

## **Wordsworth as a Worshipper of Nature**

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**Abstract:** Wordsworth served as Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom from 1843 until his death in 1850. While his later years witnessed a shift toward political and religious conservatism, his early radicalism transformed literature by placing individual consciousness and the natural world at the center of human experience. He remains one of the most influential figures in the English literary canon, frequently ranked alongside Shakespeare and Milton.

William Wordsworth is famously characterized as the “High Priest of Nature” because he did not merely describe the landscape but approached it with the devotion, reverence, and spiritual responsibility of a religious leader. His critically validated identity as a nature poet is built upon four primary philosophical pillars. Wordsworth believed in a divine spirit that permeates all objects of the universe. Unlike earlier poets who saw nature as a mere backdrop, he viewed it as a “living personality” or an organic unity. A central tenet of his poetry is that nature acts as a moral educator superior to formal philosophy. He describes nature as the “anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse, / The guide, the guardian of my heart.” He emphasizes nature’s ability to restore “sorrow-stricken hearts” and heal those bruised by the “din of towns and cities.”

**Key Words:** Nature, Priest, Divine, Landscape

“Nature” is the brand name of Wordsworth’s poetry. Perhaps only in Wordsworth’s case is “Nature” written with a capital ‘N’. This is because, for Wordsworth, nature signifies a manifestation of God itself. Wordsworth’s poetry was, in fact, a reaction against the city poetry written by Alexander Pope and his “Popian” friends in the eighteenth century. This poetry professed to follow nature, but by nature they meant human nature. So far as nature in Wordsworth is concerned, it has an altogether

different meaning. It deals not only with the external aspects of nature such as trees, brooks, clouds, and mountains, but also with the concept of pantheism.

In his *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth asserts that the poet cannot succeed by employing tricks, quaintness, hieroglyphics, and enigmas; instead, he is to write "on man and nature." He also affirms that "the essential passions of the human heart exist in a state of greater simplicity in humble and rustic conditions as compared to the sophisticated city life." In this way, Wordsworth's poetry reflects a reaction against the neo-classical poetry of the city written by urban dwellers.

### **Wordsworth's Love for Nature and His Mysticism**

It is acknowledged that the poet's unique mystical experience is the source of Wordsworth's love for nature. According to him, nature is a sentient, conscious being. Whoever loves her as a true mother, "guide and guardian," is never betrayed by the heart that cares for her. For all intents and purposes, nature is an active principle that permeates everyone's soul. In reality, mysticism is a fundamental and ubiquitous ingredient in Wordsworth's poetry, and it offers a remedy for the aches, wounds, cuts, and cracks caused by materialism.

Wordsworth firmly believed that the divine spirit pervades the entire universe. It is to be seen and felt in both the animate and the inanimate world. God is the moving spirit found in every man, woman, flower, and stone. As such, Wordsworth believed that nature not only has a life of its own but is conscious as well. That is why Wordsworth always felt the indefinite presence of some power that connects man and nature.

Wordsworth famously defined poetry as the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" originating from "emotion recollected in tranquility." His work reflects several key themes:

- **Nature as a Teacher:** He viewed nature as a living, divine entity that provides moral guidance, spiritual renewal, and healing to the human soul.
- **The Common Man:** He focused on the lives of "low and rustic" people, believing their simple language and essential passions to be the most suitable subjects for poetry.
- **Childhood and Memory:** Wordsworth believed that children possess a pure, intuitive connection to the divine that fades with age, making memory a vital tool for recapturing that original wonder.

### **Different Stages of Wordsworth's Love of Nature**

The evolution of Wordsworth's love of nature can be divided into the following stages:

1. Love that includes the “coarser pleasures” and “glad animal movements”
2. His sensuous love for nature
3. His intellectual and spiritual love

**The First Stage:**

In this stage, Wordsworth's love of nature was a healthy boy's love for the open air and the freedom of the fields. During his adolescent period, Wordsworth delighted in roaming the hills and vales for the sake of angling and other “boyish sports.” He indulged in these activities without any conscious awareness of their significance, but they provided immense pleasure. He calls them “the coarser pleasures of boyish days.”

**The Second Stage:**

This stage marks the passionate adoration of nature, during which he used all five senses to appreciate it. At this point, he was merely aware of the attractions of natural objects and had no understanding of their deeper significance. With the intention of appreciating the wonders of nature, the youthful poet sprang across the slopes “like a roe” and enjoyed the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches that nature offered him.

**The Third Stage:**

In the third stage, Wordsworth's sensuous love, or “dizzy raptures,” was eclipsed by the “still sad music of humanity.” His sensual pleasures were chastened and subdued by this music, which was neither harsh nor unpleasant. His compassion for human suffering led to the emergence of an inner awareness that recognized the previously invisible connections among all natural objects. He discovered that all natural items are connected to man by a heavenly soul. In the *Immortality Ode*, Wordsworth terms this pantheistic spirit the “celestial light.” He firmly believed that nature was nothing but a macrocosmic manifestation of the microcosmic inner spirit and that man himself reflected the divine spirit. His message now was that nature needs to be “spiritually discerned.”

According to some critics, this is the fourth level of Wordsworth's love of nature. However, those who have experienced mysticism argue that this is only the result of the third stage. In reality, it is a “state” rather than a stage. The process leading to pantheism is discernible in his poem *Nutting*, where in his boyish enthusiasm he commits “merciless ravage” upon the virgin landscape. Later, a mysterious touch transforms him, and he feels the presence of some inscrutable spirit pervading the

woods. This change is later reflected in *Tintern Abbey*, the *Lucy* poems, and many other poems, including the *Immortality Ode* and *The Prelude*.

Wordsworth's evolving relationship with nature is famously depicted in *Tintern Abbey* through four distinct stages:

- **The Period of Blood (Boyhood):** Nature as a physical playground for “thoughtless passions.”
- **The Period of Senses:** A purely aesthetic and sensuous attraction to colors and forms.
- **The Period of Imagination:** A deeper mental connection where the mind and nature begin to interact.
- **The Period of Soul (Maturity):** The realization of a spiritual presence that connects nature with the “still sad music of humanity.”

### Conclusion

Wordsworth is portrayed in his poetry as a genuine devotee of nature—her high priest. According to him, nature truly serves as man's “friend, philosopher, and guide.” His poetry was, first and foremost, a response to classical city poetry. Secondly, he found more than just sensory and physical pleasure in nature; he perceived the entire universe as being permeated by a divine energy. He remained nature's true priest, revealing her harmony and spiritual significance. He believed that nature was God's outward expression.

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