiads provide a necessary relief from "the clover, pea, and bean," good things no doubt, but ought not to form the subject-matter of poetry. Even fifty years after the composition of this poem Naiad still appears to be a favourite with the poets. Cowper in his poem, "The Task", while describing a little stream in the neighbourhood

1. The Lounger, No. 37, 1785, quoted by Sutherland in "A Preface to Eighteenth Century Poetry" p.143
2. Matthew Green, The Speeln (Chalmers, XV, 168)
of Onley tells us how dutifully Naiad fills it with the waters from her urn:

"Hence the declivity is sharp and short,
And such the reascent, between them
A little Naiad her impoverish urn
All summerlong, which winter fills again."

This description of Cowper's does not in any way bring us closer to the actuality of the scene he means to describe, which in the hand of Wordsworth or Keats would have become much more effective. With all his devotion to minute particulars, Wordsworth was not a mere foreground artist. His gaze rested more faithfully on the larger features of the background mountains, rivers, lakes, clouds and sky. His fidelity of observation brings us to the very heart of the object described. He tells us about the ecstasy that the wanderer experienced:

"When from the naked top
Of some bold headland, he beheld the sun
Rise up and bathe the world in light: He looked -
Ocean and earth, the solid frame of earth
And Ocean's liquid mass, in gladness lay
Beneath him: - far and wide the clouds were touched,
And in their silent faces could be read
Unutterable love."

The sunset scene has been described with such a delicacy of touch and confidence, that we who read this passage seem to live through the same experience as the Wanderer. Keats

1 The Task, I, 236 ff.
2. The Excursion, I, 198-205.
could describe even with a surer and finer touch than Words­worth the actuality of any natural object. He would make the swarms of minnows,

"Staying their wavy bodies against the streams,
To taste the luxury of sunny beams
Temper'd with coolness."

At times Cowper will stand outside the object of his contemplation as is evident in the lines quoted above, but sometimes he is able to penetrate through its heart:

"Here Ouse, slow-winding through a level plain
Of spacious meads with the cattle sprinkled o'er,
Conducts the eye along his sinuous course
Delighted There, fast-rooted in their bank,
Stand never overlooked, our favourite elms,
That screen the herdsman's solitary hut;
While far beyond, and over­thwart the stream,
That ©s with molten glass inlays the vale,
The sloping land recedes into the clouds"

Here he attains somewhat the touch of the romantic poets who were able to merge themselves so often into the object of their contemplation. But the natural scene as is described here is set in the background of man's occupation. The taste for mountains, cataracts, for tempests and floods was not developed as yet. This was to be done by the romantic poets.

1. The Excursion, I, 190-205
2. Englymion II, 73 ff.
3. The task, I, 256 ff. 163 ff.
We are usually inclined to consider the poetry of the eighteenth century in terms of the poetry of Pope. In doing so, we often forget most of the other notable poets of the age - Thomson, Gray, Collins, Goldsmith, Cowper and Ogilvie. These poets revolted in their own way against the established poetical standards of the age and may be said to have anticipated Romanticism in some way or other. Thomson had no patience with the neatly turned thoughts embodied in verse-form, Collins showed an interest in the superstitions of the day and Goldsmith successfully described a deserted village. All these poets though they did not fit in very well with eighteenth century sensibility did not give a rude shock to the readers. They made the range of eighteenth century sensibility wider but they were content to conform to contemporary poetic idiom and work according to the tradition. The revolt of Joseph and Thomas Warton was much more effective. Their poems take us very often from the sensible and sociable pleasures of the eighteenth century to something more emotional.

"To charnels and the house of woe,  
To Gothic churches, vaults and tombs,  
Where each sad night some virgin comes,  
With throbbing breast, and faded cheek,  
Her promised bridegroom's urn to seek"  

Such a description of gloom and emotional outburst we rarely come across in the eighteenth century poetry except in the graveyard school of poetry of whom Young was an important representative. The Warton brothers were able to achieve even greater effect in this respect with their powerful criticism. In his "Night Thoughts" and in some of his essays Young challenged the eighteenth century standards of poetry in a more effective way. He with a bleeding heart and with the suggestion of a grief real or imaginary is often classed

1 Ode to Fancy (Chalmers XVIII, 164)
with Byron, who, inspite of all that is said against him, is able to produce the desired effect upon the minds of his readers.

Cowper paved the way still farther for Romanticism by his unconscious self-revelation in "The Task". It was a step farther than the one taken by Young whose self-display in "Night Thoughts" is rather conscious. In such lines as "I was a stricken deer that left the herd," we catch the tone of confusion. Cowper anticipated the Romantic poets including Wordsworth by his frequent references in his poems to his private life. The criterion of judging if an experience is worth putting down in writing is with a classical poet, its general character, which happens usually to all men, while with a romantic poet, it is its particular character, that is, he takes it to be important because it happens to him.

Blake challenged poetic tradition dominant in the eighteenth century in one of its important aspects. There is a logical evolution of ideas in the poetry of Dryden, Pope, Thomson, Johnson, Gray and Goldsmith, which rests upon a solid framework of argument. But we do not find an air of certainty, and a reasoned statement in the poetry of Blake or Shelley. A veil of mysticism covers good sense in their poetry and those who cannot see through and beyond this veil cannot appreciate their poetic appeal.

In his "Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties", John Stuart Mill distinguished two kinds of poetry, one he calls natural poetry written by such poets as Shelley, the other he calls poetry of a cultivated but not naturally poetic mind, implying Wordsworth and poets of kindered spirit. A large number of people will be ready to refute the statement of Mill that Wordsworth was a cultivated and not a naturally poetic mind, that with him feeling waited upon thought and not thought upon feeling. But they will all agree, I believe, that at least this statement is applicable to eighteenth century poetry.

1. The Task, III, 108.