

## Nature in the Poems of William Wordsworth : A Sensible Study

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### Abstract

*William Wordsworth, one of the greatest poets in England, is known as the poet of nature. His poems took on greater significance in English literature. The purpose of this study is to cram his source of forming and the process he expressed his ideal in singing highly of the nature. Wordsworth sought to bring a more individualistic approach, his poetry avoided high flown language however the poetry of Wordsworth is best characterized by its strong affinity with nature . Wordsworth was often dismayed by what he saw and he sought solace in the grandeur and beauty of nature. Wordsworth offered not just a beautiful picture of nature but also illustrated the healing power of nature on the spirit of man.*

**Key Words:** *Nature, Romanticism, Love, Lyric, Poems etc.*

### 1. Introduction

William Wordsworth was one of the key figures in the Romantic Movement, his early poems helping to define the new movement of Romanticism and Naturalism. At the turn of the 18th and the 19th centuries, romanticism and naturalism came to be the new trend in English literature. William Wordsworth, the representative poet of nature, whose poems took on greater significance, brought a totally new and fresh stream of air to the European literary field. Wordsworth, the glittering star, is always shining in English literature. His whole life had a close connection with nature—the permanent subject sung highly by human being. Wordsworth was called by Shelly “Poet of nature”. He, too, called himself “A Worshiper of Nature”. He held a firm faith that nature could enlighten the kindheartedness and universal brotherhood of human being, and only exist in harmony with nature where man could get true happiness. Wordsworth sought to bring a more individualistic approach, his poetry avoided high flown language however the poetry of Wordsworth is best characterized by its strong affinity with nature and in particular the Lake District where he lived. The early nineteenth

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century was a time of rapid change and industrialization, but like his contemporaries, Blake and Coleridge, Wordsworth was often dismayed by what he saw and he sought solace in the grandeur and beauty of nature. Wordsworth offered not just a beautiful picture of nature but also illustrated the healing power of nature on the spirit of man. Wordsworth's nature, referring to such external things of beauty as hill and vale, stream and lake, forest and sky, flower and bird, and other things living with or in them, is God's primary creation and is said to be conducive to the growth of the poet's mind. On the other hand, Wordsworth's society as exemplified in the Prelude, referring to such man-made places or institutes as city and town, school and church, and such human activities as party and fair, government and revolution, is a "Parliament of Monsters" and "blank confusion," something fearfully destructive to the poet's soul. Accordingly, it is only natural that we feel a certain tension in the poet's account of his life with man in nature and society. The tension may not rise to the pitch of an epic war or inducement affecting the entire civilization or moral future of mankind. It, nonetheless, lends itself easily to epic treatment. (Tung 1981)

## **2. Life and Works of William Wordsworth in Brief**

William Wordsworth (7 April 1770 – 23 April 1850) was born in Cockermouth, Cumberland, part of the scenic region in northwest England, the Lake District. His sister, the poet and diarist Dorothy Wordsworth, to whom he was close all his life, was born the following year. After the death of their mother, in 1778, Wordsworth was sent to a boarding school and Dorothy to live with relatives. After the Cockermouth school, he was sent to a school in Penrith for the children of upper-class families. It was at the school that Wordsworth was to meet the Hutchinson's, including Mary, who would be his future wife. Wordsworth made his debut as a writer in 1787 when he published a sonnet in *The European Magazine*. That same year he began attending St John's College, Cambridge, and received his B.A. degree in 1791. In November 1791, Wordsworth visited Revolutionary France and became enthralled with the Republican movement. He fell in love with a French woman, Annette Vallon, who in 1792 gave birth to their child, Caroline. Because of lack of money and Britain's tensions with France, he returned alone to England the next year, but supported her and his daughter as best he could. Wordsworth was granted honorary degrees from both Durham University and Oxford University. Later, he became the Poet Laureate and considered the most important author in England. He died in 1850 at the age of 80. Some related issues are given below;

**1770** Wordsworth is born in the Lake District.

**1778** Wordsworth's mother dies.

**1779** Wordsworth is sent away to boarding school in Hawkshead.

**1783** His father dies.

**1787** Wordsworth attends St. John's College, Cambridge, where he is an indifferent student.

**1791** Graduates from Cambridge.

**1791** Travels to France, where he meets Annette Vallon with whom he has a daughter, Caroline.

- 1792** Returns to England
- 1795** Wordsworth comes into an inheritance of nine hundred pounds sterling. If we consider average earnings in 1795, that amount would be comparable to someone inheriting £872.000, or slightly over one million euro. Wordsworth's friend hoped that, by leaving him this money, he would encourage Wordsworth to spend his time writing poetry, rather than trying to earn a living.
- 1795** Wordsworth meets Coleridge, and they strike up a friendship.
- 1797** Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy move to Alfoxden House, close to Coleridge's home.
- 1798** Coleridge, William and Dorothy Wordsworth travel to Germany. Wordsworth is unhappy.
- 1798** *Lyrical Ballads collaboration* between Wordsworth and Coleridge - is published.
- 1799** The Wordsworth's return to England, and settle in Grasmere, in a house called Dove Cottage.
- 1802** The war between England and France ends, and Wordsworth goes to France to meet his daughter Caroline.
- 1802** Wordsworth marries Mary Hutchinson. They have been friends since childhood. Wordsworth's sister, Dorothy, lives with the couple.
- 1803** The first of Wordsworth's five children by his wife Mary is born.
- 1843** Wordsworth is named Poet Laureate. He is reluctant to accept the honour, claiming he is too old, but the Prime Minister persuades him. Wordsworth becomes the only Poet Laureate to write no official poetry.
- 1850** Wordsworth dies of pleurisy. A few months after his death, his wife publishes *The Prelude*.

His was a strong and passionate nature, which he was fortunate enough to be able to harness in the pursuit of poetry later in his life. As a student at St. John's College, Cambridge, Wordsworth hardly excelled. He felt remote from his peers, and said of his time there:

I was the Dreamer, they the Dream; I roamed  
 Delighted with the motley spectacle:  
 Gowns grave, or gaudy, doctors, students, streets,  
 Courts, cloisters, flock of churches, gateways, towers:  
 Migration strange for a stripling of the hills,  
 A northern villager.

Coleridge and Wordsworth worked together, and in 1798, the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads* was published. He was awarded honorary Doctorates from Durham and Oxford universities, and was made Poet Laureate in 1843. However, with the death of his daughter Dora in 1847, Wordsworth's writing ceased completely. He remains the only Poet Laureate to have written no official poetry during his time in office. Wordsworth died in 1850, and was buried in his beloved Grasmere. His

widow, Mary, published *The Prelude* shortly after his death. It was not particularly well-received at the time, but is now recognized as one of the great masterpieces of poetry.

### 3. Nature and William Wordsworth

In his poems of nature he printed beautiful pictures full of the creation by the mighty God—mountains, rocks, rivers and trees. All of them revealed the poet's genuine love towards the nature, the fervent enthusiasm of pursuing the truth of life. His source of forming such a lyrical style and the process he expressed his ideal in singing highly of the nature. Wordsworth's birth place was near to nature. Born in Cockermouth, just on the northern fringe of the English Lake district, he spent his childhood there. As a child, he often wandered among the fields and woods. At the age of 8, he was fed by one of his relatives who gave him simple food and shelter, but freedom of enjoying the nature. The Natural scenes and sounds gave his imagination wings and made him get to know the cottagers, shepherds, and solitary wanders that then entered his dreams and even his later poems. At the age of 14, Wordsworth was sent to school at Hawkshead in the beautiful lake district in northwestern England. There, the unroofed school of nature attracted him more than the classroom, and he learned more eagerly from flowers, hills and stars than from his books. Just as De Quinley said, "Wordsworth had his passion for nature fixed in blood. It was a necessity. And through his commerce with nature did he live and breathe". The colors, scents, sounds, the blue of the sky, the sparkle of the sunlight on water, the sound and plumage of birds in nature deeply influenced Wordsworth's growth of genius. The great love for nature early cherished by the child was later expressed in his poetry.

In the poem "Lines Written in Early Spring", on an early spring morning, the poet walked in small woods. Birds sang sweetly on the trees and groups of primrose blossom. The periwinkle climbed here and there coming into wreaths form.

"Through primrose tufts, in that green bower,  
The periwinkle trailed its wreaths,  
And 'tis my faith that every flower  
Enjoys the air it breathes  
.....  
The budding twigs spread out their fun,  
To catch the breezy air:  
And I must think, do all I can,  
That there was pleasure there".

In this poem, Wordsworth was deeply impressed by the charming and fresh scenes in early spring. By colorfully describing typical objects in nature such as "tufts, bower, wreaths, flower, air, budding twins" etc., we admire a calm while prosperous natural world.

In 1802 Wordsworth returned at last to France to meet his daughter, Caroline, for the first time. They walked together on the beach in Calais, and that meeting was the inspiration for this poem.

It is a beauteous evening, calm and free;  
 The holy time is quiet as a nun  
 Breathless with adoration; the broad sun  
 Is sinking down in its tranquillity;  
 The gentleness of heaven broods o'er the sea:  
 Listen! the mighty Being is awake,  
 And doth with his eternal motion make  
 A sound like thunder – everlastingly.

This poem opens with a description of the evening. It is a peaceful, calm, beautiful time, as the father and daughter watch the sun setting over the sea. Wordsworth always loved such serene times, as they allowed him to reflect on the spiritual world and appreciate the beauty of nature. He feels 'free' because he can, in this place and at this time, forget the concerns of the wider world, and lose himself in the moment. He feels that this is a 'holy' time, and that he should spend it in reverent thought. Wordsworth, though not an atheist, was not religious in the strict sense of the word. He felt that nature offered us a chance to see something of the divine, or the 'Presence' which exists beyond our understanding.

Wordsworth is a master hand in depicting natural things. Quiet, beautiful, sweet, pleasures and so on are the most universally seen words in his poems. These words stand out to reveal the poet's deep love and respect to nature. In addition to this, nature comes also as the source of energy, "And passing even into my purer mind, with tranquil restoration—feelings too of unremembered pleasure". "Even I'm tired of several years of social life, as soon as I return to nature, his quiet and peace power can make me restore my energy" (Averill, 1980).

Living in the crowded and noisy society, Wordsworth felt greatly miserable. Only in nature, can he find beauty and purity going into his own thinking. Natural world is his ideal world.

And in the frosty season, when the sun  
 Was set, and visible for many a mile  
 The cottage windows blazed through twilight gloom,  
 .....

And woodland pleasures, - the resounding horn,  
 The pack loud chiming, and the hunted hare.  
 So through the darkness and the cold we flew,  
 .....

Of melancholy, not unnoticed, while the stars,  
 Eastward were sparkling clear, and in the west  
 The orange sky of evening died away.

This poem and 'The Stolen Boat' are taken from the much longer work, 'The Prelude'. In 'The Prelude', Wordsworth explores the events in his life from childhood to adulthood, and looks at the way in which they made him the man he became. The poem opens with a description of a perfect winter wonderland. It is 'the frosty season' and the sun has set. The only lights are those of the cottage windows, shining through 'the twilight gloom'. They may call to some, but Wordsworth ignores their summons. This is a time of joy for the young boy and his friends, but there is a sense that Wordsworth somehow appreciates it even more than his companions.

In another poem Wordsworth said;

One summer evening (led by her) I found  
 A little boat tied to a willow tree  
 Within a rocky cave, its usual home.  
 .....  
 Remained, no pleasant images of trees,  
 Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;  
 But huge and mighty forms, that do not live  
 Like living men, moved slowly through the mind  
 By day, and were a trouble to my dreams.

Like 'Skating', this poem is about a moment in Wordsworth's young life when he was moved by the beauty and splendour of the natural world. This love of nature and realization that even as a child, he had poetic sensibilities. The poem tells of a time in the poet's life when, while walking alone by a lake, he comes upon a boat tied to a tree. The evening is beautiful, and Wordsworth is soon swept up in its loveliness. There is a sense of tranquility as he rows across the lake, hearing the sound of the oars echoing off the mountain. The ripples caused by the oars shimmer in the moonlight and the boat glides through the water 'like a swan'.

The poet enjoys the act of rowing, and is proud of his ability to steer the boat in a straight line. The stars have begun to appear in the sky, and the only sound is of the oars dipping into the water.

However, this tranquility does not last. As the poet rows on, a huge mountain peak appears behind the crag. The boy is terrified of this 'grim shape'. It seems to loom above him in a menacing fashion, and appears to grow larger and larger. His mind and heart became pure and free from the bitterness and the trouble of the human society. Only can nature purify human's mind. Let's come into his spiritual world and share his enjoyment of nature in such a lonely state Wordsworth got close to the nature. in "Tintern Abbey":

Five years have past; five summers, with the length  
 Of five long winters! and again I hear  
 These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs  
 With a soft inland murmur.—Once again Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,  
 Which on a wild secluded scene impress  
 Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect  
 The landscape with the quiet of the sky.

In the poem *My Heart Leaps Up*, Wordsworth also uses another concept that becomes a theme throughout his poetry; the importance of childhood. For many of the Romantics, the memories or visions of an idyllic childhood become a powerful emotive force as they aspired for life of greater harmony and simplicity

My heart leaps up when I behold  
 A rainbow in the sky:  
 So was it when my life began;  
 So is it now I am a man;  
 So be it when I shall grow old,  
 Or let me die!  
 The Child is father of the Man;  
 And I could wish my days to be  
 Bound each to each by natural piety.

Wordsworth's poetry does include passages of great hope, optimism and joy best summarised through his famous poem "Daffodils"

I wandered lonely as a cloud  
 That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
 When all at once I saw a crowd,  
 A host, of golden daffodils;  
 Beside the lake, beneath the trees,  
 Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Nature is like a foster parent of sorts. It can teach through 'beauty and by fear'. Its beauty can bring him great pleasure, but if he transgresses, it will reprimand him. It is worth noting that it was nature in the first place which led him.

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.

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.

#### **4. Concluding Remarks**

Perhaps no poet and no poem epitomize Romanticism's mystical view of nature more than William Wordsworth and his poem. Wordsworth based his poetry on the idea that it should be written in a natural language that speaks to and reflects common human emotions. Those emotions are most readily called forth by our experiences in nature. Wordsworth recalls how his memories of this setting have renewed his life when he has lived in the city, but he also begins to realize that it is his more adult relationship to nature – rather than his youthful one when he unconsciously felt at one with it – that is more significant, for it provides him with a moral connection to humanity and to some spiritual essence greater than humanity. As important, he stresses that it is not simply nature's influence on him, but equally his perception of nature – the role his consciousness and his imagination play in producing this experience. Here is the first complication in the romantic worship of nature. As we can see, though Wordsworth's poems including "Tintern Abbey" which are called "nature poetry" didn't describe the nature for its own sake. As Wordsworth said in his prospectus to *The Prelude*, not only nature, but "the Mind of man" is "my haunt and the main region of my song". In "Composed Upon an Evening of Extraordinary Splendour and Beauty", the poet was obviously struck by the unusual sight of an evening glow which so impressed him with its rare splendor and beauty. Wordsworth also is much more than a mere reporter of surface beauties. Though Wordsworth's poems were imbued with the harmony, the sweetness and the peace of the nature, we can still find the great reflection of the tremendous social renovation. Wordsworth loves nature as well as human being. He made the most proper combination between his love of man and love of nature in his works. He entrusted his love of man on the love of nature and in return, his love of natural scenery and the life of the people living in nature. His poems and his theory of poetry have great significance in English literature. The lyrical style not only set a fresh example for the later poets, such as Byron, Shelley, Keats, but also influenced them greatly.



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