CHAPTER - 4

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4.1 About Wordsworth’s Life

William Wordsworth was born on 7th April, 1770, the second of five children, in the West Cumbrian town of Cockermouth. His father John Wordsworth’s employment as lawyer to the land-owner, Sir John Lowther, a very rich person in England those days, enabled the family to have a fair standard of living in an area not known for its prosperity.

The senior lawyer of William Wordsworth’s father was often absent on Lowther’s business, and William Wordsworth, in the early years, came to be regarded as a solitary child, estranged from others with the exception of his younger sister, Dorothy, with whom he shared a close bond. His being left alone may be owing to behavioural problems that were a major factor in his parents’ decision to send him, at the age of 6 years, to live with his maternal grandparents in the north Cumbrian town of Penrith, where he attended the local school. It is said that the grandparents were cold authority figures which did nothing to aid William Wordsworth's emotional development and the problems were compounded by the death of his mother in 1778. This event fractured the family unit completely, and his father, unable to raise the children alone, sent William's siblings to live with others. (Rickett 301)

In 1779, Wordsworth moved once more, this time to take a Grammar School placed in the rural village of Hawkshead near Windermere. He
was boarded in the home of Anne Tyson and her husband, a couple in their 60’s. Anne's financial accounts books and a desk in which the young William Wordsworth carved his initials are now on display in the school museum. His brothers joined him later, but Dorothy was fostered with her mother's cousin, Elizabeth Threlkeld, in the Yorkshire town of Halifax. She and William were not to see each other again for several years. Further disorder to his life was added, when, in 1783, his father died, and still Wordsworth owed a considerable amount of money to the Lowther Estate, a dispute not settled until 20 years later.

Wordsworth was granted a place at Cambridge University in October 1787 and continually remained academically undistinguished and without any clear goal. Considering the circumstances Wordsworth went through, i.e. being away from his family and mounting debts, it is not surprising that he could not perform well in his academics.

An impulsive gesture in July 1790 saw him leave England on a walking tour of France and Switzerland in the company of his friend, Robert Jones. He was much impressed and influenced by what he saw and heard, not only by the scenery, but also by the politics of the emerging French Republican Cause. (Negrotti 24) Sections of The Prelude, written much later, recall his journey over the Simpion Pass:
The brook and road

Were fellow-travellers in this gloomy strait,

And with them did we journey several hours

At a slow pace. The immeasurable height

Of woods decaying, never to be decayed,

The stationary blasts of waterfalls,

And in the narrow rent at every turn

Winds thwarting winds, bewildered and forlorn,

The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky,

The rocks that muttered close upon our ears. (Rehder 165)

Returning to England three months later, he spent the winter in London attending political meetings, among other pursuits. (Negrotti 26) The meetings were generally in support of the French Republican Movement. Later, he headed for Wales, and joined again Robert Jones, but it was not long before he returned to France.

France lured me forth; the realm that I had crossed
So lately, journeying toward the snow-clad Alps.

But now, relinquishing the scrip and staff,

And all enjoyment which the summer sun

Sheds round the steps of those who meet the day

With motion constant as his own, I went

Prepared to sojourn in a pleasant town,

Washed by the current of the stately Loire. (Wordsworth 710)

Wordsworth stayed in Paris for a little while before moving on to Orleans in the south. It was here that he met and fell in love with Annette Vallon, the daughter of a surgeon. Her parents did not approve of the relationship and attempted to ban her from seeing him. However, shortly after William’s return to England, she gave birth to a daughter, Caroline, on December 15, 1792. (Darbishire 29)
He remained on the south coastal area of England in the hope that he could speedily return to France and Annette, but the approaching war between the two countries rendered this impossible. He resumed his dejected wanderings, some of which took him back to the Wales and the area around Tintern Abbey, founded in 1131. It was during this period of leisurely loitering about that provided Wordsworth with an opportunity to express his appreciation of the nature in his poems. Thus, this period, which apparently seems to be blank, on the contrary, proved to be very fruitful. Thomas de Quincey was later to observe that this period of aimless wanderings were the formative years of his poetic development. (Danby 41)

The year of 1794 saw his return to the north of England where he found his long-standing friend, Raisley Calvert, seriously ill. He nursed Calvert until his death and was left a small legacy in gratitude.

Yet one word more of personal concern—

Since I withdrew unwillingly from France,

I led an undomestic wanderer's life,

In London chiefly harboured, whence I roamed,
Tarrying at will in many a pleasant spot
Of rural England's cultivated vales
Or Cambrian solitudes. A youth—(he bore
The name of Calvert—it shall live, if words
Of mine can give it life,) in firm belief
That by endowments not from me
withheld
Good might be furthered—in his last decay
By a bequest sufficient for my needs
Enabled me to pause for choice, and walk
At large and unrestrained, nor damped too
soon
By mortal cares. (Wordsworth 325)

It was at this time that he and Dorothy were reunited, he aged 24, she 22. The tenancy offer of “Racedown”, a remote Dorset cottage, was eagerly accepted now that their income was supplemented by the proceeds from the small legacy left to William Wordsworth by Raisley Calvert. They moved to “Racedown” in December 1795 and remained there happily until 1797.
Samuel Taylor Coleridge became a regular visitor, and it was partly his instigation that led Wordsworth to rent “Alfoxden”, a large mansion near the village of Holford Glen in Somerset. (Rader 72) This seems to have been a happy productive period for all. Together with Coleridge and other visitors, they roamed the countryside day and night with a notebook in which to record observations as ideas for future writings. One of these visitors was John Thelwall, a political activist with Republican leanings, who had already been arrested on the orders of an offended Government as an agitator. (Rader 74)

The Autumn of 1798 found William, Dorothy and Coleridge disembarking in the port of Hamburg, ostensibly to learn the language and study Natural Sciences. Shortly after their arrival, they went their separate ways. The Wordsworths spent a particularly harsh winter in the town of Goslar in the region of the Hartz Mountains. Evidence of their distress in the cold conditions is found in, “On One of the Coldest Days of the Century”:

A plague on your languages, German and
Norse!
Let me have the song of the kettle;
And the tongs and the poker, instead of
that horse
That gallops away with such fury and force
On this dreary dull plate of black metal.

(Wordsworth 22)

They returned to England in the late Spring of the following year to stay with the Hutchinson Family on a farm near Stockton-on-Tees. The farm was owned by the brother of Mary Hutchinson, whom William had not seen since primary school days in Penrith. (Rader 42)

Coleridge readily accepted their invitation to stay. He and William walked the surrounding countryside, and one excursion took them further afield to Grasmere. Wordsworth was smitten by the beauty of the village and its surroundings and vowed then and there to make it his home as soon as possible. (32)

He was able to rent Dove Cottage, and in the December, he and Dorothy took up residence after walking much of the way from
Stockton. One report says that in order to “arrive in style”, they hired a horse-drawn carriage for the final part of the journey from Ambleside. Thus began a settled period for him and his sister. (22) They explored the area from end to end, noting scenes and events, some of which were later included in his compositions. (23)

To my Sister:

My sister! (‘tis a wish of mine)

Now that our morning meal is done,

Make haste, your morning task resign;

Come forth and feel the sun.

(Wordsworth 16)

Mary Hutchinson began to take on more and more importance in his life and marriage seemed inevitable. Probably, with this in mind, he and Dorothy, in the summer of 1802, visited Annette Vallon and daughter Caroline. They appear to have parted on good terms before returning to England for marriage preparations. During some weeks before the wedding, Dorothy wrote to her friends,

I have long loved Mary Hutchinson as a sister,
and she is equally attached to me this being

so, you will guess that I look forward with perfect happiness to the connection between us,

but happy, as I am, I half dread that concentration of all tender feelings, past, present, and future will come up me on the wedding morning.

(Jones 123)

Mary moved into Dove Cottage, and the three of them settled to a simple life-style dictated largely by a modest income. (Rader 62) Dorothy acted as William’s secretary, Coleridge moved to Greta Hall in Keswick, and Thomas de Quincey and other prominent literary figures became regular guests. Sadly, once more, tragedy intervened in early 1804.
John, William's younger brother, as captain of the merchant ship, Abergavenny, was lost together with all hands, when it was wrecked in a storm off the south east coast of England. August of that year saw the birth of William and Mary's second child Dora, a sister to John, their first-born. A son, Thomas, was born in June, 1806, putting extra strain on an already overcrowded household. A larger home became a necessity, and so in 1808, they moved to Allan Bank in Grasmere, with Coleridge as a permanent guest, and de Quincey taking over Dove Cottage.

Two years later, they moved again to rent the Old Rectory, opposite Saint Oswalds Church in Grasmere. The house proved to be damp and uncomfortable with an incessantly smoking fireplace. It was here in 1812 that the two youngest children, 4 years old Catherine, and 6 years old Thomas, died. Their final home was Rydal Mount, rented from Lady Fleming in 1813.

His writings had gained recognition; the sum of money for which he was in dispute from earlier years was paid to him, and he secured the position of Westmoreland's Collector of Stamps for a small salary. All of this improved the family finances. Some ridiculed his acceptance of
the Government post. Leigh Hunt, who had spent time in prison for his attacks in the Press on the Prince Regent, said that accepting such positions negated independence, and that Wordsworth, (and Southey) were now as violent in their protest against their old opinions as they had been about their new ones. (Darbishire 47)

The Wordsworth home was often the scene of gatherings by the literary notables of the age. Charles Lamb and his sister, Walter Scott, Crabb Robinson and William Godwin. (Rader 38) Godwin and Wordsworth quarrelled violently about Wellington's victory in the 1815 Battle of Waterloo. Wordsworth considered it as a victory over “monstrous ambition”, whilst Godwin, like his friends, Shelley and Byron, saw it as a barrier to progress. (47)

Wordsworth's rejection of his earlier radical views and his conversion to Conservatism took place in a climate of intense political change and industrial development. He continued writing, but did not receive the acclaim of 1799-1808. (Negrotti 41) Dorothy, who had not enjoyed good health for several years, fell seriously ill in 1829. Not only did she physically decline, but her mental health deteriorated as well and she required constant care and attention for the remainder of her life. (Darbishire 62)
Wordsworth’s friends, Coleridge and Lamb died in 1834. He had parted company with Coleridge as early as 1812, when both he and Mary were tired of his opium abuse and erratic behaviour. (Rader 51) The increasing number of visitors to the area annoyed him, although many had in fact come to view Rydal Mount in the hope of catching a glimpse of Wordsworth himself. He was not alone in this. John Ruskin bemoaned the prospect of what he termed, “drunken men” (56) looking upon Helvellyn. The proposed extension of the railway line beyond Windermere aroused his strong opposition, and when it was suggested that Ennerdale should have a rail link, he demanded a “spot of English ground secure from rash assault”. (50)

When his friend and poet colleague Robert Southey died in 1843, Wordsworth became the new Poet Laureate in Great Britain, the title he kept until his death. Yet, it is interesting to note that it is an honour he initially refused on the grounds of his old age. He ended up accepting, however, when the Prime Minister of the time reassured him as follows: “You shall have nothing required of you”. (52) Wordsworth thus became the only one with such honour granted to them who did not have any poetry writing duties, which in fact turned
out to be a good thing because when in 1847, Dora, his daughter, passed away and he stopped writing altogether for significant amount of time.

Wordsworth died in 1850 at the age of 80 at Rydal Mount, a house in the Lake District near Ambleside, made famous as the home where he lived and died. The cause of his death was a re-aggravating case of pleurisy, which is an inflammation that prevents breathing by causing terrible pain when one does so. It is typically the result of pneumonia.

(Darbishire 70)

4.2. Genesis of Wordsworth’s Humanism

4.2.1 Influence of French Revolution

The period in which Wordsworth lived is believed to have been one of the most significant as well as turbulent periods in the history. As far as England was concerned, it was a period of political unrest and upheavals and of social and political developments of gravity unparalleled except in the present century. During his early years, England lost the American colonies; in 1789, the French Revolution broke out, and with its proclamation of Liberty, Equality and
Fraternity appealed to many zestful enthusiasts in England and raised the hopes of Europe. The Revolution took a form of irrevocable campaign for freeing the oppressed people of Europe by conquest. England declared a war against France in 1793 and fought on almost continually and sometimes alone until the power of France and its allies under the supreme military genius of Napoleon was finally defeated in 1815. The end of the war did not mean peace at home because the ensuing time was the time of the unprecedented unrest, turmoil and vehement reactions. Though England had expanded its industries and commerce very much aggressively, it was not at all good time for England. Workers were exploited and children working at factories were considered an asset for their parents. Besides, the population explosion aggravated the condition of beleaguered England. (Derbishire 71) A large number of people poured into cities in search for greener pastures i.e. jobs in factories. Living and working conditions in new colonies were pathetic. There were no medical or educational services and workplaces were insanitary, which invited some diseases. It is quite a convincing fact that Wordsworth, who was fascinated with nature, was desperate to escape this kind of awful situation in England. He ran away to France and was too much impressed by the Revolution going on there—the Revolution that was
based on humanistic values viz Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. Later these have values found their expression in Wordsworth’s works.

Romanticism was introduced by Wordsworth has a great influence on English and other literature and other arts. Romantic painters often painted landscapes of nature to suggest turning away from decay of capitalism and seeking solace in the purer and more innocent in man. This was later expressed in the poetry of William Wordsworth and the school known as the "Lake poets", after the picturesque and unspoilt Lake District in North West England that provided the inspiration for Wordsworth’s best poetry. However, as it will be seen, the real content of this "nature poetry" underwent a radical change in the course of Wordsworth’s lifetime, and the cause of this transformation must be sought, not in nature, but in society and politics.

Despite the frenzied hostility of the English ruling class, the events in France aroused the most enthusiastic support of the foremost artists and intellectuals across the Channel. Literature, which had played so prominent a role in the battle of ideas, could not escape the consequences of its actions.
From his youth, William Wordsworth was besotted with nature. But in the poetry of the young Wordsworth, nature appears as a wild, unruly force, similar to the forces unleashed by the French Revolution, which he greeted with enthusiasm. In 1790, one year after the storming of the Bastille, the 19-year old Wordsworth went to France, where he gazed in wide-eyed bewilderment at the spectacle of "human nature being born again". (Rader 86)

Perhaps the most remarkable poetic tribute to the French revolution is Wordsworth's famous autobiographical work *The Prelude*, where one has a vibrant and truthful picture of what a revolution is:

[...] 'Twas in truth an hour

Of universal ferment; mildest men

Were agitated; and commotions, strife

Of passion and opinion, filled the walls

Of peaceful houses with unique sounds.

The soil of common life, was, at that time,

Too hot to tread upon. (Wordsworth 41)
The Prelude is considered to be Wordsworth's greatest masterpiece. It is at once a celebration of revolution and nature. The two ideas are here so mixed up as to be inseparable. Just as the experience of the elemental forces of nature inspired him in his infancy, so the experiences of the young Wordsworth in revolutionary France burned themselves on his consciousness and gave rise to a powerful spiritual uplift:

O pleasant exercise of hope and joy!

For great were the auxiliars which then stood

Upon our side, we who were strong in love!

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,

But to be young was very Heaven!

(Knight 48)

Thus, Wordsworth’s very interest in life and whatsoever was happening around him became a base for his humanistic concern, which found its voice in his poems.
4.2.2 Influence of American War of Independence

During the time of Wordsworth, England was going through a lot of turbulence and struggle and waning of its power over its American colonies was also a very severe blow to England. The first of a series of wars of independence that ended European control of both North and South America happened before Wordsworth’s birth. The conflict between Britain and her American colonists was triggered by the financial costs of the Anglo-French wars of the previous thirty years, in particular the Seven Years War (1756-63). A principal theatre of conflict had been in North America, where it was felt that the colonials had failed to play their part either financially or in the fighting. In the years immediately after the war, the army in North America consumed 4% of British government spending. (Danby 157) This cost, combined with the victories over the French had increased British interest in their colonies. Ironically, those victories had also removed one element tying the Americans to Britain - fear of French strangulation. In 1756, the French held Canada, the Ohio Valley and the Mississippi, isolating the British colonies on the eastern seaboard. By 1763 that threat had been removed.
At the heart of the division between the colonists and Britain was a fundamentally different concept of the purpose of the colonies. To the British, their American lands were there largely to provide raw materials to Britain and be consumers of British manufactured goods. This feeling expressed itself in an increasing control and restriction of American trade and industry that helped build up resentment, especially in New England, where manufacturing goods for export to the southern colonies was already an important part of the local economy. In contrast, many of the colonists saw themselves as carving a new society from the wilderness, unrestricted by decisions made 3,000 miles away across the Atlantic.

These pressures were tolerable as long as British regulation of the rules was fairly lax. However, in the decade before the colonies rebelled, there was a new level of interest in exploiting the American colonies. The first move was an attempt to limit further expansion by the colonies. In 1763, it was decided to draw a border behind the existing colonies, along the line of the Alleghenies. The land to the west was to be left to the Indians, who were to be encouraged to become consumers of British goods. New colonists were to be encouraged to go north to Nova Scotia, where they could produce
much needed timber for the navy, or south to Florida. This limit on their expansion caused much discontent amongst the colonies, costing many, including George Washington, a good deal of money.

The next increase in the tension came in 1765 with the Stamp Act and a trade act known as the Sugar Act. It was the Stamp Act that caused the most protest. This was a direct tax, levied on the paper required for legal transactions and on newspapers. It had been proposed in 1764, and the Americans had been given the year to suggest alternative methods of raising the money needed to administer and defend the colonies. Instead, this year was used to organise opposition to the act.

The Stamp Act caused hostility for a variety of reasons. First, the policy of limiting westward expansion that it was intended to help fund was not popular in the colonies. Second, it was the first direct taxation to be imposed on the colonies from London. All previous taxation had been in the form of trade duties. Finally, the act brought to the fore an issue that was bound to eventually emerge - the status of the legislative assemblies that existed in several of the colonies. In Britain, they were considered to be subordinate to Westminster on all
issues, in the colonies a new theory emerged that the Westminster Parliament had control over imperial issues, but not over colonial taxation. Combined with a boycott of British goods, the riots caused by the Stamp Act caused the fall of the government of Lord Grenville. The new government of Lord Rockingham repealed the Stamp Act in 1766, but at the same time passed a Declaratory Act confirming Parliamentary authority over the colonies.

Non-importation hit the American ports hard, especially Boston, where lawless conditions eventually forced the British to post troops in the city. Meanwhile, a change of government in Britain brought Lord North to power (1770). By 1769, the British government had decided to abolish all the duties on Tea, and in 1770 Lord North removed all the other duties. Tea was retained in part as a symbol of sovereignty and in part because it raised just over £11,000 each year.

This was the time of turbulence in England and America before Wordsworth’s birth. American colonies were asserting their right to be free from colonial domination. The very spirit of individual freedom is typical of humanism:
Affirming the dignity of each human being, it supports the maximization of individual liberty and opportunity consonant with social and planetary responsibility. It advocates the extension of participatory democracy and the expansion of the open society, standing for human rights and social justice.

(www.americanhumanist.org)

From the above-given definition it becomes very clear that some of chief characteristics of humanism include “dignity of each human being”, “individual liberty”, “participatory democracy” and “open society standing for human rights and social justice”. If the war of American independence is considered in the light of this quotation, the war seems to have been fought on a humanist basis, which must have influenced Wordsworth and moulded his thinking.

4.2.3 Influence of Kant

Kant is associated with humanism as Douglas Kellner and Tyson Lewis remark:
Kant’s revision of the liberal humanist tradition replaced metaphysics (speculation about external reality) with critique. For Kant, critique consisted of tracing the origins of experience back to the faculties of the mind. Kant’s humanistic side is most clearly articulated in his theory of freedom. For Kant, humans are not simply the aggregate natural forces. Humans are distinctly unique because we freely give to ourselves an imperative to follow.

(www.pages.gseis.ule.edu)

Coleridge, who had a great influence on Wordsworth, was greatly influenced by Kant and the impact of Kantian philosophy can be seen in the first version of The Prelude. It is certain that Kant’s thoughts, which Coleridge assimilated very well, must have penetrated Wordsworth’s mind through exchange of ideas with Coleridge. Wordsworth’s Ode to Duty seems to be very much close to Kantian ideas and appears to reflect humanism of Wordsworth.

Stern Lawgiver! Yet thou dost wear
The Godhead’s most benignant grace;

Nor know we anything so fair

As is the smiling upon thy face:

Flowers laugh before thee on their beds

And fragrance in thy footing treads:

Though dost preserve the stars from wrong:

And the most ancient heavens, through Thee, are

Fresh and strong. (Wordsworth 492)

In Wordsworth’s views, man is the creator of all the moral values that can ascertain happy life. Duty in the poem is personified as the voice of God. So, Wordsworth’s concept of God is rational here. It is truly evident that happy human beings can build happy society provided that they must follow moral duties. So for Wordsworth, the laws, the moral values that protect the welfare of all human beings take the position of God. Wordsworth sees the ultimate solution to man’s predicament not in any heavenly intervention or God’s grace but in
the very human being, his ability to love and preserve the state of childlike innocent notwithstanding his age. The poet says in this *Ode to Duty*:

Serene will be our days and bright,
And happy will our nature be,
When love is an unerring light,
And joy its own security.
And blessed are they who in the main
This faith, even now, do entertain:
Live in the spirit of this creed;
Yet find that other strength, according to their need. (Reed 368)

Kant believed that moral law is binding upon all thinking beings including God. Kant maintained that his concept of a Kingdom of Ends was another way of formulating his conception of duty. Wordsworth has precisely summarised this doctrine that every rational creature should be treated as an end in *The Excursion*:

Our life is turned

Out of her course, wherever man is made
An offering, or sacrifice, a tool

Or implement, a passive thing employed

As a brute mean, without acknowledgment

Of common right or interest in the end;

Used or abused, as selfishness may prompt.

Say, what can follow for a rational soul

Prevented thus, but weakness in all good,

And strength in evil? (Knight 305)

Thus, the poet seems to have accepted two main principles of the Kantian ethics: the categorical imperative and the doctrine of ends.

4.2.4 Influence of Plato

Lewis Loflin says,

Four influential Classical Humanists were Plato, Zeno, Epicurus, and Aristotle. Plato promoted Idealism, the theory that the
essential nature of reality lies unconsciousness or reason.

(www.sullivan-county.com)

One can safely presume that some influence of Plato and his humanism on William Wordsworth. Humanism takes shelter of rationality and spirit of inquiry to find truths. Plato practiced this very technique. In this sense, Plato can be known as a humanist. (Negrotti 48) There is no doubt that Coleridge familiarised Wordsworth with some of Platonic concepts. It can be judged from a large number of books, Coleridge’s ideas must have chimed in with those of Wordsworth and Plato, when he discussed Plato with him. The allusions to Plato in Wordsworth’s writing seemed to be invariably complimentary—he holds Plato in high regard. He talks about Plato’s “genius”, his “lore sublime”, and the “everlasting praise” that Plato deserves. In The Convention of Cintra, he seems to declare that in the persons of Plato, Demosthenes, Homer, Shakespeare, Milton and Lord Bacon “were enshrined as much of the divinity of intellect as the inhabitants of this planet can hope will ever take up its abode among them.” (Smith 78)

A careful study of some of Wordsworth’s poems reveals the fact that some of his poems bear the Platonic stamp. According to Plato, the universe is a rational universe and God himself is the eternal Reason.
Wordsworth writes in this manner when he addresses his apostrophe to the “Wisdom and Spirit of the universe; Thou Soul that art the eternity of thought.” (Reed 34) In both of his works *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* Plato talked affinity between spiritual love and reason. Similarly, Wordsworth appears to be of the opinion that imagination and intellectual love are similar to ‘reason in her most exalted mood.’

Another Platonic doctrine is the *Soul of the World*. In his *Timaeus*, Plato says that the world is made up of two levels of being, that which is undivided and is always self-same and that which is disable in bodies and is manifested in a myriad of ways. Wordsworth must have been very much pleased with this doctrine as he says,

...the one Presence, and the Life

Of the great whole. (Rader 79)

On the other hand, he writes:

Of the individual Mind that keeps her own

Inviolate retirement. (Danby 24)

His strong sense of oneness appears to be coupled with an equally strong sense of individual identity:

Points have all of us within souls

Where all stands single; this I feel, and

make Breathings for incommunicable powers. (37)
Melvin Rader observes,

Wordsworth is in vital accord with Plato in his ‘intimations of immortality’. Not only did he make use, in the famous *Ode*, of the Platonic ‘recollection’ of pre-existence, but the entire poem follows the *Phaedo* in emphasising the ‘high instinct’ by which our ‘mortal Nature’ appears a pensioner upon the immortal elements of the mind. To find a similar glorification of childhood ‘trailing clouds of glory’ we cannot do better than to read the Platonists—Proclus, Hermes, Trismegistus, Henry Vaughan, Thomas Traherne, and Thomas Tylor. However, Plato himself rejects the ‘wisdom’ of the child in favour of the rigorously disciplined mind of the philosopher. (Rader 99)

Wordsworth appears to be a great creative thinker and like any thinker he must have read extensively and must have come across a variety of ideas, which he used freely in his own writing without plagiarising
them. Though a lot of schools of thought and political ideologies influenced Wordsworth, he appears to be far too original to be enslaved by any of them. The source of his creative writing seems to have come from his own life, his own experiences and of course from the company of people that he admired most—for example Dorothy and Coleridge.

4.3 Humanism in Wordsworth’s Poems

Though Wordsworth is remembered usually as a poet of nature, it is wrong to assert that he wrote only about nature. By studying his poems closely, the researcher has come to know that he was also a poet of man as much as a poet of nature. His poems are full of his love for human beings.

Wordsworth’s poetic vision is incomplete without man. This is evident from his elevated description of man.

Thus was man

Ennobled outwardly before my sight,

And thus my heart was early introduced

To an unconscious love and reverence

Of human nature (Wordsworth 703)
And his love for nature become subsidiary to his love for man.

.........a passion, she,

A rapture often, and immediate love

Ever at hand; he, only a delight

Occasional, an accidental grace,

His honour being not yet come.

(Selincourt 295)

In the researcher’s view, Wordsworth’s unreserved support for democracy appears to have been a result of influences of French Revolution on him. Regarding this, John F. Danby observes:

The French Revolution has been built up for so long as an ‘influence’ on the early Romantics that we are apt to forget the English democratic revolution that proceeded it. Wordsworth, Coleridge and Blake were sons of the English Revolution,
albeit one they recognised as not yet completed. Behind them was 1642 and 1688. Behind them also was the American War of Independence, the final fulfilment by Englishmen, even though on one English soil, of the eighteenth-century, objection to King and privilege.

(www.bartleby.com)

Wordsworth’s thinking appears to be in favour of democracy and democracy per se is one of the essential qualities of humanism. Thus, humanism can be traced in his democratic utterances.

..............we were brothers all

In honour as in one community,

Scholars and gentlemen.

(www.bartleby.com)

The above-quoted lines seem to refer to the democratic society and atmosphere he lived at Cambridge. Thus, the humanitarian ideals of
camaraderie and brotherhood are clearly and strongly witnessed in Wordsworth’s writings. The ideals of French Revolution, i.e. liberty, equality and fraternity seem to have much fascinated Wordsworth that he did not appear to view the Revolution as a threat but as a straight return of a society to its original form. John F. Danby remarks,

The determining factor in his career was the French Revolution — the great movement which, besides remaking France and Europe, made out very modes of thinking anew. While an under-graduate in Cambridge, Wordsworth made several vacation visits to France. The first peaceful phase of the Revolution was at its height; France and the assembly were dominated by the little group of revolutionary orators who took their name from the south-western province from which most of them came, and with this group—the Girondists —Wordsworth threw in his lot. Had he remained he would probably have gone with them to the guillotine. As it was, the commands of his guardian
brought him back to England, and he was forced to contemplate from a distance the struggle in which he burned to take an active part. One is accustomed to think of Wordsworth as a mild old man, but such a picture if it is thrown back as a presentiment of the Wordsworth of the nineties is far from the truth. This darkly passionate man tortured himself with his longings and his horror. War came and the prayers for victory in churches found him in his heart praying for defeat; then came the execution of the king; then the plot which slew the Gironde. Before all this Wordsworth trembled as Hamlet did when he learned the ghost’s story. His faith in the world was shaken. First his own country had taken up arms against what he believed to be the cause of liberty. Then faction had destroyed his friends whom he believed to be its standard-bearers. What was in the world, in
religion, in morality that such things could be? In the face of this tremendous problem, Wordsworth, unlike Hamlet, was resolute and determined. (Danby 32)

The researcher holds a view that though Wordsworth, being a rational and reflective person, could not have believed in the French Revolution and might have lost his faith in it, the effect of the French Revolution appears to have influenced him to such an extent that he developed a humanistic outlook and emerged ultimately as a poet of man. It appears to have moved the focus of his contemplation from himself and nature to man. (45) It is reported that he became a conservative in his later years, but his faith in the ideals of the Revolution remained as steadfast as ever. (Rader 65)

4.3.1 Fundamental Qualities of the Humankind as Reflected in Wordsworth:

From the French Revolution, Wordsworth seems to have learnt that every human being per se is capable of unlimited development. It made a promise of making the ideas a solid reality but failed to fulfil
the promise. Nonetheless, Wordsworth does not appear to have lost his faith in the inherent good qualities of human beings and set himself to examine the facts for himself. And the following words of his sister Dorothy shed some light on how he did this:

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 ways of thinking and feeling. (Darbishire 29)

While he was roaming about on the country roads, he seems to have come across the humblest of human beings.

Souls that appear to have no depth at all To careless eyes. (www.bartleby.com)

He seems to admire the qualities nature and man has:

To Nature and the power of human minds,
Commenting on the source of Wordsworth’s creativity, Helen Darbishire says:

The power that surprised him in tramps and beggars and outcast women was not the thing that Godwin valued in men. It was feeling, not reason, that Wordsworth found when he groped to the bottom. The elementary feelings, the essential passions of the heart are at their purest and simplest, he found, in humble and rustic life. These are the powers in human nature which are like the primal energies of Nature: their strength, force, and beauty seem to spring from the same source; through them man and Nature are one. This was his discovery. When he reached this truth, his imagination was
released, and the poetry of the *Lyrical Ballads* and *Lines composed above Tintern Abbey* followed.

(www.bartleby.com)

### 4.3.2 Wordsworth’s Predilection for rustic life

In his preface to the 1809 edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth appears to give reasons for his strong preference for rustic life.

Humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings coexist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly
communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings, and, from the necessary character of rural occupations, are more easily comprehended, and are more durable; and, lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature.

(Grosart 193)

Besides, it is said that

Humanists asserted the dignity of normal earthly activities... (Symons 92)

Thus, instead of promulgating lofty ideals, humanism delves into the very life on earth, i.e. the realistic side of the life. His keen unreserved acceptance of mundane life appears to be found in Wordsworth’s poetry. Rousseau propagated his theory of the essential dignity of the peasant and Wordsworth talked about it in his poems by accentuating
the simplicity of the rustic. Wordsworth’s heroes, viz, tramps, beggars, peddlers, waggoners and leech-gatherers were from country side and they were all under the direct influence of the nature. They seem to possess the steadiness of nature and being the very extension of the earth from which they rise, they exhibit a different kind of eloquence when they speak.

Words are but under-agents in their souls;

When they are grasping with their greatest strength

They do not breathe among them. (Reed 551)

The poems in which Wordsworth is most human, and most himself as a poet—for example, poems like The Leech-Gatherer, Michael, Animal Tranquillity and Decay and The Old Cumberland Beggar, that they seem to be all motionless or there is quite imperceptible movement in them like the old beggar:

He is so still

In look and motion, that the cottage curs,
Ere he have passed the door, will turn away,

Weary of barking at him. (453)

Appreciating Wordsworth’s poetic art, Arthur Symons observes:

And Wordsworth conveys this part of natural truth to us as no other poet has ever done, no other poet having had in him so much of the reflective peasant.

(Symons 49)

4.3.3 Wordsworth’s interest in ordinary life

Wordsworth appears to be against any kind of affectation or pretence and in particular the pretence of being extraordinary.

For though I was most passionately moved

And yielded to all changes of the scene

With an obsequious promptness, yet the storm
Passed not beyond the suburbs of the mind.

(www.Bartleby.com)

He does not seem to trust whatever is abnormal. The stories he relates in his poems are of the simplest subjects—the subjects he happened to meditate on. It is remarkable that he did not write anything that is full of incidents or very rapid in movement. In the *Hart-leap Well*, he says,

The moving accident is not my trade;

To freeze the blood I have no ready arts

(Smith 13)

He seems to confess that he found his trade in

..the vulgar forms of present things,

The actual world of our familiar days.

(Reed 544)
There is no more striking passage on the subjects Wordsworth chooses for his poetry than three short stanzas in the prologue to his *Peter Bell*.

Long have I loved what I behold,

The night that calms, the day that cheers;

The common growth of mother-earth

Suffices me--her tears, her mirth,

Her humblest mirth and tears.

The dragon's wing, the magic ring,

I shall not covet for my dower,

If I along that lowly way

With sympathetic heart may stray,

And with a soul of power.

These given, what more need I desire

To stir, to soothe, or elevate?

What nobler marvels than the mind

May in life's daily prospect find,
May find or there create? (Wordsworth 238)

David Nichol Smith remarks:

Wordsworth had never any wish to escape from the commonplaces of life. He accepted them all. And viewed them with a calmness and a courage that could never be shaken. (Smith 13)

4.3.4 Human life: as a predominant theme of Wordsworth’s poems

The principal theme of Wordsworth’s poetry appears to be phenomena interwoven with human life such as love, the workings of love, its power to inflict the deepest wounds as well as to heal the most incurable wounds. His poems such as Goody Blake and Harry Gill, Simon Lee, The Thorn, The Last of the Flock, The Mad Mother, The Idiot Boy and The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman have love as a main theme. When Wordsworth talks of love, he does not seem to talk not of any passionate instinct or fancy but of passionate affection. Love not as a passion in the narrow sense of the word but
passionate affection, its ‘wily subtleties and reflexes’, this is what Wordsworth seems to be in quest of in his later and finer poems like Michael, The Brother, Margaret, The Affliction of Margaret, Ruth, The Happy Warrior, The White Doe of Rylstone and some stories narrated by the Parson in The Excursion and some patriotic sonnet. By the dint of his uncommon intuition Wordsworth seems to have learnt that the law of Nature is love.

Flowers laugh before thee in their beds,

And fragrance in thy footing treads;

Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong;

And the most ancient heavens through thee are fresh and strong. (Reed 369)

However,

Serene will be our days and bright,

And happy will our natures be,

When love is an unerring light,

And joy its own security. (368)
David Nichol Smith says,

Of love in great but restricted sense of the
word Wordsworth had, as we have seen,

Comparatively little to say. . . . romantic
love— (Smith 47)

Though Wordsworth talks about love in his poems, his love does not
appear to be the love that Lord Byron, John Donne or Catullus talk
about. Wordsworth’s word ‘love’ is used in the sense in which St. Paul
uses the Latin word “caritas” that means affection or charity, that
‘breath all things, believeth all things, hopesth all things, endureth all
things’ (Reed 91) —sympathy with his fellow-men and desire for their
welfare—that is the essence of all his poetry, the origin of the joy that
he expresses:

Love now a universal birth

From heart to heart is stealing

And you must love him ere you
He will seem worthy of your love.

(Potkay 157)

4.3.5 Realistic delineation of predicament of human life:

Since most of his poems sing about joy that nature has to offer, many critics might overlook the fact that Wordsworth’s depiction of life seems not to be lop-sided but realistic and therefore it also tends to throw some light on some fundamental predicaments of human life. For example:

The still sad music of humanity

....................

The free confederate storm

Of sorrow, barricaded evermore

Within the walls of cities.

.........................

Amid the groves, under the shadowy hills,

The generations are prepared; the pangs,
The internal pangs, are ready: the dread
strife
Of poor humanity’s afflicted will
Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny.

(Danby 81)

A humanist believes in reality and is prepared to confront it however harsh it may be. The faithful depiction of the dark side of human life is found in Wordsworth’s poetry—for instance in some of his gloomiest poems such as The Thorn, The Sailor’s Mother, Ruth, The Brother, Michael, The Affliction of Margaret. This realism that pervades his poetry is nothing but a quality of humanism. While a reader is going through these poems, very frequently he finds himself engulfed by solitary anguish, ruined innocence, torturing hopes and even inescapable despair. Though he presents before us the dark side of life, he does not pretend to be able to understand ‘this unintelligible world’.

4.3.6 Wordsworth’s outlook to the predicament of human life:
In the researcher’s view, it will be a mistake to judge Wordsworth as a pessimist on the basis of only a few of his poems in which he voices the problem of human life. Wordsworth does not only depict the bleak side of human life but also offers a solution to it in his poems. According to him, the solution lies in turning back to what is a natural state — to the life where an individual’s freedom is not restricted. In his views, we can learn from nature a lot of better qualities.

Through primrose tufts, in that green bower,

The periwinkle trailed its wreaths;

And ‘tis faith that every flower

Enjoys the air it breathes.

The birds around me hopped and played,

Their thoughts I cannot measure:

But the least motion which they made,

It seemed a thrill of pleasure. (76)

Conclusion:
Though Wordsworth advocated humanism in his poems, his sympathy with man was limited. It is observed that there are many aspects of humanism that he did not explore. Wordsworth is so much engrossed with his own purpose that he does not seem to notice the aspects of man that are not pertinent to his purpose. In this regard, Arthur Compton-Rickett observes,

He watches men and women with the expectant gaze of a man who is looking for some particular attitude or posture which he is anxious to portray. No doubt by this method he missed a great deal of rich human material, but he is a moralist at heart, with one steady purpose in view, and leaving aside much that was fascinating and perplexing, he contents himself with a few broad, simple issues: and there, at his best, he exhibits a massive splendour of compelling power.

(Rickett 311)
Despite the view Arthur Compton-Rickett holds, a serious study of Wordsworth’s poems reveals his humanism, though his poems may be, as Arthur Compton-Rickett believes, ‘leaving aside that was much fascinating and interesting’. The concern he shows for man and his favour of simple humble life rooted in the earth rather than something ethereal are the humanistic qualities that make him a true humanist.

**Sense of Humanism in Wordsworth’s Poems**

One might say that the great guiding principle of the Romantic revolt was reinvigorated humanism, which was greater than any since the Renaissance. The principle dealt greatly with individualism. Humanism affected every cycle: politics, philosophy, religion and arts. Generally, Wordsworth is considered a poet of nature, and yet we could sense the doctrine of humanism in his works as well. His poems appear to suggest that he thinks highly not only of nature but also man.

Here are listed a few reasons: Wordsworth seems to see significance in every man, especially common ones. This is quite startling because never before poets see importance in ordinary people. Wordsworth seems to have been impressed with common people when he wrote a
number of poems about them. He appears to have treated them as if they were very significant. *She Dwelt among Untrodden Way* is a good example. The poem deals with ordinary and obscure country lass who have almost nobody to appreciate her beauty as she lives in the remote country. And yet her death has strong impact on the poet.

She lived unknown, and few could know

When Lucy ceased to be,

But she is in her grave, and, oh,

The difference to me! (Reed 68)

Although only a few people notice her death, it grieves Wordsworth a lot to think that she is dead.

Wordsworth seems to have a strong sense of individualism. Almost all of his poems are concerned about himself and his mind; he rarely seems to have written about another subject matters. Wordsworth's favourite topic for his poems seems to express the course and the development of his mind. For example, *Imitation Ode* seems to depict how once the poet has a serious conflict in his mind - he cherishes childhood and nature, and yet none could last forever - and how he finds a resolution - everything can be kept in his memory forever. *Sonnets Composed upon Westminster Bridge* seem show his
tremendous pride for London. *The World is Too Much with Us* seems to suggest his opinion towards British society in his own time. Moreover, if poets before Wordsworth's time thought of writing a long poem, their subject matter would, traditionally, not be their personal life. It would be things like mythology, the Bible or a great ruler. However, Wordsworth's very long poems like *The Prelude* and *The Excursion* deal with himself, his personal life and his mind. (*The Prelude*, which the poet considers *Growth of a Poet's Mind; an Autobiographical Poem*, is composed of 14 books!) Wordsworth thus appears to be intensely a personal poet.

Wordsworth's great appreciation for nature seems to be somehow based on humanism. Wordsworth is well known for his skill of 'naturalised' nature. And yet he sometimes 'humanises' nature as well. The poem *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* is a good example. When the poet wants to depict his beautiful memory of the daffodils, he uses human term to describe them. He seems to call them 'a crowd' or 'a host' which were tossing their heads. He upgrades the daffodils by personifying or 'humanising' them.
Finally, Wordsworth's sense of humanism seems to be suggested in his great esteem on childhood. Romanticists believe that men are born good. Therefore, childhood is cherished, as it is the state that has not been tarnished by the world or social code yet. This means in the state of childhood man shows his 'real' nature. The statement that 'The child is father of the Man', written in the poem *My Heart Leaps Up*, does not only convey the thought that the adult, in order to be able to appreciate life, has to learn to share excitement and innocence from the child but also the thought that the state of childhood exposes the 'real' nature of man. Children's nature is more 'original' and closer to the nature of 'man' than the adults' nature (for children’s nature has not spoiled yet.). In other words, real human beings are the children. For this reason, the fact that 'Wordsworth cherished childhood' means 'he cherishes man'.

In conclusion, Wordsworth's poems suggest that the bard is essentially a humanist. He sees the worth in every single man - no matter how small they are. The doctrine of individualism is reflected in his works for almost all the poems. He sometimes humanises nature. And he cherishes the state of childhood, which is the state that exposes the original nature of man.
References


