Wordsworth is an innovator in his treatment of nature primarily because as Hobsbaum observes "he placed enormous reliance upon his perceptions as an individual." (1) With him Nature is not only the cause, but the occasion for poetry. His imagination siezes upon the accidental conjunction of things in nature, takes them up, and subsumes them under the higher laws of its operation. Nature images and even the human figure apprehended in certain attitudes are converted or transmuted by the act of imagination into an apocalyptic alphabet, in which, in silence is read the presence of the holy.

Seeking the raven's nest, and suddenly surprised
With vapours, or an rainy day. When I have angled
up the lonely books. Mine eyes have glanced upon him, few
few steps off, In size a giant stalking, through the frog
His sheep like green land, Bears, at other
times, When round some shady promotry turning,
His form both flashed upon me, glorified.
By the deep radiance of the setting sun, O, him I
have descended in distant sky
A solitary object and sublime,
Above all height." (2)

Yet these images of man and natural things are not in themselves permanent, but only seem so. They are things which take him by surprise, and whose appearance in those moments he is able to convert into the language of eternity. The shepherd is transfigured by the setting sun, and his sheep are
magnified by the fog. Even after sunset, the images manifesting the divine remain behind, responsive to the significances which recollection will disclose in them.

Wordsworth’s devotion to landscape or nature is not as an assistance to human complacency and self-assertion as in many of his contemporaries, but rather as a work of rescue and consolation. The doctrine, that life in the midst of nature must be gratifying, is the prevailing theme in his poetry. His poetry is not merely a painting of rainbow colours or rosy hues, but has a plenitude that tempts one to get into closer contact with nature. Wordsworth’s view of nature and its impact on humanity derive humanistic values from nature. Wordsworth’s obsession with the image of man as a traveller between life and death so oppressed him, that in one of his Salisbury Plain Poems, which is largely in the form of dialogue between a traveller and a vagrant woman as they walked across the plain all night, he emphatically expresses this idea. The woman’s tale of her distress concludes at dawn with the words:

And now across this waste my steps I bend
Oh! tell me whither for no earthly friend,
Have I no house in prospect but the tomb. (3)

The poet’s own reaction is poignant:

Adieu ye friendless hope - forsaken pair
Yet friendless ere ye take your several road
Enter that lowly cot and ye shall share
Comforts by prouder mansions imbestowed
For you yon milkmaid bears her brimming load
For you the board is piled with homely bread
And think that life is like this desert broad
Where all the happiest find is but a shed
And a green spot mid wastes interminably spread (4)

He then concludes with a diatribe against contemporary wrongs and injustices. We disguise the bleak aspect of reality by retreating into large cities, setting up warm self-protective cells, choosing a reclusive life away from the city, indulging in spirited rationalisations, whatever they may be. Man’s ultimate condition, his blindness to his own peril, is the ‘travellers tread between life and death’. And to touch the core of bleak reality is the fact that the traveller’s journey is against the background of a great cosmic machine, which has scant regard for human wants. This statement may be disputed by those who believe that Wordsworth concentrated more on nature’s positive relationship with man. But in discussing the pragmatic relevance of nature for mankind, we have to take into account all aspects, positive as well as negative, of the man-nature relationship. The road, the path, the way are emblematic of the poet’s vision. These are many more instances of strange impressions of actual human beings seen moving in isolation against a great landscape. And the road with its symbolic status emphasises the pathos of man’s condition:

While thus he journeyed, step by step led on,
On he must pace, perchance, 'till night descend,
Where'er the dreary roads their bare white lines extend. (5)

Our Walk was far among the ancient trees;
There was no road, not any woodman's path;
But a thick umbrage - checking the wild growth
Of weed and sapling along soft green turf
Beneath the branches (6)
These are some instances indicating the human loneliness in the vast panorama. As Raymond Dexter has pointed out, "Human and rustic life was generally chosen, because in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil . . . the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature." (7)

In his youth, Wordsworth was a "radical" championing the cause of liberty. But his interest in politics took time to mature. During his visit to France in 1791-92 the impact of the French Revolution surfaced in his thoughts. Rousseau's psychological insight into isolated and community life, his essays on liberty and corrupting aspects of civilization proved to be the spark that turned into a devastating fire that the French Revolution was Rousseau wrote "I should have wished to live and die free, that is, so far subject to the laws that neither I, nor nobody else, should be able to cast off their honourable yoke: the easy and salutary yoke which the haughtiest necks bear with the greater docility, as they made to bear no other" (8)

Wordsworth, like Rousseau, belonged to a revolution that had elevated sincerity and fidelity in personal feeling above the objective truths of the social organisation. Wordsworth retained and even heightened Rousseau's passion for solitude and communion with nature. Wordsworth's poem 'To a young Lady' addressed to Dorothy, who had been reproached for taking long walks in the country addressed her as 'Dear child of Nature' and the image of this child haunted Wordsworth's rural poems. Indeed Wordsworth is the supreme poet of this passion for solitude and communion with nature. As in the "Immortality Ode" he writes:

To me the meanest flower that blow
can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep
Deliberately discarding the usual romantic stage-effects, avoiding the use of meretricious poetic vocabulary and largely expressing himself in plain language, he created his own poetry.

A Violet by a mossy stone,
Half-hidden from the eye,
Fair as star, when only one
Is shining in the sky. (10)

Like a sudden flash of beauty during a long walk on a grey day, such fleeting moments once experienced and encapsulated in poetry are never forgotten. During his endless walks among the bleak falls as he brooded in solitude, the familiar but never changing scene spread wide before him, he was in search of these moments, when the mountains and bare tree and the grass would seem to light up from within, when simple words in some magical arrangement of the unconscious would rise to consciousness. Wordsworth’s concept of nature involved his convictions concerning imagination.

In The Prelude, Wordsworth is satisfied to say that imagination brings joy, self-assurance, and the deepest insight into the nature of divinity that man can never achieve.

Thence did I drink the visionary power;
And deem not-profitless those fleeting moods
Of shadowy exultation; not for this,
That they are kindered to our purer mind
And intellectual life, but that the soul,

Remembering how she felt, but what she felt
Wordsworth believes that the influence of nature on human mind is something more than what the mind offers in return. No development is possible without a reciprocal attitude between man and nature. There is an inspiring truthfulness in his painting of human pain and wrongs. It is undeniable that Wordsworth carried a peculiar poetic burden. In his early poems Wordsworth was consciously breaking new ground in subject matter and style. "She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways" is apart from any deeper considerations, an exemplum of poems in which the spectacle of lonely existence and suffering in solitude rivets his attention and his sympathy.

The poet's work explores the relation of his imaginative development to the contemplation of human misery. He had profound interest in the wretched of the earth. Margaret's husband Robert, the Idiot Boy and his mother, or Martha are pointers to the poet's concern for the poor, the neglected and the wronged. Talking of Margaret's husband in "The Ruined Cottage", the old man tells the poet traveller:

... but ere the second autumn
A fever seized her husband. In disease
He lingered long, and when his strength returned
He found the little he had stored to meet
The hour of accident or crippling age
Was all consumed . . .
... his good-humour soon
Became a weight in which no pleasure was,
And poverty brought on a petted mood
And a sore temper: day by day he
drooped. (12)

Similarly, the description of the woe-begone mother Betty Foy searching for her imbecile boy, Johnny, is quite moving.

O Woe is me O Woe is me
Here will I die; here will I die;
I thought to find my Johnny here,
But he is neither far nor near,
Oh what a wretched mother I. (13)

After frantic cries and searches, when she finds him in the distant wood, she is shocked.

She looks again - her arms are up -
She screams - She can not move for joy;
She darts as with a torrent's force,
She almost has O'ertumed the horse,
And fast she holds her idiot boy. (14)

The perennially observable shadow in Wordsworth's analysis of tragic response brings out the possibility that there is only momentary pleasure in the contemplation of a Margaret, a Betty Foy, a Michael or a Martha Ray. The sequential imaginative growth fathomed in "The Pedlar", "Tintern Abbey", "The Ode on the Intimations of Immortality", and finally The Prelude goes a long way to prove that the poet had a fascination with tragic material. In "The Pedlar" he endeavours to explore the magnitude of suffering that a person can abide. "Tintern Abbey" is primarily concerned with the problems of loss and
alienation, and thus a philosophical treatment of human suffering is offered.

... and in after years,

When these wild ecstasies shall be matured

Into a sober pleasure, when they mind

shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,

Thy memory be as a dwelling-place

For all sweet sounds and harmonies; Oh! then,

If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,

should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts

of tender joy will thou remember me,

And these my exhortations Nor, perchance,

If I should be, where I no more can hear

Thy voice, nor catch from thy wild eyes these gleams

Of past existence, wilt then thou forget

That on the banks of this delightful stream

We stood together, and that I, so long

A Worshipper of Nature " (15)

Wordsworth writes nature poetry in the context of his own beliefs and experiences, and of his consciousness of the prophetic role. His writings about nature acquires much dimensional significance when he adores nature, as he does in “Tintern Abbey”, calling it.

The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul.

Of all my moral being ... (16)

He is using precise language for a process which he wishes as a prophet to
declare to the world, contrasting sharply with the mechanical, and to him wasteful, life of modern urban society. These are ways of living that allow the fuller development of mind and heart.

Knowing that Nature Never did betray
The heart that loved her (17)

Wordsworth is here similar to Blake and Byron as a critic of society; like them he sees the need for a radical change of heart. Blake’s ‘‘The Little Black Boy’’ is comparable with Wordsworth’s ‘‘September 1, 1802’’ Blake gives to his poem the touch of a parable and assures hope for a negro boy in his mother’s fairy tale that they are born on this earth for love as the plants or birds, that the black skin is only a cover to bear the heat and light of the sun where God lives, that once the body has learnt to bear these aspect of God, the cloud would disappear and God would ask them to go to him to play by him as the lambs do.

And we are put on earth a little space,
That we may learn to bear the beams of love,
And these black bodies and this sunburnt face Are but a cloud. (18)

The poet brings out an irresistible innocence and optimism in the boy’s conclusion:

And thus I say to little English boy;
When I from black and he from white cloud free,
And round the tent of God like lambs we joy,
I’ll shade him from the heat till he can bear
To lean in joy upon out Father’s Knee;
And then I’ll stand and stroke his silver
Blake's psychological insight and compassion are touching. The yearning of a black boy has rarely been so poignantly expressed as in the child's desire to "stroke the silver hair" of the English boy.

Wordsworth is even more direct in his description of the pathetic helplessness of a Negro travelling from France by decree of the government, which chased away all the Negroes from France during the reign of terror. He writes:

... Meek destitute, as seemed, of hope or aim
She sate, from notice turning not away,
But on all proffered intercourse did lay
A weight of languid speech, ...
Yet still her eyes retained their tropic fire,
That burning independent of the mind,
Joined with the lustre of her rich attire
To mock the out cast - O ye Heavens, be kind!
And feel, thou Earth, for this afflicted Race! (20)

Incidentally, both the poets choose images of fire and light to describe the Negro boy and woman. Wordsworth is also concerned with the greetings where no kindness is and 'the dreary intercourse of daily life.' It is this sheer waste of life that saddens him.

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and Spending, we lay waste our powers;
Little we see in Nature that is ours;

We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon! (21)

Thus, the doctrine of nature in Wordsworth's poetry is a relentless campaign against the impoverishment of the individual by material and social pressures. The farther man travels from nature the more degraded he becomes. Human nature exists in its pure and elemental state in the midst of nature. Man is at his best when he lives a life of primal simplicity in constant communion with nature. Wordsworth in his poem "The World is Too Much With Us" rightly condemns the overweening materialism of contemporary English society. In consequence the aesthetic sensibility which belongs to the part of Man's higher nature is enervated. He saw himself and Colerige as prophets of nature, not so much to propagate a gospel, as to demonstrate the power and beauty of mind when influenced by nature.

Few writers have exercised a greater influence on the world than Rousseau. "It is hardly an exaggeration to say that he is to be found at the entrance to all the paths leading to the present." (22) Hazlitt in an essay written in 1816 remarks about Wordsworth's affinity with Rousseau: "The writer who most nearly resembles him in our times is the author of Lyrical Ballads. We see no other difference between them, than that one wrote in prose and the other in poetry. Both create an interest out of nothing, or rather out of their own feelings; both weave numberless recollections into one sentiment, both wind their own being round whatever object occur to them". (23)

Rousseau asserts that to judge a man truly we must see him as he sees himself. Unimpeded by the customary disguises of art, we come to understand his life as he does and therefore, we apprehend its inner truth. Rousseau thus depends upon his language to create an extraordinary identification - even demands - total
participation of his sensibility. Rousseau vouches for the truth of his portrait by the audaciousness of his own trust in the spontaneous dictates of memory and feeling, the self that governs the poetic style is a renovated spirit’ new and higher than the habitual and characteristic self. Spontaneity of style for Wordsworth in The Prelude therefore sets the poet apart and above his audience, and even above his own every day persona. The inspired poet performs his art clothed in priestly robes. He does not simply choose his garments, they come to him from a source beyond deliberate resolve. By the end of Book I, the ‘‘genial mood’’ has spontaneously returned. His trust in his powers revives, but he can not really guarantee the success of his song, for it depends upon the mysterious and predictable grace of his Muse.

‘‘Love’’ is one of the most frequently used words in The prelude Josphine Miles observes that, ‘‘the word appears in Wordsworth’s poetry more than any other word except ‘Man’, ‘Life’ and the common verbs’’ (24) Indeed a primary aim of Wordsworth’s epic endeavour is to revive the seriousness of ‘‘Love’’ in poetry. Though Wordsworth, at least as much as Rousseau, departs from past literary conventions of love, he does not behave as though the word itself was contaminated by customary meanings. Instead of chafing Rousseau-like, against debasing action of language, Wordsworth exercises his poetic power to re-creat conventional words so that they are mantled with this particular feeling of love and also his own individual sensibility.

Thus were my sympathies enlarged and thus
Daily the common range of visible things
Grew dear to me, ‘already I began
to love the sun,
Not as I since have loved him, as a pledge
And surety of our earthly life, a light
Which we behold and feel we are alive;
Nore for his bounty to so many worlds -
But for this cause, that I had seen him lay
His beauty on the morning hills. (25)

Throughtout The Prelude Wordsworth delights in using and re-using the word “love” mainly for his diverse response to nature, with the depth and constancy of passion appropriated by earlier poets for either heterosexual love, or love between friends, or adoration of God. More importantly in Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth’s famous group of poems of nature is the first truly Wordsworthian creation.

The most comprehensive document in Wordsworth’s Nature theory at the period of Lyrical Ballads is “Tintern Abbey”. There is one remarkable feature of this poem when compared with the philosophical nature poetry of the 18th century. Throughout the poem, Wordsworth does not once name God or make a single unmistakable reference to the supreme being. He does not indicate that his relations with beauties of nature leads him to mystic intuitions. He has felt,

A presence that disturbs me with the joy of elevated thoughts (26)

When Wordsworth composed this poem, rules had been established for the observation of landscape. At that time Books told where to go, how to stand, how to look and what to see. And in “Tintern Abbey” the opening is illuminated by the cottage made of native stone, extended organically, so that these humble dwellings seem reminiscent to the contemplative spectator of a product of nature, or as if they have risen by an instinct of their own wrongs. The poet envisions the plots of cottagers, divided not by ledges into rectangles, but by undulation of
unclipped trees, as "little lines of Sportive wood run wild", The region seems more alien than populated farms. The farms are like pastures "Green to the very door":

Wreaths of smoke rise...
Sent up, in silence, from among the trees,
With some uncertain notice, as might seem
of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods
or of some Hermit's cave, when by his fire,
The Hermit sits alone (27)

In this way, Wordsworth eulogizes places that hide manifestation of human life and power beneath apparent calm, and the spiritual strength innate in cottagers, shepherds, or nearly inarticulate yet eloquent leech gatherer, in the sea at Calais, and in the child at the poet's side. In the sleeping city seen from Westminster Bridge, as in the silence of those seemingly houseless woods along the Wye, sounds the unheard music of humanity.

At first in "Tintern Abbey" Wordsworth barely hints at the interchange of values between Man and Nature in the act of human perception. In seeking the scene along the Wye, he understands the marriage between Man and Nature. The steep and lofty cliffs invest a wild secluded scene with thoughts of more deeper seclusion. During the five years since he first saw these groves, dreaming himself in the muddy flow of existence in rented rooms, "he has been haunted by the seemingly houseless woods echoing the still, sad music of fellow beings." A green landscape giving a sense of solitude to gregarious human life becomes emblematic of that life "past and to Come".

The poetry of Wordsworth works at two different levels of understanding.
On the surface it appeals to the educated and the uneducated, to the urban and the rural, to the sophisticated and the ingenuous alike. At a deeper level, it becomes more meaningful to those who have a philosophical disposition. The dichotomy between the “surface” and the “deeper meanings” shows that Wordsworth is not merely a poet of nature, but more a poet philosopher showing us the stoic path to peaceful life in a world of fast deteriorating values. Wordsworth’s strong moral and philosophical tendency clearly comes out in poems like “Intimations” of “Immortality” and “Ode to Duty”. In these two poems philosophical and metaphysical poetry reaches its height because of a perfect blend of profound thought and deep emotion.

O Joy! that in our embers.
Is something that doth live,
That nature yet remembers
What was so fugitive
The thought of our past years in me doth breed
Perpetual benediction: not indeed
For that which is most worthy to be blest;
Delight and liberty, the simple creed
Of childhood whether busy or at rest,
With new-fledged hope . . . . (28)

The poet speaks of the loss of innocence, childhood independence and of all the beauties associated with boyish carefree ness, with the passing of youth and onset of maturity. In this state, when man is spent out, indolent and dispirited nature can make -

**Our noisy years seem moments in the being**
of the eternal silence: truths that wake,
To perish never:
Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,
Nor Man Nor Boy,
Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
Can utterly abolish or destroy! (29)

Nature may not be receptive of the innocent joy of the past but endows the poet with an innate strength that surmounts despair:

Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind;
In the primal sympathy
Which having been must ever be;
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering;
In the faith that looks through death,

In years that bring the philosophical mind. (30)

The poet's reference to "primal sympathy" suggests greater powers of nature, for not only can she guide us through the cares and griefs of life but, also instill the "preparedness", call it "mental", "intellectual" or "psychological". Not only does nature provide man with pleasure, peace or temporary solutions to our conflicts, but also leads the emotional mind to wisdom. The concluding stanza is significant for a new reflection on the poet's attitude to
man's relation with nature also an expression of his confidence in the healing power of nature.

"Ode to Duty" is frankly a moral and didactic poem. Duty is the power that guides human beings along right path and teaches them to distinguish between right and wrong.

Stern Daughter of the Voice of God!

O Duty! if that name thou love
Who art a light to guide, a rod
To check the erring, and reprove. (31)

The poet declares his resolve to submit himself to the strict mandates of Duty. He seeks from Duty wisdom, humility, the spirit of self-sacrifice etc. He wants to become a bondman of Duty, because he does not wish to be troubled any more by chance desire and changing hopes.

However, man bereft of imagination and some innate feeling and kindness of heart, can not draw inspiration from nature, nor can he seek refuge in her. In other words, nature showers her benediction upon a sensitive man bemused with the mystery of creation. As Sherry explains, "The revolution of the infinite in the finite in Wordsworth's poetry does not come from without, but is seen as coming from within. The imagination is an 'endowment' of a mind standing in privileged relation to the world." (32)

Interestingly there is a revealing phrase in "Lines Written A Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" which suggests that the mature Wordsworth was at least partly aware of the negative character of his early attitude to natural beauty. While describing the adolescent feeling for nature he says that he was

More like a man
Flying from something that he dreads, than
one who sought the thing he loved. (33)

The mysterious 'something' that he dreaded was perhaps a
quasi-personification of the social order represented for him by his uncle Kit and
grand parents, though it may well have been accompanied and reinforced by
supernatural sanctions.

A particularly illuminating example of this emotional attitude is the episode
of the stolen boat in Book I of The Prelude

One summer evening I found
A little boat tied to a willow tree
Within a rocky cave, its usual home.
Straight I unloosed her chain, and stepping in
Pushed from the shore. It was an act of stealth
And troubled pleasure nor without the voice
Of mountain-echoes did my boat move on;
Leaving behind her still, on either side (34)

The huge cliff that seemed to stride after the skiff is clearly a reflection of
the boy's guilty conscience. This act of taking a boat was an act "of Stealth and
troubled pleasure", but it is difficult to believe that the temporary unauthorised
loan of a boat can have induced so profound and memorable a sense of guilt.
Something more was obviously involved. The fact that the lake where the episode
took place was Ullswater seems to provide the clue. Wordsworth was spending the
night at Patterdale on his way back to Penrith. It was apparently the first day of the
summer holidays and no doubt he was proceeding by easy stages from Hawkshed
School, to the prison house of the draper's shop. Perhaps without fully realising
what he was doing, the boy had been trying to escape into silence and solitude of the night from the goal he was due to enter the next day. In that case the menacing cliff must be seen as a subconscious symbol of adult authority. Here, in fact, in alarming physical form was that 'something' which he dreaded and from which his instinct was to 'fly'.

Wordsworth's emphasis is quite the reverse of Rousseau's. The feelings of personal fear, discomfort, torment, are mentioned, but only to be relegated to the background of circumstances. What survives most vividly is a marvellous spectacle for the eye and ear. The look of the scene does not belong to the realm of fact. The details present still vivid perceptions, revitalised now in the descriptive language of the poem. From Rousseau's point of view, since memory retains the exact texture of past feeling, pleasurable or painful, the idyllic past is of course to be preferred. Wordsworth's sublime memories celebrate Nature in its fear some aspect, not simply because the poet learns from fear nor because he enjoys experiencing fear again, but more fundamentally because memory transforms the specific emotions of the past. Most wonderfully, the poet's memory has the power to transform fear to awe, personal anxiety to a lofty sense of mystery and wonder. Rousseau gives only enough detail to particularise feeling of certain occasions - his child like delight in his own musical precocity and in the easy blend of theatrical. Rousseau is intent to preserve the particular feeling of each interlude of time. He does not, therefore, grant separate details of the autonomous life that they have for Wordsworth. To put it differently, individual things do not break free from their places in an original experience. Perhaps that is why he is no more drawn to the metaphor when describing the object in his memory than when directly recalling feeling. Wordsworth's metaphoric comparison - the moon to a snake, the shepherd to an aerial cross - shift and enlarge the significance of past perceptions. This shows that the bulk of Wordsworth's poetry is retrospective. Indeed, his well known formulation of the source of poetry - "emotion
recollected in tranquility' succinctly defines the desired state of mind and the role of memory in helping to achieve it. He wants the emotion, but he does not want it to be immediate and pressing. He goes on to say that in the "mood" in which "successful composition generally begin", the emotion is contemplated till the tranquility gradually disappears, and an emotion kindred to that produced a new feeling; but he at once adds that the emotion of whatever kind and in whatever degree is qualified, the mind will be in the state of enjoyment. In other words, emotions of whatever kind, even the more painful ones are not to be allowed to intrude to spoil the balance of pleasure.

On how and why the mind can retain this blissful state, Wordsworth is delightfully vague. It may be because the emotion is contemplated rather than immediately felt. The poet may vividly recollect the original powerful feelings, but he does so from a distance that the recollected emotion can not overwhelm and disturb, but can only arouse and excite the mind to pleasurable activity.

Besides memory, Wordsworth possessed a powerful historical imagination capable of vividly reconstructing the past. In fact his sense of history was so strong, that sometimes, he says, it literally overwhelmed and obliterated his consciousness of the present. For example on his first entry into London, while sitting on the top of a coach, he saw

Vulgar men about me, trivial form
of houses, streets of men and
things, Mean shapes on every side. (35)

But Wordsworth's sense of history usually seems not to have blotted out the present, but rather to have minimized imagination. He was able to see the present, with all its restless concern and demands, against such a vast panorama that it was diminished in importance and lost some of its power to agitate and
Wordsworth has virtually illimitable capacity to love and thanks to these endowments, he sees life palpitating with joy and grief in those that are apparently inanimate or trivial objects of life. In the opinion of Wordsworth ‘To her fair works did nature link/the human soul that through me ran’ (36) Whitehead pertinently remarks: ‘The literature of the nineteenth century, especially its English poetic literature is a witness to the discord between aesthetic institution of mankind and the mechanism of Science, (37) Wordsworth believes that the impulse to identify himself with the objects of nature is God sent. Hence he bemoans that man’s innumerable pleasures obtainable from intimacy of nature are thwarted by urban occupations. Elsewhere the poet contrasts his response to a serene milieu in nature with that of a little companion walking with him. The presence of one spirit dwelling in the different manifestations of nature is admirably brought out here:

It is a beauteous evening, calm and free;
The holy time is quiet as a Nun
Breathless with its adoration; the broad Sun
Is sinking down in its tranquility. (38)

The solemn image of a nun reaffirms the effect of quietitude to the evening time. The poet now senses the supreme life that lives in all.

The gentleness of heaven broods O’er the Sea:
Listen! the Mighty Being is awake,
And doth with his eternal motion make
A sound like thunder - everlastingly (39)

The impact of an intuitive sensing of the “mighty Being” is not without its effects on the poet’s mind. He becomes keenly solicitous of the innocent and
immature girl walking with him. Though both of them are exposed to the same "Nature Scape" the older man's response is but of a sombre hue, because a heart that has known the expressions of that "Being" is incapable of vanity. So the poet says:

Dear child! Dear child! that walkest with me here,
If thou appear untouch'd by solemn thoughts
Thy nature is not therefore less divine:
Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year;
And worshipp' st at the Temple's inner shrine,
God being with thee when we know it not... (40)

The last line comes as an antithetical revelation for it warns us that those who perceive the explicit workings of God or Nature may not see its implicit.

Wordsworth's "To The Daisy" is a pointer to his faith that nothing is mean, petty and trivial in nature.

... For thou art worthy,
Thou unassuming Common place
of Nature, with that homely face,
And yet with something of a grace,
Which love makes for thee (41)

One tends to agree in this context, with the poet's biographer, Mary Moorman, that "Wordsworth's maternal conception of nature echoes throughout his poetry". (42) Though the Daisy is an insignificant flower, nature's maternal love has imbued it with a homeliness that is nonetheless graceful.

Only Wordsworth is capable of showering a string of epithets likening the
lovely daisy to 'a nun demure', "Spnghtly maiden", "a queen in Crown", "a starveling", a little cyclops", "a silver shield with boss of gold", "a pretty star".

Yet like a star, with glittering crest,

Self-poised in air thou seem' st to rest ;-

May peace come never to his nest,

Who Shall reprove thee ! (43)

Mark the intensity of his love for the Daisy. The impact of such objects on the poet is so intense, positively speaking, that it is capable of rousing the poet's imagination at a later time, when he is in repose. The very image of the daffodils fills him with pleasure:

They flash upon that inward eye
which is the bliss of solitude,

And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils. (44)

Wordsworth considers Man and Nature complementary to each other, and the mind of man as the mirror of the fairest and most interesting properties of nature. His poetry appears to express the native or rather naked dignity of man and also the world seen 'in the spirit of love'. The finest of Wordsworth's poetry explores the relationship between Man and Nature and attempts to demonstrate the power of nature in retrieving the individual mind from feelings of materialism, and despair. Wordsworth's early poetry demonstrates his two great pre-occupations - the predicaments of human life and the beauty of the natural world, but in "An Evening Walk" and Descriptive Sketches there is no attempt at integration. "An Evening Walk" written at School during the Cambridge Vacations, describes the Lake District in the tradition of picturesque landscapes, interrupted by the terrible portrayal of the soldier's widow and her two starving children left destitute.
Similarly in *Descriptive Sketches* which is an exercise in the sublime rather than that the picturesque, the difficulties of the Swiss mountaineers and the desperation of the begging children is juxtaposed rather than integrated in the poem. These two poems show that the introduction of man and human life is not just a tautology; Wordsworth surveys not only man and nature, but also the larger significance arising from the interaction between the two; between man and the world around him. And while both these poems are filled with images of beauty and sublimity of nature, they also show that man is fated both to enjoy and to suffer. Wordsworth’s poetry concerning nature’s relation to man gives Wordsworth his peculiar significance as a poet of nature. It is in this poetry that he manifests his remarkable power to “see into the life of things”. For example in the poem entitled “To My Sister” nature pulsates not only with life, but also with the spirit of love. It is an attribute of man. It pervades all nature, and man and nature are knit together by this spiritual bond conceived by Yeats as a ‘Unity of Being’. On the mild March day the poet feels it operative, not only among his feelings but also between them and nature.

Moreover, nature is inspiring and illuminating. She exists in close relation to human mind and heart and man may derive from one moment’s communion with her more than from “years of toiling reason”.

Nature reveals moral laws and impels him to confirm to them. Her spirit is a spirit of beneficence, in communion with which man finds and frames the measure or ideal of his soul, and in harmony with which he endeavours to attune it.

One moment now may give us more

That years of toiling reason

Our minds shall drunk at every pose
Wordsworth had firm faith in the primary affections of man because they bring him close to nature and thus lead him to happiness. That is why princes and kings are not the themes of his poetry. The Cumberland Beggar, Leech Gatherer, Michael, and Cumbrian peasants are his treasure houses.

In "The Old Cumberland Beggar" Wordsworth’s finest vision of the irreducible natural man is traced. Though he is stripped to the nakedness of primordial condition he is still infinite in value. He is neither the agency of revelation nor responsible for a sudden release of Wordsworth’s imagination. He is not a mere medium of visionary utility. He is something far beyond use, a vision of reality in himself. The poem opens with "I saw an aged beggar in my walk", who putting down his staff, takes his scraps and fragments out of a flour bag one by one. He scans them, fixedly and seriously. This plain introduction of the beggar soon yields to a music of love, the beauty of the real:

... In the sun,
Upon the second step of that small pile,
Surrounded by those wild unpeopled hills,
He sate, and ate his food in solitude;
And ever, scattered from his palsied hand,
That still attempting to prevent the waste,
Was baffled still, the crumbs in little showers
Fell on the ground, and the small mountain birds,
Not venturing yet to peck their destined meal,
Approached within, the length of half his staff. (46)

Wordsworth’s descriptive skill endows the beggar with a character shared...
by the human as well as the natural. He is as innocent, dignified and solitary as the wild hills and as loving, miserable, poor and old as an ordinary man. The beggar neither knows nor feels his miserable condition. Habit has made him more an element of nature than of his mortal self. He can not age any more, an idea implied in the poet’s knowledge of him as an old man since his childhood: “he was so old, he seems not older now” (47).

This old man is so helpless in appearance that everyone - “sauntering horseman” or “toll - gatekeeper” or “post boy” — makes way for him, taking special care to keep him from harm. For he can not be diverted or disturbed, but moves on like a natural process. He sees only the ground, but he is tenaciously alive and is beyond desire, even of death. He has eyes, yet he hardly sees. He moves constantly, yet is so still in looks and motion that he can hardly be seen moving. What is the poet’s purpose in juxtaposing the character of a helpless beggar in the old man? Are we not tempted to question, “Is this life? Where is its use?” If we go into such questions it is clear indication of our own dehumanised state, for Wordsworth answers the first question in an affirmative style and to the second in absolute moral passion. There is

... a spirit and pulse of good,

A life and soul, to every mode of being

Inseparably linked. (48)

Wherever he goes, the old man inspires acts of kindness. Is not this an important function or use? He is a binding agent for the memories of good impulses in all around him. Hence, “The mild necessity of use compels/ To acts of love”. (49)

These acts of love, seen in the horseman or toll gatekeeper or post boy dispose their virtue and true goodness. How often have the best in us found
expression in a scene of some humble inmates eating or reposing in their hut? How often have we been touched by the beggars satisfying their hunger with half a loaf by dry bread and water to sleep contentedly under a shade? These are not expressions of pity, for each fills us with a conscious or unconscious resolution to do good, to care for our kind, to remember the great sense and energy of mercy, charity and fits of ideals because of our primary affections, which take us close to the harmony and oneness in nature. Again, Wordsworth must not be mistaken for a social reformer as his poetry has nothing directly to do with social justice as Blake’s or Shelley’s frequently does. The old beggar, free and at home in the heart of the solitudes he wanders, does not intend the humanizing good he passively causes. More than his social aspect, the pivotal concept of the poem is the beggar’s freedom.

Then let him pass, a blessing on his head!
And, long as he can wander, let him breathe
The freshness of the vallies, let his blood
Struggle with frosty air and winter snows;
And let the chartered wind that sweeps the health
Beat his grey locks against his withered face. (50)

He is a man perfectly complete in nature, reciprocating its gifts by being himself, a being one with it.

Let him be free of mountain solitudes,
And have around him, whether heard or not,
The pleasant melody of woodland birds. (51)

Even in the state where his senses have begun failing, he would have chirping birds round him, and mountain solitudes and sudden winds.
Wordsworth's Old Man, Michael, Leech Gatherer, Margaret, Ruth depict absolute integrity of character and unbelievable courage. Surely, there is one feature common to these folks besides their humble living, namely their proximity and breeding in nature. Indeed their courage is different from an urbane one, in a militant sense of the word, which could make one self-conscious and proud.

Most of Wordsworth's poems deal with the gentler, freshening and positive aspects of nature. Quite a number of them describe an April or a summer morning or spring or winter at its terminal stage and many poems revolve round gentle breezes and calm landscape. Even when he speaks of a cataract, it is from the point of view of its evoking gentle pleasure.

It was an April Morning: fresh and clear
The rivulet, delighting in its strength . . .
And yet the voice
Of waters which the winter had supplied,
Was softened down into a vernal tone. (52)

For instance, he thus describes a rivulet leading in its course of joyous "circling" culminating in a cataract where it

Sent forth such sallies of glad sound that-all
Which I till then had heard, appeared the voice
of common pleasure; beast and bird, the lamb,
The shepherd's dog, the linnet and
Vied with this waterfall, and made a song . . . (53)

It is not the lofty or occult in nature that captures Wordsworth's concern. He is not drawn to nature for its own sake. Hence he does not investigate into the
Creator's skill in moulding nature through the blend of beauty and formidability. In "To the Daisy" he makes explicit his objective:

Her divine skill taught me this,
That from everything I saw
I could some instruction draw,
And raise pleasure to the height
Through the meanest object's sight,
By the murmur of a spring,
Or the least bough's rustling;
By a Daisy whose leaves spread
Shut when Titan goes to bed;
Or a shady bush or tree;
She could more infuse in me
Than all Nature's beauties can
In some other wiser man. (54)

The meanest objects in nature - daisy, daffodils, rivulets, hillocks, robin, wren, the old man and the helpless Cumberland folks, Michael, the beggar, Alice, Ruth, Margaret, etc.;—enable the poet to fathom the depths of the divine organisation of things and "rouse pleasure to the height".

Solitude, detachment from human life, absence from the madding crowd, life in the midst of forests, 'the cathedrals of Nature' - these were practised by Wordsworth almost like the Indian sages. The limitations of intellect as an implement for probing the mysteries of the universe are universally acknowledged. Analysis is the destructive intellectual process, while synthesis is a creative
intuitional process. Wordsworth puts into beautiful verse the way of the sages together with their doubt of the reasoning faculty.

Sweet is the lore which nature brings;
Our meddling intellect
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:
We murder to dissect (55)

Wordsworth treats "Solitude" in various contexts, "solitude" of orphans; as in the case of Ruth, who is lonely because of an unfeeling stepmother; or "solitude" of desertion by love, as in the same poem when Ruth is forsaken by the young boy; solitude of orphans arising from poverty as in "Alice Fell". In this poem the child's grief is intense; when endowed with imagination she sees the tattered remnants of her cloak whirling in the wheel-spokes of a postchaise, fiercely driven by strangers on lonesome roads through a night of storm. She weeps bitterly despite the stranger's attempt to console her, checking her sobs for a moment to answer a question and then renewing her wails as if she had lost her only friend and the thought would choke her very heart. This is not merely because she is orphaned, but because she is poor. It is this poverty and this grief that Wordsworth reiterates forcefully like hammering blows such soul-wrenching agony for the loss of something one treasures. What does it matter whether the thing is a woman, or a kingdom, or simply a tattered cloak?

Wordsworth argues that it is the passion that counts. There is no exaggeration here, no romanticising of the girl's grief. Schiller's definition of the "Sentimental Poet" suggests this the characteristic, which the eighteenth century brought to tragic art. "He reflects upon the impression that objects make upon him and only in that reflection is the emotion grounded which he himself experiences and which he excites in us". (56)
The word "human" for Wordsworth has wider connotation than our idea of it. Man is by far the apex of creation, endowed with rationality and intellect. It is the innate capacity of the human mind to see a friend in an old man or little girl, in a bird, animal or stone and flowers; its spontaneous identification with light, love, life and beauty among things great or small. A.C. Bradley pertinently remarks that "Wordsworth was the poet of 'community', a great part of the poet's verse was totally dedicated to the affections of home, neighbourhood and country and to that soul of joy and love links together all nature's children and steals from earth to man and from man to earth" (57) This is Wordsworth's implication of the "human heart", which marks the evolutionary stage in his philosophy. As in all great poets, in Wordsworth, too, we witness the "unwillingness to submit the poetic spirit to the charms of the fact and real circumstance". He himself says so in the Fenwick Note to "An Evening Walk": "I will conclude my notice of this poem by observing that the plan of it has not been confined to a particular walk, or an individual place; a proof of my unwillingness to submit the poetic spirit to the charms of fact and real circumstance"(58)

He perceives city smoke differently from cottage smoke. The city is a way of life, a state of mind, a mood from which Wordsworth had suffered in London, and Goslar and elsewhere, and from which he now suddenly feels free:

Yes, the Realities of life - so cold,
so Cowardly, so ready to betray,
So stinted in the measure of their grace,
As we report them, doing them much wrong (59)

Town people are susceptible to immoral ways, being exposed to the sordid realities of corruption. Wordsworth lambasts a man in the prime of his life, indulging in mutual hatred, conspiracies and cheap mouthings.

... Shame that this was ever so,
Not to the Boy or Youth, but shame to thee,
sage Man, thou sun in its meridian strength,
Thou flower in its full blow, thou King and Crown
of human Nature; shame to thee, sage Man.
The prudence, thy experience, thy desires,
Thy apprehensions - blush thou for them all! (60)

But back in the Grasmere shades the poet is safe:
What once was deemed so difficult, is now
Smooth, easy, without obstacle; what once
Did to my blindness seem a sacrifice,
The same is now a choice of the whole heart. (61)

Drawing upon his experiences on London and Grasmere Wordsworth realises that the human heart has innumerable obstacles to surmount in carrying out the dictates of goodness among city life, whereas they are spontaneously carried out among country folks. The spirit of goodness is immanent in every heart living close to nature.

... among the bowers
Of blissful Eden this was neither given,
Nor could be given, as possession of the good
Which had been sighed for, ancient thought fulfilled,
And dear Imagination realised,
upto their highest measure, ... (62)

Here he comes close to Donne in the conceit used by him. That which the Garden of Eden lacked - the possession of the good - the dales and valleys of
Grasmere have in abundance. He therefore implores them—:

Embrace me, then, ye Hills, and Close me in,

Now in the clear and open day a feel

Your guardianship; I take it to my heart (63)

And unlike the insatiate desires, rantings and frustrations suffered in London, here, amidst the beautiful landscape of Grasmere with valley, crays, woody steeps, lake, green island and its winding shores, "multitude of little rocky hills "What want we? Have we not perpetual steams,/ warm wood, and sunny hills, and fresh green fields" (64) The poet recognises the cause for contentment, peace and health here, unlike in London and at Goslar. And in this recognition may be seen his philosophy of the unity and oneness in all the varied objects of God's creation.

'Tis (but I cannot name it), tis the sense
Of majesty, and beauty, and repose,
A blended holiness of earth and sky,
Something that makes this individual spot,
This small abiding - place of many men,
A termination, and a last retreat,
A Centre, come from whereso'er you will,
A Whole without dependence or defect,
Made for itself and happy in itself,
Perfect contentment, Unity entire. (65)

Thus Wordsworth's acknowledgement of the immense treasures of life available at Grasmere is clear indication of the poet's disposition towards it.
One of Wordsworth's peculiar achievement was to raise poetic autobiography into a region of universal interest. Keeping in view his definition of the function of a poet, his poems never lose sight of the human significance of his poetic progress. Mark these lines:

The child is father of the Man
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each in natural piety. (66)

Apparently, like the divine emanation in the Immortality Ode, poetic sensibility was innate in Wordsworth from early childhood, though it flowered later in poems like The Prelude. How nature moulded the poet's mind in childhood, how disappointments being not personal, but general and political, unsettled him, and how nature acting through more kindly influences catalysed the creative impulse,— such in brief, is the story of The Prelude. In the above quoted lines, there is a distinct departure from established thought. Wordsworth does not believe in the traditional notions of the poet as a heaven-sent genius, who owes nothing to birth, circumstances and conditions, who lives apart from other boys and astonishes the world by his brilliance and precocity. His immortal observation "The child is father of the man" repudiates this traditional notion.

Where, then it may be asked are the signs of the poetic genius? The incidents of boyhood which seem ordinary become extraordinary in telling and this is characteristic of Wordsworth in particular. The discerning reader of The Prelude will not miss them.

I heard among the solitary hills
Low breathings coming after me, and sounds
Of undistinguishable motion, steps
Almost as silent as the turf they trod (67)
A certain amount of inspiration must have been aroused from the wonder felt during the adventure on the lake;

When, from behind that craggy steep till then
The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge,
As if with voluntary power instinct
Upreared its head. (68)

The following lines serve to express the aesthetic capabilities of the poet during the period of excitement.

The leafless trees and every icy crag
Tinkled like iron; While far distant hills
Into the tumult sent an alien sound
Of melancholy not unnoticed, While the stars
Eastward were sparkling clear, and in the west
The orange sky of evening died away. (69)

These and similar description reveal that while Wordsworth's experiences were such as might have befallen anyone, his genius lay in quickened sensibility and in deeper apprehension. The poet had been through many depressions, his thwarted hopes had engendered a morbidity which is described in The Prelude Book XI:

... til demanding formal proof,
And seeking it in everything, I lost
All feeling of conviction, and in fine,
Sick, wearied out with contrarities.
Yielded up moral questions in despair (70)

The "confessional" element in Wordsworth's poetry is often interesting,
elevating and even indispensable to the understanding of the poet's mind. But obsessive and unnecessary use of 'I' becomes irritating to the reader. Poems like "We are seven", "Anecdote for Fathers" and "Leech Gatherer" in which the author introduces himself, and the interlocutor

I thought of Chatterton, the Marvellous Boy,
The sleepless soul that perished in his pride,
Of Him who walked in glory and in joy
Following his plough, along the mountain side
By our own spirits are we deified:
We poets in our youth begin in gladness;
But thereof come in the end despondency and sadness (71)

All these poems could have been written in the objective manner, with the author's perpetually intending presence. Even the objectively written narrative of "Lucy Gray" contains a reference to the poet himself in its opening stanza, which could easily have been left out. In the case of "Michael", too, the introductory passage loses verve and vivacity, because the poet obtrudes himself on the reader's attention by saying:

Therefore, although it be a history
Homely and rude, I will relate the same
For the delight of a few natural hearts (72)

For Wordsworth the unsettling tug of immediate human concern seems often to have been lessened by his perfection of an immense natural world, surrounding and engulfing these concerns. Seen against the large, tranquil nature, human life itself becomes reduced in importance and human passions are felt to be less urgent and compulsive. Indeed, one sometimes has an impression in reading Wordsworth that man is a brief appearance on the surface, a kind of fungus
momentarily clinging to the bleak, immutable rocks. For Wordsworth, the immediate result of this kind of contrast was, of course, that it tended to encourage a composed state of mind. Thus, when Wordsworth crossed at twilight, a Penninsula on “Esthwaite’s Lake” he saw on the opposite shore a heap of garments which no one came to claim:

    Meanwhile the calm lake
    Grew dark with all the shadows on its breast
    And now and then, a fish leaping shaped
    The breathless stillness (73)

Wordsworth, however was not frightened, for he explains, he had seen such sights before in the fairy land. In this characteristic incident, the drowned man, “a shape of terror” guiltily transgressing on the breathless stillness is an image of humanity. Set against the enormous backdrop of lake and hills, he can make little impression. Even at that moment, Wordsworth notices the surrounding beauteous scene. The fear inspired by the drowned man and the guilt he symbolises have been engulfed in the immensity of nature. A similar episode in Wordsworth’s account of the death of a woodman in the forest appears in The Prelude Book VIII. The man is “withering by slow degrees”, but his death takes place amidst—

    Mild gentle airs,
    Birds, running streams, and hills so beautiful,
    On golden evening while the charcoal pile
    Breathed up its smoke (74)

The charcoal pile giving up its smoke may be an implicit metaphor of the man breathing up his soul. As such, it would help to define the tone of the verse, which in any case transform the death to something as natural and painless as the
sun set which envelops it. Here again human suffering has been subsumed in the tranquility of nature.

This contrast of human life with the immensity of nature not only allowed Wordsworth to view human concerns with a detached composure, but it also permitted and at times stimulated, feelings of tender benevolence directed to human life as a whole; feelings which he earnestly desired to cultivate, and which stand in marked contrast to the distress evoked in him by the contemplation of specific human life.

Wordsworth’s physical and mental powers were unfolded mainly under Nature’s guidance and under the benign influence that flowed from its internal heart. Almost like the child of Rousseau’s “Emile” he grew up to maturity. Liberty proved to be an important influence in moulding and fashioning both his body and his mind.

Wordsworth was an innovator in his treatment of nature. Many of his readers worshipped him, in his own time, as the founder of a new religion of Nature. No doubt, a number of poets before Wordsworth had shown their interest in Nature and had given minute and detailed natural description in their poetry. To Milton, who knew Nature chiefly through books, it was a glorious spectacle; but to Wordsworth it was a living power. Most eighteenth century poets were either contented with the description of single scenes in Nature, or they transferred to these scenes their emotions. In other words, they were satisfied with a mere external, unspiritualised view of her beauties. But Wordsworth was a nature poet with a difference. For him Nature was not a spectacle, but a power, and his constant preoccupation was first to understand and then to communicate how that power could operate upon him and mould his mind and spirit. He developed a sense of mutuality between himself and nature. This led him to the curious belief
that good and evil and morality itself, were to be learned, not from contact with men or the clash of mind upon mind in the work-a-day world of human sympathy, or strife, or aspiration, but from nature and his solitary communion with her. Some of these things came to him through the beauty of nature, and some came to him through fear in the presence of the immense and inexplicable aspects of nature. Nature in his poetry is not a mere backdrop of his picture of man, nor a mirror reflecting the feelings of man, but rather as a wonderful anodyne for the soul of man.
Notes and References


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