

## Wordsworth's Spiritual Treatment of Nature

Md. Akhtar Hossain\*

Md. Sadekul Islam\*\*

### Abstract

*John Keats discovered nature as a manifestation of God's beauty; P.B. Shelley personified nature And showed that it brings changes throughout the motion of seasons ; William Blake loved nature wholeheartedly from tiniest grass to mighty tiger of nature. Blake was a nature humanist not only loved despicable conditions of life even his love spread to the excommunicated one like whores freezing water. Blake made inanimate objects of nature to come animated one. Samuel Taylor Coleridge not only saw nature like his fellow romantic poets but also found something extraordinary in nature that teases our mind. Coleridge felt some supernatural entity is disguised in virgin nature so his poems depicted some uncanny metaphor of nature. W. Wordsworth's found nature as his best friend. Nature was ultimate goal for him, some critics say that his philosophy of nature is somewhat agnostic; he saw nature as the ultimate end of manifestation of lively entity. But in reality to Wordsworth nature is everything and everything is nature; one kind of spiritual Pantheism. He found touch of heaven an aura of celestial beauty which enlightened his mind being with nature. furthermore, nature to him was manifestation of God; a revelation. Here I will try to show gradually William Wordsworth's treatment of nature from his chef d'oeuvre . I will also elaborate Wordsworth's pantheistic view that is in relation to spiritual being immanent with heavenly exposure in nature.*

**Keywords:** Nature, pantheism, imagination, mind, celestial

### Introduction:

William Wordsworth's (April 7, 1770 – April 23, 1850) treatment of nature is quite different from other romantic poets like John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley and William Blake. In his mentionable works 'The Prelude', 'Intimations of Immortality', 'Tintern Abbey' and 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud' and in some other poems William Wordsworth showcased his closeness with nature with deep affinity. Nature came to him as a friend, as a source of removing monotony and as a guide to give solace to his sore mind moreover nature would refresh his mind when he was lonesome. The heavenly beauty of nature gave him added joy in stranded mind. And furthermore nature became a warden to him and also solace to despairing mind. Apart from perceiving deep philosophy Wordsworth perceived mentally the revelation of celestial being in nature.

---

\* Professor, Department of Language, Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, Dhaka-1207.

\*\* Assistant professor, Department of English, Lalmonirhat govt. College, Lalmonirhat 5500.

Very few romantic poets were as devoted lover of nature as Wordsworth; no other romantic poets showed their affinity for nature as deeply and ardently as Wordsworth. In his famous poem and autobiography, 'The Prelude', Wordsworth shows his childhood memories and love for nature which is widely evident in the long autobiographical poem as stated 'The Prelude.'

Prelude takes our attention on Wordsworth's spiritual development, it shows Wordsworth is deeply overwhelmed by the beauty of celestial state of nature. In the very beginning of the poem, The Prelude, the poet recalls a night when he was very young, steals a boat and rows out into the middle of a lake. But a huge mountain makes him afraid so he rows back to shore. From this on, the memory had a great impact upon the mind of the poet. Mountains have magical impact upon his mind for that he is in a pleasant way disturbed by the vast magnitude of mountain. Later on in all other poetry this magical influence plays a major role. After that he shows a great relationship between him and the nature. Then a mystical relationship between the poet and the nature is very much evident in all other poems of the poet. Apart from that, the poet also depicts wonder of nature, in its trees, flowers, fountains, rivers and every discernible things of nature. The poet's rich imagination wants to expose before all that the infinite being is mixed in the nature with awful beauty. So, no object of nature is insignificant, even a meaningless natural object can be heavenly in its importance.

### **Discussion:**

The ode 'Ode on Intimations of Immortality' shows some similar characteristics that was inculcated by the mountain influence. Wordsworth idealizes nature, when he says: "To me the meanest flower that blows can give; Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."(Intimations of Immortality Stanza 11 )Here we not only find poet's spiritual oneness with nature but also an intellectual oneness with nature.

Wordsworth's belief was that our birth is nothing but a temporal sleep, when we will wake up eventually after death we will be united with infinite reality. In 'Intimations of Immortality' his eerie feeling shows that God has a teleological plan for all; we are here in this finite world but our root is in the far away in infinite abode. He sounds in an amazing way : "Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting. The soul that rises with us, our life's star, hath had elsewhere its setting, And cometh from afar. But trailing clouds of glory do we come from God, who is our home."( Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood)

Wordsworth presumes our existence in this world with somewhat uneasy way; a symbol of bewildering presence makes him awe-inspiring. The sign of our existence and origin is mixed in nature with an awe- inspiring feeling. He can only make half sense of it.In his famous 'Immortality' ode, the poet strengthens his mystic belief: "The earth, and every common sight; To me did seem; Apparell'd in celestial light." ( Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood)

Here again the poet is totally imbued in a world that is beyond our tangible capacity.

In Book XII – XIV, (Prelude) the poet showed in a step by step metamorphosis of his creed in human kind. The Prelude is his semi- autobiographical poem, an elaborate work containing views on nature man, and society, it is one of the most conspicuous works of Wordsworth and a psychological description of the development of his own mentality. The most adored work of Wordsworth 'The Prelude' is a record of a soul's development towards the declaration of self. This is clearly seen in the opening lines of The Prelude Book – II.

“Thus far, O Friend,  
 have we though leaving much Unvisited,  
 endeavoured to retrace  
 The simple ways in which my childhood walked,  
 Those chiefly that led me to the love Of rivers, woods and fields.  
 The passion  
 Was in its birth, sustained as might befall  
 by nourishment that came unsought”. 13

This proves the awakening of love for nature in Wordsworth.

Sadik Islam in his article 'Wordsworth: obsession for nature' showcases Wordsworth's pantheistic trait:

"Wordsworth's pantheistic doctrine that "God is everything and everything is God" is the substance of his main poems. Prelude shows the poet's firm supposition that human capacity is limited to perceive the cause of mesmerizing beauty that nature reflects."

The poet shows his mystical bent of mind and the profundity of unearthly thoughts baffles Wordsworth with utter discomfort because something invisible becomes faintly visible in nature but in unnatural way: "And I have felt; A presence that disturbs me with the joy; Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime; Of something far more deeply interfused - "A motion and a spirit, that impels; All thinking things, all objects of all thought; And rolls through all things." (Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey)

This again shows us that the poet maybe in human stature but his thought is beyond all and he transcends limited life and in rich and heavenly imagination makes limited unlimited and fantastic.

Wordsworth's poetic faith that is found in the ' Tintern Abbey' is extraordinary, he finds something mysterious in nature. It evokes the perplexed memory of the Prelude.

'Nor less, I trust,  
 To them I may have owed another gift,  
 Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,  
 In which the burthen of the mystery,  
 In which the heavy and the weary weight  
 Of all this unintelligible world.'  
 (Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey)

This mysterious and unintelligible feeling is benchmark quality of the poet.

Sadik Islam in his article 'Wordsworth's obsession with nature' compares Wordsworth's feeling with Tagore's uncanny feeling.

This verse from 'Tintern Abbey' reminds us of Rabindranath Tagore's mystic poem 'The Golden Boat', where karma, or deeds of life, is taken away leaving behind earthly life by a symbolic boat. The poet can't have a full view of the shadowy boat's activity; so staying stranded, he remains spellbound: "Who is this, steering close to the shore; Singing? I feel that she is someone I know."

In the poem, Tagore in trance experiences a half-seen entity; a mysterious being that can never be known in a cloudy blackened rain drenched river backdrop. Furthermore, an all-encompassing essence in the bewildering beauty of nature unsettles Wordsworth in wonder. The best ever worshipper of nature comes to idealistic realization that "nature never did betray the heart that loved her"(Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey)

Sadik Islam in his article furthermore shows poet's divine feeling in this way:

The Prelude' remains significant for making things mystic. Wordsworth sees life in the lifeless. The whole seemingly motionless world seems to him animated with divine grace, an esoteric sense runs through his thoughts: "To every natural form, rock, fruit or flower; Even the loose stones that cover the highway; I gave a moral life: I saw them feel.

To Wordsworth rivers, hills, birds, trees, flowers, meadows all natural objects were illuminated by divine glory. Wordsworth by his insight and imagination built a new doctrine; his thought and belief marked a new era in English literature. Again in 'Tintern Abbey', Wordsworth hears with painful ear not the murmuring sound of Wye river, while standing beside the Wye River, but he hears the sad music in the flow of river water that bears chemical poison of industrialism. Nature which is to Wordsworth abode of God's presence was being devastated by man's lust that gave immense shock to the poet.

As Sadik Islam remarks in his article:

So, the poet comes back again and again to the contact of nature, leaving hustle and bustle of manmade world to appease his soul with the purity of biotic care. Nature, pathetically, which is the shadow of cosmic sublimity, does not anymore hold the same grandeur that Wordsworth exalted so much. There lies now a big chasm between humans and nature. One can hardly get eternal solace because nature, which Wordsworth called his guide for spiritual solace, now is a mere slave to human rapacity.

So it is found that as a poet of Nature, Wordsworth stands supreme. In his nature treatment he shows deep propensity towards spiritual aspects of nature. He is a worshipper of Nature,

Nature's devotee or high-priest. Wordsworth had a full-fledged philosophy, a new and original view of Nature. His elevated thought discovered, as said before, a celestial body that baffles his agitating mind.

Furthermore, He beheld nature as a living personality. He had deep faith that there is a spiritual entity pervading all the objects of Nature. Wordsworth's philosophy can be termed as mystical Pantheism. Like a true pantheistic trait in mind Wordsworth believed 'All is God and God is all'. Nature is the vehicle through which a man can come closer to understand the presence of God. This belief is fully echoed in Tintern Abbey, where he proves his devotional feeling towards nature:

“...And I have felt  
A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply infused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of the setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:”

( Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey)

This uneasy feeling is very much mentionable and exceptional for a poet of nature. Wordsworth explains very easily the deep most feeling that no nature poet could do ever. Giving life to inanimate is an extraordinary trait of the poet; here in Tintern Abbey the poet sees what our carnal capacity misses.

Wordsworth finds the existence of God even in the mind of man through nature. Wordsworth upholds that there is a pre-arranged harmony between the mind of man and the spirit in nature, which enables man to form a relationship or communication with nature.

“Dust as we are immortal spirit grows like  
Harmony in music, there is a dark  
Inscrutable craftsmanship which binds together  
Discordant elements and makes them cling together  
In a society.”

(Lyrical Ballads)

The relationship is materialised when the mind of man forms a kinship with the thoughts of nature. And it is this cordial and intellectual junction between man and nature that helped to shape his belief that nature has the power to teach and educate human beings. The poet considers nature as a bountiful source of knowledge. He also believes that nature is the nurse and the protector of the mankind. Nature's benignity considers only the welfare of human beings. In his words, nature is:

“The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse  
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul  
Of all my moral being.”

( Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey)

In fact the poet always would soothe his painful and despairing mind coming close contact with nature.

Wordsworth believed that the company of Nature gives joy to the human heart and he looked upon Nature as exercising a healing influence on sorrow-stricken hearts. In Wordsworth's belief, nature is capable of alleviating the tormented mind of man. The beautiful and frolicsome aspects of nature are an infinite source for healing power. To him the primrose and the daffodils are symbols to him of Nature's message to man. A sunrise for him is not a pageant of colour; it is a moment of spiritual consecration. In his eyes, "Nature is a teacher whose wisdom we can learn, and without which any human life is vain and incomplete."

Cazamian remarks: "To Wordsworth, Nature appears as a formative influence superior to any other, the educator of senses and mind alike, the sower in our hearts of the deep-laden seeds of our feelings and beliefs. It speaks to the child in the fleeting emotions of early years, and stirs the young poet to an ecstasy, the glow of which illuminates all his work and dies of his life."

In the Immortality Ode he tells initially that as a boy his love for Nature was a thoughtless passion but when he grew up, the objects of Nature took a sober colouring from his eyes and gave rise to profound thoughts in his mind because he had witnessed the sufferings of humanity. When life becomes pungent and unbearable then the sweet and affectionate contact with nature and even the recollections of nature can eliminate the burden of desolation, anxiety and suffocation:

"But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din  
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them  
In hours of weariness, sensation sweet.  
Felt in the blood and felt along the heart;  
And passing even into the purer mind  
With tranquil restoration."

( Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey)

So it is evident that nature would heal and fill his heart with happiness when he was lonesome and in heavy mood.

Again in the poem "Daffodils" Wordsworth recalls same thing of compassion:

"For oft, when on my couch I lie  
In vacant or in pensive mood  
They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude.

Wordsworth honours even the simplest and the most ordinary objects of nature and human life. For him nothing is mean or low, since everything that is present in the universe is touched by divine life.

Again, Intimation of Immortality is a mentionable lyric poem in world literature; In its rhythmic style and in the development of deep sense of life. Moreover, 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood' is a beautiful and deep in meaning poem in which the speaker focuses on time and aging where emotion play a role. One day in the unique beauty of the month of May, the poet's thirsty mind sees the immortal glory of the creator flowing in this earth in a small way. So the poet asked the shepherd boy to sing; Be obsessed with the joy of the fauna of the universe. Surprisingly, the poet sees that heavenly feeling left in his mind reawakening in his heart. As Rabindranath said ' Who's singing on the boat heading for the shore? As I looked on, I feel I've seen the face before'.( The Essential Tagore, page 210). Wordsworth experienced the strange traces of the heaven from which we came to this earth in the hidden beauty of nature. In the midst of the finite like Plato he finds the sign of the infinite Maya. His extended realization 'this birth is just forgetting a day's sleep: the rejuvenation of our souls with our lives. The origin of this living soul is elsewhere; I have come here from afar. 'But we grow up and the rules of the world, the attraction, drives us away from that pure consciousness; As the purity of childhood grows, the ugliness of the earth fades. The rough joy of the world dissipates the past glory deep in our hearts. The desperate poet finds the shadow of his pre-existence in life, surrenders himself to the song of birds and shakes off all despair in the fascinated nature. Just as Rabindranath sees the connection of the moving world with the transcendental world on the wings of a flying bird in 'Balaka' poem, so Wordsworth is delighted with a transcendental feeling; Get the outstanding in the middle of the small. Seeing a child imitating his parents, the poet sees in the depths of thought that this child's mind still feels the heavenly aura left by him not only with his body but also with his heart and soul; but gradually the activities of the world become a cover between this world and that world. The poet's mind remembers the glorious memories of the child's childhood and sees his glorious pre-birth memories awakened in this nasty world. The poet says very meaningfully 'I see that immortal world / floating in the heart that has brought us here' ( I Wondered Lonely as a Cloud) poet ends his famous poem with the analogy of nature - the poet thinks that even an inferior flower has deeper thoughts than the water of human tears which is superior.

One of Wordsworth's creations was The Prelude that I cited before. It is in effect a semi-biographical book of poetry where nature, society and human life get priority. Prelude was not fully finished but it contains deep philosophy for life. Man, nature, spirituality and pantheistic views are main traits of Prelude. The poet did not bypass even the smallest things of nature, just as Walt Whitman had found a fragrant handkerchief to the grass in nature, in Prelude Wordsworth looks nature in the same way. To the poet, every object of nature is beautiful, sublime, awe-inspiring and silent representation of the cosmic entity. In the poet's imagination, this world, its man is a small shadowy manifestation of the infinite world, and nature is inseparably holding the mark of that eternal world with a fuzzy pattern between this mortal world and the immortal world. In this way, in extraordinary poetic truth in 'The Prelude' the poet sees a glimpse of the limitless, eternity in the simple, gentle maya of nature. He saw the manifestation of the world-giver in the light of wonderful philosophy in an honest, pure, silent universe with deep life thoughts. The poet sees the transmission of life in objects; Dumb objects are also glorious to the poet with his all encompassing love of nature.

Wordsworth doesn't like to see the nature as fixed beauty and Wordsworth doesn't like to limit his arts to only describing the sights, sounds, odours, and movements of various elements of nature. He wants to soar high and find divine beauty in nature. So his poetry is not a motionless art rather in the calmness of nature, in its outer beauty he discovers something inner meaning which is mystical one. In almost all his poems this mystical treatment is a main force.

Wordsworth a mystic poet sees life in all inanimated things. His mystical doctrine is that every foliage, all flowers and moving cloud, every running stream and hill, the starry stars and the chirping birds that are body of nature, have got its own life.

Wordsworth's significant assumption is that he values nature and life equally. Wordsworth finds life in nature. In the poem 'Tinter Abbey' he urges people to be nature-bound because 'nature never abandons the heart that loves him' and in the poem 'The Tables Turn' he urges people to throw away books and obtain knowledge from nature. For Wordsworth Birds should be our priests, nature should be our teachers. The poet loves nature with deep love and rare ecstasy. The enlightened universe has modified this nature with all its royale beauty and the new meaning of life. But we the ordinary nature lovers are unable to see this deeper meaning of nature.

Finally, it can be said, Wordsworth's looked nature in a different way than we do. In nature Wordsworth found a deeper and profound meaning of life that is not similar to ours. Nature is not only a source of joy to him but also he showed his great devotion for nature. Divine being is interfused in nature that was Wordsworth's nature philosophy. His mystic sense and his great love for nature helped him to find a new vision in nature. His mystical vision made him different from other romantic writers and Wordsworth with his charming divine philosophy opens up something fully different meaning of nature to us.

### **References:**

- William Wordsworth has been quoted from the Norton Anthology of English Literature, Sixth Edition, Vol.2, Abrams,M.H.(ed.) New York: Norton,1993.
- Alam, Fakrul. Radha Chakravarty. *The Essential Tagore*.ed, Fakrul Alam.2011, Visva-Bhshati.
- The textual references of William Wordsworth have been taken from the website [www.poetryfoundation.org](http://www.poetryfoundation.org) (Retrieved 17 th Dec 2021)
- Wordsworth: Obsession for Nature*. [theindependentbd.com](http://theindependentbd.com). (Retrieved 17 th Dec 2019)
- Critical Analysis of Romantic Poetry*.pdf. Romantic Age. [www.coursehero.com](http://www.coursehero.com) (Retrieved 08 Aug 2020)
- Moraud, Marcel (1971). "Poemes choisis by George Meredith, L. Cazamian, M. Cazamian". *The French Review*. 44 (6): 1130–1131. JSTOR 386879
- Leaves of Grass: The Poems of Walt Whitman*, [whitmanarchive.org](http://whitmanarchive.org) > books > other > rhys (Retrieved 10 Sep 2018)
- Liverod, Sara Barosen "*Wordsworth's Naturalistic Spirituality: The Effects of Romantic Paganism in William Wordsworth's Poetic works*". Artistic University of Norway. [munin.uit.no](http://munin.uit.no) > handle > thesis. 10/02/2022

-----