Nature in the Poetry of Wordsworth

This chapter discusses the treatment of nature in the distinguished poetic work of Wordsworth. ‘Nature’ has played an important role in poetry written in different periods. However, in different ages it received different treatment. Theme of Nature is present not only in English literature but also in World literature. During the Elizabethan age, the general outline of the medieval world picture survived. Nature in English poetry has sometimes taken the form of pastoralism. Pastoral poetry has attracted our attention and in the days of Shakespeare and Spenser this type of poetry had become very popular.

“Elyson regions where we are to meet with nothing but joy, and plenty and contentment; where every gale whispers pleasure and every shade promises repose”.1

Likewise, theme of eighteenth century’s poetry was ‘Nature.’ It was everywhere in region, in ethics and philosophy and in politics. But here, Nature is methodized, having nothing to do with the manifest nature of Wordsworth’s landscapes. Nature has always been a controlling idea in western thought but it was never as active as it was in the eighteenth century. It was an age of Spinoza, Shaftsbury, Newton, William Godwin, Joseph, Priestly, David Hume and many others who emphasized Nature. Critics and poets were also continuously and habitually referring to Nature as their standard, ‘First follow Nature, and your judgment frame by her just standard, which is still the same.’ 2

During the middle ages people held the idea of the controlling laws of nature, but the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries found nature as a liberating force. Nature during eighteenth century in literary world acquired two more meanings, i.e, reason and good sense. Basil Willey comments this attitude:
“Nature for the poet is the idea, the form, potentiality, which in history, and in fact, strive to realize themselves in refractory matter. Art completes what Nature leaves imperfect; Nature offers a brazen world—the poets only deliver a golden.”

Wordsworth’s view of nature is well known. He had a innovative and original philosophy to unfold, and had a individual view of nature to expound. Poet had a realization of God in Nature and got sensuous manifestations that delight most of the poets of nature. His view of nature is different from that of other poets of his age. In poems like Tintern Abbey and The Prelude Wordsworth has delineated to what extent his love of Nature was developed and passed through the various stages. In the first stage Wordsworth’s attitude was shown to Nature that he roamed about delightedly, freely in the open air. Thus poet found pleasure in roaming about in the midst of Nature. Like a deer, poet leaped about over the mountains, by the side of the deep rivers, and along the lonely streams. He wandered about wherever Nature led him. His wanderings in the lap of Nature is Known as “glad animal movements’ and the pleasure he enjoyed in the midst of Nature is called a coarse pleasure.

His childhood days were spent in the midst of beautiful sights and sounds of nature. Wordsworth’s first love of nature was a healthy boy’s delight in outdoor life. Furthermore, contrast can be realized in his attitude toward Nature, as his mind began to speculate and had a rational approach in his attitude. In his early youth, he addresses the spirit of Nature both as a rejoicing Spirit and as a teacher of the mind and heart. In the Prelude, we find that in this early stage Nature was:
‘But secondary to my own pursuits
And animal activities, and all
Their trivial pleasures.’ (The Prelude VIII 43 to 45) 4

In the second stage Wordsworth’s love for Nature was purely based on physical sense. Nature now appealed chiefly to his senses. Poet felt pleasure while he sees the colours of Nature smells the fragrance of Nature, touches the objects of nature and hears the sweet sounds of nature. Wordsworth developed a passion for the sensuous beauty of nature. Although, there were many poets as his contemporary but none is ahead of him, his passion for nature is universally well-known. But, as he grew up, his ‘coarser pleasures’ lost their charm for him, and Nature was loved with an unreflecting passion. Referring to the boyish pleasures of the period when he viewed Nature with a purely physical passion, he writes in The Prelude:

‘The props of my affections were removed,
And yet the building stood, as if sustained by its own spirit!’ (The Prelude II 279-81) 5

In Tintern Abbey, Wordsworth depicts, Nature as an object of a ‘passion for the picturesque. During this period the colours and shapes of mountains and wood were an appetite to him. There was a time when the voice of waterfall haunted him like a passion. Thus he loved Nature with an unreflecting passion.

‘I cannot paint
What then I was. The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite.’ (Tintern Abbey 75- 80) 6
In France he came to know aching joys and dizzy raptures of human suffering while he was in contact with Nature.’ The French Revolution opened his eyes and made him realize the dignity of the common man. During this period his love of Nature became linked with the love of man. Now he could hear in Nature ‘sad music of humanity’. His love of nature was humanized.

‘The still sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue.’ (Tintern Abbey 91-93)

Ultimately, at the last stage, Wordsworth’s love for Nature became spiritual and intellectual. He now became thoughtful. Therefore, while he took a glance at Nature, he was filled with deep thoughts. Now he could find an inner meaning and a hidden significance in Nature. The external beauty of Nature was still appreciated by him. It was the inner or hidden significance of Nature which made him a thinker. He feels a sense of sublime spirit, the working of an Almighty in all the objects of Nature, as in the light of the setting sun, in the round ocean, in the blue sky, and in all things. At this stage, he also realised the educative influence of Nature, and the power of Nature to mould the human personality and human character. He took Nature as the nurse, the guide, the guardian of his heart, and the soul of his moral being. Thus this is known as the stage of Pantheism. Poet has a firm faith that the divine Spirit is prevalent in all the objects of Nature. It can be seen in Tintern Abbey where he says,

‘Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man.’ (Tintern Abbey 97-99)

Wordsworth’s love of Nature is more tender and truer than any other English poets. He has given a special status to Nature in his poems. He believes
that there is a divine spirit in nature and the company of nature gives joy to the human heart. According to him Nature never betrays the heart that loves her. Moreover, the teaching of Nature is so effective that no worldly evil can harm. He looked upon nature as a healing power. Above all, he regarded her as a great moral preacher. He believed that there is a link between man and nature. In his eyes, ‘Nature is a teacher whose wisdom we can learn if we will, and without which any human life is vain and incomplete.’9 A minute study of ‘The Excursion’ shows the effect of physical environment on the poet’s mind. As we have seen that Wordsworth’s mind was greatly influenced by his natural surroundings, it is none the less true with regard to ‘The Excursion’. All through the poem it is evident that he is affected by local scenery, and the effects of his intimacy with nature are manifested in every book. It was the natural beauty and grandeur of Race down, Alfoxden, Grasmere, and Allan Bank that appealed to him and furnished materials for description, as well as inspiration and insight. Hazlitt rightly point out: “His mind is, as it were, coeval with the primary forms of things; his imagination holds immediately from nature and ‘owes no allegiance’ but to the elements.”10 The Old Cumberland Beggar’ is one the outstanding poems of Wordsworth which brings out the peculiar teaching of the poet in respect to both Nature and Man. It was inspired by the war of the political economists “upon mendacity in all its forms, and by implication, if not directly, on alms-given also.”11 It shows the intimacy of the poet to both Nature and Man, and also shows that both are equal to in their judgment. Wordsworth has a optimistic approach and it is brought out in this poem in more pronounced manner than here before. It is seen that a feeling of goodness is associated with all things. It cannot be dissociated even from the meanest and most degraded, the vilest and most brutish, of Nature’s forms, much less from Man, even in his lowest estate:
‘T is Nature’s law
That none, the meanest of created things,
Of forms created the most vile and brute,
The dullest or noxious should exist
Divorced from good. (Old Cumberland Beggar 73-77) 12

Wordsworth has a mystic approach to Nature. Mysticism is an immediate, direct, intuitive knowledge of God. It is attained through personal religious experience. Thus it is a cognitive process as well as a mode of feeling. Quest of the invisible reality and its apprehension through contemplation method to a realization of all existence. These mystic’s claim ultimately brings about a state of bliss or serenity. In his poems, poet often describes ‘the blessed and serene moods’ that revealed the mysteries of existence and invariably, lightened the burdens of many an unpleasant reality of life. Since his childhood, he was given to visions. When he was a boy, he was able to realize a living contact with some indefinable friendly, but bodiless presences in the world of fact.

‘I felt the sentiment of being spread
O’er all that moves and all that seemeth still;
O’er all that, lost beyond the reach of thought
And human knowledge, to thee human eye

Invisible, yet liveth to the heart; (The Prelude II, 401-405) 13

Wordsworth’s concept of universal kinship is inseparably connected with the formal mystic tradition. It has mainly been derived from Plato’s theory of the phenomenal world which is a shadow of the Absolute Reality, existing as an idea in the ineffable mind; belief in the inherent unity of all existence had acquired special significance for Christian mystics. The soul’s keen desire for merging in the infinite and its experience of bodiless union with the latter constitute the highest form of joy, termed by the western mystics as ‘Ecstasy’. 
‘Wordsworth’s mystic view of the inner relationship in a unicentric universe impelled by a common soul, and his cosmic sympathy are thus distant echoes of the Plutian concept of an informed and living universe.’14

In moments of deeper insights, he passionately realized and sang of this spiritual affinity between man and nature:

A sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man.’ (Tintern Abbey, 95-99) 15

To Wordsworth, Nature was not only imbued with a merely passive, animistic existence but also endowed with consciousness as well. She was kind, sensitive and responsive to man’s interest in her. She never betrayed ‘the heart that loved her’, so the poet is prompted by this innate love. He rejoiced in the midst of nature as a worshiper and gratefully pledged deeper loyalty to her. The faith, thus reposed, yielded happier results; for nature did not only lighten his pensive moods, but also provided food for future thoughts. Nature is a source of inspiration and strength to him. Whenever he suffers from the weariness of the world, he takes shelter in the lap of nature. She provides him with a balmy touch and soothing effect. In the hour of adverse circumstances, she rescued him from utter ‘dereliction and dismay’, and preserved the final serenity of his mood. He finds a never failing principle of joy in nature.

‘The gift is yours,
Ye winds and sounding cataracts! Tis yours
Ye mountains! Thine, O nature! Thou hast fed
My lofty speculations and in thee,
For this uneasy hearts of ours, I find
A never failing principle of joy
And purest passion. (The Prelude II, 445-51) 16

Wordsworth’s philosophy of Nature also contains some pantheistic trends. In pantheism, the doctrine of the translation of the one into many receives theological sanction. Wordsworth not only rejoiced in discovering a common soul running through the round ocean, the blue sky, the setting sun and the mind of a man, but also assigned to nature the superior role of a teacher, a spiritual nurse and the harbinger of mystic insights. In brief, she was fully divinized:

‘Nature through all conditions hath a power
To consecrate, if we have eyes to see,
The outside of her creatures, and to breathe
Grandeur upon the very humblest face
Of human life.’ (The Prelude XII, 282-86) 17

In some measure, Vedantic doctrine of the divine Maya seems to resemble Wordsworth’s concept of nature. Apparently, mystic approach on the poet’s part is undeniable. Gratitude, hopefulness and spontaneity of faith are the features of the mystic view of religion. Integral parts of Christian mysticism have three distinct stages of spiritual ascent - the purgative, the illuminative, and the unitive. In the first stage, the meditator seeks to purge himself of all temporal interests and the conventional impediments to spiritual progress. Thus the seeker prepares himself for the illuminative stage of contemplation. In the second stage, the clouds of ‘unknowing’ are dispelled and the devotee feels himself enwrapped in the light of ‘knowing’ and love. The third stage brings about complete spiritual union with the Ineffable, culminating in the attendant experience of rapturous joy - the ecstasy. A minute study of Wordsworth’s poetry of nature, specially his attitude to nature, seems to suggest a fairly correspondent pattern. Though, he had an instinctive love for nature since
childhood, his kinship with nature reaffirmed in mature days. Wordsworth recalled how in moments of spiritual perplexity, he warned against himself.

‘Like a cowed monk who hath forsworn the world,
Zealously labored to cut off my heart
From all the sources of her former strength.’ (The Prelude XII, 78-80) 18

In his poem ‘A Poet’s Epitaph’ a well known poem, written in 1799, Wordsworth presents his views of what really constitutes a poet and differentiates him from other men. His attitude towards Nature is far removed from that of the scientist or philosopher, who “would peep and botanize upon his mother’s grave.” 19-20 The poet is no such ‘fingering slave’ as this. He is possessed of no such ‘ever dwindling soul.’ He lives on terms of fellowship with Nature, receiving her inspirations and profound impulses-

**He murmurs near the running brooks**

_A music sweeter than their own._ (A Poet’s Epitaph 39-40) 19

The poet views Nature externally and has a insight into her inner life. The poet reaches the heart of things not by the cold processes of the logical intellect- by analysis and dissection, and conclusions there from- but by sympathy, love, meditation, mystical brooding and intuition. It is thus that insight is gained. He is nature’s friend and confident to whom she reveals her deeper life and mind and to whom she speaks her spiritual message. Undoubtedly, Wordsworth expresses to his own experience, describing his own mental processes as a poet. For, as we have seen, it is thus that he deals with Nature and that Nature deals with him. Seldom does he reason about her in his poetry. He meditates, broods and thus receives the vision.

It is the spirit of the age, the genius like Wordsworth emanates from it. He takes the simplest elements of nature and of the human mind. His poetry is based on an opposition between the natural and the artificial, between the spirit
of humanity and the spirit of fashion and of the world. Poet’s concept of nature and man is to trace the action of his unique incommunicable faculty, that strange, mystical sense of a life in natural things and of man’s life as a part of natural things. These strength and colour and character have been drawn from local influences from the hills and streams and from natural sights and sounds. This is the active principle in Wordsworth’s poetry. As we find in, ‘Micheal’ a beautiful poem, in which this sense of the beneficial interaction of Man and Nature is projected in the portrait of Michael himself. He was formed and strengthened by his mountainous environment and his enduring and durable will. If we explore the inner life of nature as Wordsworth conceives it, we find that one of its features is its joy. To The Daisy speaks about the ‘cheerful flower’ as alert and gay. ‘I wandered Lonely as a Cloud’ depicts the jocund daffodils that outdo the sparkling waves in glee. Another poem “Three Years she Grew in Sun and Shower” is well –known poem from the stand point of our special study, composed in the Hartz Forest. He describes a girl as Nature would fashion her were she to be her own- a girl in whom her different moods and the beauty and grace of her fairest forms would be reflected. The poem expresses implicit faith in nature’s consummate art:

The stars of midnight shall be dear
To her: and she shall lean her ear
In many a secret place
Where rivulets dance their wayward round
And beauty form of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face. (Three Years She Grew 25-30) 20

In this way, the doctrine of nature in Wordsworth’s poetry is an unremitting campaign against the destruction of the individual by material and social pressures. For this purpose, he described the poet as ‘the rock of defence for human nature’ ‘an upholder and preserver’ carrying everywhere with him
relationship and love. Being influenced by nature, poet saw himself and Coleridge as a prophet of nature demonstrating the power and beauty of the mind of man:

Prophet of Nature, we to them will speak  
A lasting inspiration, sanctioned  
By reason and by truth; what we have loved  
Others will love and we may teach them how  
A thousand times more beautiful than the earth  
On which he dwells. (The Prelude XIII, 442-48) 21

Nature is a living entity for Wordsworth. The indwelling spirit of nature imparts its own consciousness to all objects of nature.

‘To every natural form rock, fruit, and flower,  
Even the loose stones that cover the highway,  
I gave a moral life 130-132 22

If we explore Nature internally, as poet conceives it, we find that one of its virtues is its joy. He found Nature ‘kind’ and ‘kindly’ and it is ‘fostering Nature’, ‘holy Nature’. Nature teaches a ‘lesson’ deep of love.” He found in the meadows and the woods and mountains the spiritual stimulus that Blake sought in purely imaginary visions. Wordsworth uses the word ‘Nature’ as signifying the norm of conduct for man. Science impartially notes that nature is full of pleasure and pain; but poet regards Nature as ‘fostering’ mother, which leads birds to function as birds. Seizing on this hopeful aspect of things, poet reminds man that he is capable of pleasure in a high degree and exhorts him to cultivate to the utmost the capacities with which Nature has endowed him. French Revolution taught the poet that every human being was intrinsically great and capable of infinite development. “By stripping our own hearts naked, and by looking out of ourselves towards men who lead the simplest lives, and those most according to Nature, men who have never known false refinements,
wayward and artificial desires, effeminate way of thinking and feeling.” 23 In his wanderings on the country roads, he came in contact with the humblest human beings. Their strength and energy surprised him. He saw into the depths of human souls. Soul that appears to have no depth at all to careless eyes. In his poetry Wordsworth shows how human beings fit into the midst of the interplaying forces of Nature. In “Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower”, Lucy is taken up into the life of nature and incorporated with it. The same is true of Michael, then Leech-gather, the Solitary Reaper, the Highland Girl, the Danish Boy, and Louisa in the shade. Wordsworth believes that there is a pre-existing harmony between the mind of man and nature. “Man and Nature, Mind and the external world, are geared together and in unison that is the complete motive principle of the universe. They act and react upon each other, ‘so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure’. The exquisite functioning of this interlocked universe of Mind and Nature is for Wordsworth the highest theme of poetry; in poetry the process actually receives its final consummation.” 24

A careful reading of The Prelude clearly shows that Wordsworth received the best part of his education from nature. In the first two books of this autobiographical poem, we find that Nature has been acting as a sort of glorified parent or schoolmistress. The poet gives ‘thanks to the means which Nature designed to employ’- discipline of fear and joy through which it begins. He has given many examples of Nature’s ministries and interventions whereby it reproved his childish delinquencies:

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. (The Prelude I 322-25) 25
In The Tables Turned, the poet has depicted the difference between practical knowledge and bookish knowledge and asked his friend to leave his books and come out into the open, since he can learn more about man and about moral good or evil from the spring woods than from all the sages.

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can. (The Tables Turned 21-24) 26

Further, we see that poet’s conceptions have an affinity with Rousseau’s that natural man is good and has descended from primitive innocence to corrupt sophistication. As he asserts in the ‘Immortality Ode’ that every common sight was a symbol of celestial light in his childhood but ‘the glory’ and ‘visionary gleam’ have fled away with the weight of increasing materialism and ‘inevitable yoke of earthly freight’. Wordsworth’s “The Tables Turned” has a voice of Rousseau’s philosophy of purity of nature in which he expresses:

Sweet is the lore which nature brings;
Our meddling intellect
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things;
We murder to dissect. (25-28) 27

In fact, through his poetic talent, Wordsworth opened a treasure of a beautiful world to us, full of unimagined vistas of bright days, warm radiant sun beams on white hill tops, sweet scented breeze, gurgling brooks, cool thickets, and merry daffodils. The Poet has a magical touch while he depicts Mother Earth and her bounteous nature. Nature was his cradle as the poet was born in 1770 in Cumberland, a picturesque countryside in England’s Lake Region. The green meadows, the crystal clear lakes; the rolling hills were the playing grounds of his growing up years. Wordsworth felt a sense of intimacy
with Nature right from his childhood. Among his first most significant sonnets ‘Written in very early youth’ he writes:

“Calm is all nature as a resting wheel.
The kin are couched upon the dewy grass;
The horse alone, seen dimly as I pass,
Is cropping audibly his later meal:
Dark is the ground; a slumber seems to steal
O’er vale, and mountain, and the starless sky.” (1-6) 28

In his youth, poet got an opportunity to travel to Switzerland and France, at a time when the ring of rebellion was echoing in the country. From the revolution, a voice of equality and people began to cry for demolishing the bastions of the privileged. Having affected by revolution, Wordsworth was keen to be a part of it. Although poet was prevented by his uncles, he continued to keep a close tab on events in France, but the bloody turn to the revolt left Wordsworth dejected and miserable. English writer and literary critic William Hazlitt writes in his book ‘The Spirit of the Age’ that the Wordsworth’s school of poetry “had its origin in the French Revolution... It was a time of promise, a renewal of the world — and of letters”. 29

It is seen that a man does find peace in the embrace of serenity when the war drums have fatigued his senses to the end. Vague as it may sound, but after witnessing politically tumultuous and violent struggles, connecting with Nature may have been Wordsworth’s way of rejuvenation. On September 16, 1798, Coleridge, Dorothy, and Wordsworth left England for Germany; Coleridge left Wordsworth at Humburg, going to Ratzeburg then to Gottingen. From here Wordsworth went to Gosler, where they stayed until February 10. But the poet did not pass his time here idly, and from here he produced a number of poems accordingly, and most of his poems bear the impact of nature. In this series, at
the outset at ‘There was a Boy’ is merely an extract work and later it was known as ‘The Prelude’ as his autobiographical work. His preface to the edition of 1815 throws light on his personal character and the development of his imagination under the influence of nature. As for imagination, he refers

“I have represented a commutation and transfer of internal feelings, cooperating with external accidents to plant for immortality, conjoined impressions of sound and sight in the celestial soil of the imagination.”30

Further, referring the poem ‘There was a Boy’ which tells about the familiarity of the boy with poet, who pressed the palms of his hands together, used “to blow mimic hooting to the silent owls”. Thus we see that his conception of nature going beyond the gates of sense, engaging the imagination, and warmed by a strong mystical feeling results finally in poetic insight. This impact can be seen in the following lines:

A pause
Of silence mocked his best skill
Then sometimes, in that silence, while he hung
Listening, (There was a Boy 16 to 19) 31

In the poem ‘Nutting’ the poet has delineated the circumstances under which great change came in his approach to his nature. After his ‘merciless ravage’ something mysterious touched him and he felt that ‘there is a spirit in the woods’. From now onward he realized a divine principle in the heart of nature. William Wordsworth changed the course of English Poetry. He made its subject the internal world of man, the strivings of the mind and the sublime experience of the soul. His immediate predecessors John Dyer, James Thomson and Thomas Gray wrote nature poetry like Wordsworth, but in a rather different manner. They described the external world in a conventional style, almost as a series of two-dimensional, painted scenes, in a stage set. There are
so many external hints of a greater spiritual reality; trees are symbols, rocks and stones a hidden language, mountains mysterious statements made by a creator who tries to communicate with his creation. This supreme consciousness, spirit of nature, or God is present everywhere. This is known as the stage of Pantheism. This faith of the poet shows that the eternal spirit is prevalent in all the objects of nature and it is forcefully expressed. In Tintern Abbey the poet gives expression to his feelings:

‘A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thoughts
And rolls through all things’. (100-102) 32

There are a number of passages of nature-depiction in Wordsworth’s poetry which are scattered. These passages contain marvelous descriptions of different aspects of nature. In The Prelude the poet has made comparison with himself to an Aeolian harp which answers with harmony to every touch of the wind. In most of his poems, the poet has depicted delicate and subtle expression to the sheer sensuous delight of the world of nature. Here the poet feels the element of joy of spring in ‘It was an April Morning’:

‘The Spirit of enjoyment and desire
And hopes and wishes from all living things
Went circling like a multitude of sounds’ (6-8) 33

A careful introspection of Wordsworth’s nature-depiction shows that his eye and ear were very sensitive. In this connection Arthur Compton Ricket observes:

‘As the poet of the eye he has many peers and in richness of effect and subtlety must yield the palm to a crowd of singers less great than himself; but when it comes to the symbolism of sound, Wordsworth is supreme.” 34
A wavering in poet’s moods reflects his early childhood, suggested as a epitome of how we develop morally and spiritually. It reflects the moments of joy and spontaneous child pleasure. His most evolved self sprouts from his most frightening experience remembered as sustenance for the development of his creative spirit and sympathetic imagination. In The Prelude the poet has expressed extremely the inner life of nature. Once when he had stolen a bird from the trap of some other boy, he heard among the solitary hills. In the same way, when he had stolen a boat to explore the silent lake in the evening, he felt as if a huge peak up reared its head.

‘And growing still in stature the grim shape
Towered up between me and the stars and still,
For so it seemed. (The Prelude, I, 381-383) 35

The main goal of the poet’s life is to reveal the invisible impulses at work behind the outward beauty of nature. In the poem ‘To My Sister’ the poet recognizes ‘a sense of joy’ in nature and a blessed power that rolls through all things about us. These poems deserve a more absolute acceptance as a record of Wordsworth’s thought than some critics have been inclined to give them.’36Further poet states that it is principle of nature that the life of the whole imparts a pulse of good to each fragment. As the poet declares in The Excursion:

Whate’er exist hath properties that spread
Beyond itself communicating good
A smile blessing or with evil mixed. (Book IX 10-12) 37

The poet’s disposition towards natural objects closely appears in poem after poem. The spiritual unity of nature enters into the design of ‘I wandered Lonely as Cloud,’ Nutting, Hart-Leap well, and ‘Lines Written in Early spring’. An advice of life and interplay distinguishes many scattered lines:
The winds come to me from the hills of sleep
And all the earth is gay. 28-29) 38

Wordsworth’s approach to Nature is that of a mystic. What the poet found in the meadows and the woods and mountains the spiritual stimulus that Blake sought in purely imaginary visions. Wordsworth remained a poet of ‘the mighty world of eye and ear’ till the end of his life. So his mysticism is grounded and rooted in the senses. His nature mysticism is clearly evident in Tintern Abbey:

That serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,-
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul. (41- 46) 39

The poem ‘The Excursion’ also reveals the poet of insight, the mystical intuitionalist who has ‘the vision and the faculty divine’ whose mind surpasses the limits of sense and ordinary poetic imagination, and sees into the inner life of reality. Consequently, we find, a rich spiritual conception of the physical world. Book I, which records the history of the wanderer, is saturated with this spiritual conception of corporeal things, and in Book IX we find the affirming as active Principle in ‘every form of being, the soul of all the worlds, uniting all things into a spiritual brotherhood’

In this sequence, going forward his poetry, the poet shows how human beings fit into the midst of the interplaying forces of nature. The poet believes that there is a pre-existing harmony between the mind of man and nature. Thus, he writes in The Recluse:
For the discerning intellect of man,
When wedded to this goodly universe,
In love and holy passion.’ (The Recluse Book- I 52-54) 40

Since, the communion of the individual mind and the external world are exquisitely fitted to each other which is possible. But this communion is possible only when the soul of man is in harmony with the soul of nature. In his poetry the poet shows how human being, who is separated from all that in everyday humanity, is disturbing or distressing. Here are the appropriate lines from the poem ‘Three Years She Grew:

‘The silence and the calm
Of mute insensate things.’ 17-18 41

The nineteenth century poets believed in the goodness of Nature. The rein now passed in the hands of poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats. These poets were the pillars of romantic poetry, men with imagination and energy with firm determination to keep the fire ablaze. Nature was at the centre of their poetry. She was the perennial source of their inspiration. She was a loving mother always ready to receive her prodigal sons back into her lap. Shelley passes the visible shows of nature to the larger cosmic operations in which she manifests her power. In Queen Mab he says that the justice of Nature may be found in man’s own heart. Keats sought beauty in every form of Nature which suffused the mind and heart of the poet. They wanted a relief from the burdens of city life. Nature provided the relief by affording a calm and tranquil atmosphere. John Stuart Mill, whose famous essay ‘on Nature’ had given a severe jolt to the people’s pre-conceived notions about the love and benevolence of Nature, too found solace in the poetry of Wordsworth. He read the poetry of Wordsworth that acted like a medicine to his ailing mind and heart.
“What made Wordsworth’s poems a medicine for my state of mind, was that they expressed, not mere outward beauty, but states of feeling, under the excitement of beauty. They seemed to be the very culture of feelings, which I was in quest of. In them I seemed to draw from a source of inward joy, of sympathetic and imaginative pleasure, which could be shared in by all human being.” 

Literature of this period was based on love, fascinations, obsessions, myths, and nature. A majority of Wordsworth’s literature expressed his obsession with nature.

Three poems which express this obsession are “Composition upon Westminster Bridge”, My heart leaps up when I behold,“ and the most popular, “I wandered lonely as a Cloud.” In the poem “Composition upon Westminster Bridge,” he is consumed by the beauty of the scenery. In the poem My Heart Leaps up when I Behold, the poet sees a rainbow in the sky, he feels great joy and happiness. There was a rainbow when he was born. There is a rainbow now when he is a grown-up man. There will be a rainbow when he becomes old. If he does not see a rainbow now or in the future, he longs to die. The poet wishes to pass his days as a continuous chain showing deep respect for nature.

I wandered lonely as a Cloud.” The speaker says that, wandering like a cloud floating above hills and valleys, he encountered a field of daffodils beside a lake. The dancing, fluttering flowers stretched endlessly along the shore, and though the waves of the lake danced beside the flowers, the daffodils outdid the water in glee. The speaker says that a poet could not help but be happy in such a joyful company of flowers. He says that he stared and stared, but did not realize what wealth the scene would bring him. For now, whenever he feels “vacant” or “pensive,” the memory flashes upon “that inward eye / That is the bliss of solitude,” and his heart fills with pleasure, “and dances with the daffodils.”
The poem is a recollection of his travel on the Westminster Bridge in London on one early morning. Wordsworth seems to be drawn into the scenery for it is the early morning and all are still asleep and calm. In the poem, Ode: Intimations of Immortality From Recollection of Early Childhood, in the first stanza, the speaker says wistfully that there was a time when all of nature seemed dreamlike to him, “appareled in celestial light,” and that time is past; “the things I have seen I can see no more.” In the second stanza, he says that he still sees the rainbow, and that the rose is still lovely; the moon looks around the sky with delight, and starlight and sunshine are each beautiful. Nonetheless the speaker feels that a glory has passed away from the earth. The way that everything was laid out from the houses to the buildings to the sun’s glow over it all just seemed to fit together perfectly as if Westminster Bridge overlooked the town being, was a completed puzzle. This view may not be the typical natural scene but it’s not unnatural. In his nature work Wordsworth did away with allusions to classical gods and goddesses, nymphs, Sprites, and heroes of Mythology.

As a lover of the meadows the woods and mountains; and all that we behold' became the principle subject of his verse. All in poems such as The Prelude and Tintern Abbey Wordsworth's poetry is the poetry of consciousness becoming aware of itself, of man using contemplation of the natural world as a means of coming to grips with his cosmic insignificance. It is poetry of transcendence, in which the individual soul touches Divinity by putting aside the petty needs of ego and materialistic distractions- 'The fever of the world.' Wordsworth is one of the few English poets to describe mystical states and his writings contain similarities with Buddhist and Yogic scripture. He describes a 'serene and blessed mood' in Tintern Abbey:
"The breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul…” (43-46)

‘Lines Written in Early Spring’ is a classical poem by Wordsworth. Basically, this poem is replete with love, simplicity, tenderness and love of nature. In this respect, the poet conceives that the happiness of nature should be paralleled by happiness of mankind: “To her fair works did nature link the human soul that through me ran; And much it grieves my heart to think what man has made of man.” 44 In this poem nature has been delineated in a very positive way. The poet has recreated a spring ambience because he states ‘and tis my faith that every flower’ (line 11) or the birds around me hopp’d and play’d’ (line 13) whatever he depicted in this example is very much connected with spring season. The poet has depicted the season with harmonious touches and tenderness due to which it makes us feel very calm and relaxed. We can also see and observe that calm in lines 17, 18, 19 and 20 where he says ‘the budding twigs spread out their fan to catch the breezy air, and I must think, do all I can, that there was pleasure there”.

Further the poet recreates the feeling of pure air in the lap of nature, the air will be fresh and uncontaminated and there will not be problem for breathing and we can enjoy the explosion of freshness. Therefore, he is delighted in the beautiful moments while lying under a tree seeing the lovely nature and breathing that pure air. In this beautiful poem, nature plays a significant role. However, nature has different meanings for Wordsworth, depending upon the poem he is talking about. In one of them we can easily find that nature is depicted as full of calm, being in harmony with birds or leaves flourishing.

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Nature captivates the modern poet no less than the poets of other ages. In spite of the smoke and murkiness of the machine world of today, the modern poet feels a deep love and delight for nature. It is not the spiritual or emotional life of nature that fascinates the modern poet, but only the simple charm and poetry of her outward manifestation of flowers, birds wind, and countryside. The modern poet writes about nature with a rare freshness and vividness. Traces are visible of specialized love of certain region, as Robert Bridges depicts of the south country. The sea has found its laureate in John Masefield. The poet today invests nature with own mood. He uses his subjective experiences with the objective realities of nature. His method is not photographic; it is impressionistic. He regards Nature as the highest excellence which man has achieved through the gradual process of evolution. There were many other poets during Wordsworth’s days who wrote poems, thoroughly impregnated with the love of nature, but Wordsworth’s treatment of nature differs from others. So, he puts upon the moral influences of nature. He loves her as he might love a mistress, and communes with her as mind may commune with mind. A light of morality can also be seen in the poetical works of Wordsworth. When he attained maturity, he was preoccupied with moral thinking as he asserts in The Prelude that his mind was “Endlessly perplexed/ With impulse, motive, right and wrong, the ground/Of moral obligation” (The Prelude, X:893-895). For Wordsworth morality does not emanate from the scriptures, the authority of church or the divine commandments but from the world of nature. He believes that nature is the true source of morality; Wordsworth’s moral outlook is visualized through the interaction of the ideal tendencies of the human mind with the natural objects. John Beer in his introduction to Coleridge Poems observes that Wordsworth and Coleridge together with Dorothy Wordsworth were intent “on exploring the idea that
exposure to nature might be one of the most beneficent moral resources available to man”.

Here a few lines from Ode: On Intimations of Immortality can be quoted. When Wordsworth advises his sister Dorothy never to forget nature in the line under the grace of nature mother.

**The homely Nurse doth all she can**

**To make her Foster-child, her Inmate Man,**

**Forget the glories he hath known,**

**And that imperial palace whence he came.**

Wordsworth’s moral vision also has affinity with Kant who in the Dialect of Pure Practical Reason observes that two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the starry heavens above and the moral law within. Kant views rationality which constitutes the moral order. In Wordsworth’s poetry the source, validity and authenticity of moral values get their sanction from the contemplation of the natural objects. Man has commercialized as he has gone blind to nature that nurtures his healthy urges and consequently this deviation leads man to dehumanization as human beings waste away their energy without identifying themselves with moral order of nature. In the poem ‘The Tables Turned’ Wordsworth’s advice “Come forth in to the light of things/ Let Nature be your teacher (15-16) is an acknowledgement of the presence of moral system in nature. Poet stresses that in the modern materialistic and technologically advanced society man’s happiness lies in the adoption of the moral values deduced from the system of nature. Having understood an aesthetic information of nature, man must establish conformity to it. The supreme society of the universe has various natural objects imbibed with various virtues which makes the world full of life and happiness. At the same time, these objects exhibit sublime laws and values
to a contemplative mind. If a man makes these divine values applicable to his life, he will not go astray from righteousness. In lap of Nature, one can make oneself the best even in the modern commercialized and technologically advanced society.

Wordsworth has depicted the various stages of the ascending journey of the being in his poetry. In ‘Resolution and Independence’ he presents a borderer’s stage between inanimate and animate as the Leech-Gatherer “seems a thing endued with sense’ between a stone and a beast, ‘not all alive nor all dead/ Nor all asleep’ 71-72, ‘And moveth all together, if it movesat all’ 84. In these lines we find how gradually the consciousness is emerging into the lifeless thing. There is connection between inanimate and animated form. It seems that it is detectable that this animation process is taking place with the help of divine source. It is of seen that romantics relish reality through dreams, so Wordsworth has done in his poem Resolution and Independence, as he articulates that:

And the whole body of the man did seem  
Like one whom I had met with in a dream;  
Or like a Man from some far region sent;  
To give me human strength, and strong admonishment. 109-112

William Wordsworth is one of the most distinguished poets of the Romanticism and he is viewed as a great Nature poet. But his nature treatment has been criticized and regarded one-sided. Poet presents Nature as never failing source of joy and he never looks at Nature from negative point of view. In this context, W.H. Hudson points out:

“He finds a never failing principal of joy in nature.” 47
As poet tells in one of his poems,
“And it is my faith

That every flower enjoys the air it breathes.” (11-12) 48

He regards that it is a holy plan at work in nature. Therefore, we see that poet totally remains blind to the problem and sufferings which pervade in Nature. It is nature’s law to struggle for existence and natural abattoir. It seems that the poet has a limited approach to Nature, because he always appreciates Nature as a gentle and comfort for human being, but he is not sensitive to the terrible aspect of Nature. That is why he could not realize the reality about her and remained continued to depicting the natural landscape and the Lake District. He had never strayed out of the Lake District and so never had the chance of coming across nature.

It is known fact that Wordsworth’s earlier poetic work was received with shout derision, except in the case of Keats, has never attended the first appearance of a great poet. He is very different from Wordsworth because he does not appear in his poems, or his feelings. He does not like to interfere with the description and so their lyrical poems are not fragments of autobiography, like the lyrics of Byron and Shelley. Nature is the protagonist. In fact, he tells that poets have no self, no identity, only the Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women are poetical identity. The poet is pervaded by Nature. On the contrary, in Wordsworth the Nature was the mirror of his feelings. According to his conception of it, poetry should be, not the vehicle of philosophy, religious teaching, or social and political theories, but the incarnation of beauty. The famous opening line of Endymion (1818) ‘A thing of beauty is a joy for ever’- strikes the key note of Keat’s work. In his treatment of nature this same passion for sensuous beauty is still the dominant feature. He loved nature just for its own sake and for the ‘glory and loveliness which he everywhere found in it, and no modern poet has ever been nearer than he was to the simple ’poetry
of earth’; but there was nothing mystical in love, and nature was never fraught
for him, as for Wordsworth and Shelley, with spiritual messages and meanings.

The limitations of Wordsworth’s genius are very obvious. He had no
humour and little passion, and was singularly deficient in dramatic power. Even
those who revere him most are bound to acknowledge that he wrote more
uninspired and unpoe tic verse than any other poet of equal rank. In his statedly
philosophical poetry particularly and notably in The Excursion, he often
indulges for hundreds of lines together in prolix moralizing of the dullest and
most prosaic kind. There is indeed an immense amount of perishable matter in
his collected work, and beyond most great poets, therefore, he gains by
judicious selection. But if what is best and really vital in his voluminous output
is relatively to the total bulk of it small in amount. It comprises some of the
finest treasures in English poetry, and suffices to give him a high place among
those of whom he himself writes:

“How blessings be with them, and eternal praise,
Who gave us nobler loves, and nobler cares-
The poets, who on earth have made us heirs
Of truth and pure delight by heavenly lays.” (51-54) 49

To conclude, William Wordsworth is a high priest of nature. He has
depicted nature having various aspects. The contemporary of Wordsworth,
depicted nature, but depiction of nature by Wordsworth is matchless. He is
capable of entering into the feelings of others and he identifies his own feelings
with theirs. Such a poet takes a look at the world in the spirit of love. It is said
that his chief originality, of course, is Nature in his poetry. He is one of the
great poets of England because he is the poet of more than external Nature. The
whole trend of his writings was, towards the simplification of life, and in this
way again he was in harmony with the revolutionary spirit. Even his theory of
poetic diction is another aspect of his general effort to pierce down through artifice and convention to nature and reality. When he thought of Nature, he thought of Man. Man is the most happy and healthy when he lives in the midst of Nature.
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