

God's Natural World and Modern Man's State of Mind in William  
Wordsworth's "*The Tables Turned*"

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**Abstract**

The research will examine the philosophical position of William Wordsworth in the field of poetry by sketching his love for God's natural world and nature in his adult life to prove him as a philosophical poet. The present study is carried out on the selected poem *The Tables Turned* written by William Wordsworth emphasizes on modern man (who only relies on science and discoveries) instead of becoming part of nature and love for nature. Moreover, the man versus God's natural world in his poetry in general and in this poem, in particular, shows a contrasting relationship of modern man which the author observed and discussed in detail. Nature (God's power/creature made by God and natural beauty) is a source of reasoning for modern man as mentioned in Quran Surah Al Baqra albeit modern man ignored those aspects of nature and focused only on science. The analysis shows how the revolutionary spirit and harmony with Nature can make modern man a happy person amid Nature as Nature is not only the name of landscapes but also covers all the complexity and the aspect of life and death.

**Keywords:** Nature, consciousness, adult life, revolutionary spirit

## Introduction

This poem *The Tables Turned* by William Wordsworth explores the deep concerns about human life and directly applies to the romantic movement. William Wordsworth (especially in the Romantic period) has always been playing a vital role to enlighten the mind of readers that according to Robert Frost “a poem begins in delight and ends in wisdom”<sup>1</sup>. Wordsworth wishes to develop a mystical relation of man with nature. To him, nature makes the characters strong and beautiful and this simple beauty brings out the eternal beauty in character as nature does to beautify this universe. For Taine, he does not only prescribe the form of poetry but also decorate it with specific elements. In *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), the qualities of the poet have been discussed as “a more comprehensive soul”<sup>2</sup> with great understanding and sensibilities about Nature. As a poet, William Wordsworth instructs us in language near to men's language how to follow Nature and the fluxes and reflux of mind when modernity affects. In addition to simple language and theme announced by him, he in his poem-*Recluse*-insisted that “the discerning intellect of man, when wedded to this goodly universe in love and holy passion” is “my haunt, and the main region of my song”<sup>3</sup>. Through his own experiences and after searching the mysterious pits of his impulses, he tries to convince the modern man that all the elements which are necessary to make a perfect man are located within nature. By the following nature steadfastly, a man can get guide how to learn the lesson of living with great pleasure<sup>4</sup>. Edward Dowden, in *Introduction to Wordsworth's poems*, informed that the life of nature is interpreted by the life of the human spirit and Wordsworth dedicated his life to prove it. He proclaimed the message of God by interpreting nature and establishing a trust to fulfil what he feels about diving inspiration. A gift of Heaven is possessed by the poet, even the prophet “sense that fits him to perceive objects unseen before”<sup>5</sup>. Wordsworth, in his adult life, uses the philosophical concept to deal with worldly matters by focusing on Nature and natural surroundings. The poet tries to figure out the meaning of life and how to live that life in a modern world? John Stuart Mill (1873), whose renowned essay “*On Nature*” had shattered people's preconceived conceptions about Nature's compassion and kindness, sought comfort in Wordsworth's poetry as well. He argues:

What made Wordsworth's poems a medicine for my state of mind was that they expressed, not mere outward beauty [.....], but they seemed to be the very culture of feelings, which I was in quest of. In them, I seemed to draw from a source of inward joy, of sympathetic and imaginative pleasure, which could be shared by all human beings.<sup>6</sup>

The poet (with particular reference to the poem *The Tables Turned*) shows concern about humans who only relies on science and discoveries but miss the chance to explore nature and get knowledge from it. The detailed analysis will show how the poet provides motivation to modern human beings to love nature and opens a new gate to ponder over their self-centred nature. There are numerous outward signs of a deeper spiritual dimension; trees are symbols, rocks and stones are a secret language, and mountains are strange statements created by a creator (God) who attempts to connect with his creation such as in the poem *The Tables Turned* "woodland linnet, sun, mountain's head" "may teach you more of man"<sup>7</sup>. This consciousness is known as the stage of Pantheism refers to the belief that the highest awareness, the spirit of nature, or God, is present everywhere. This poet's conviction demonstrates that the everlasting spirit pervades all of nature's objects and is passionately articulated.

#### **The Tables Turned as a source of Supreme Consciousness**

In the first stanza, Wordsworth (1800) gives us the message about the change of mindset of human beings and leave the books behind "quit your books" and "up! up! my friend and clear your looks"<sup>8</sup> because "the sun above the mountain's head, [.....] has spread, his first sweet evening yellow"<sup>9</sup>. Nature is pure for the poet but books provide us with limited knowledge or sometimes wrong information as books are written by a human. There is speculation that the wishes to discover something new has generated the Covid-19 virus and even after passing two years, there is not a single solid solution to this virus. So, it proves true that only bookish knowledge is not worth reading and causing trouble. However, leaving behind the books make the person "double"<sup>10</sup>. The laws of nature can provide a clear look at society and the problems of society as Nature is a nurse and provides the guidance for spiritual life. To Wordsworth, there is a close resemblance of all things to

Nature which expresses the basic concept of supremacy of Nature. He develops a Pantheism stage with a concept of supremacy of Nature and to him, in all the objects of Nature, the divine spirit is prevalent. He established a firm faith which can be obtained through the poem *Tintern Abbey* written in (1798) as

“Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and the mind of man”<sup>11</sup>

The Poet further says that Nature has more power to teach than books and books are just an “endless strife”<sup>12</sup>. Although humans are doing discoveries through science and by taking help from scientific books yet “woodland linnet” has more sweet music in life and “wisdom in it”<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, these discoveries are only for humans instead of the universe. While Nature is for everyone and is everywhere. The poet presents the same idea in a poem *School-time* in *The Prelude II*,

“I felt the sentiment of being spread  
O'er all that moves and all that seemeth still;  
O'er all that , lost beyond the reach of thought  
And human knowledge, to thee human eye  
Invisible, yet liveth to the heart”<sup>14</sup>

The poet stresses the presence of a moral system in nature with the following lines which speak volume “come forth into the light of things, let Nature be your teacher”<sup>15</sup>. The pleasure of the contemporary, materialistic, and technologically advanced man is found in the acceptance of moral ideals derived from nature. The universe's highest society has numerous natural items imbued with various qualities, resulting in a world brimming with life and happiness. The intensity and love for Nature have been increased with the development of the poem. Here, the poet directly emphasizes humans to be a part of nature because “Nature through all conditions hath a power”<sup>16</sup>. Similarly, the poet portrays nature as a never-ending source of delight, and he never views nature negatively. In this context, W.H. Hudson points out, “he finds a never-failing principle of joy in nature”<sup>17</sup>. There is much more around us, we can learn, watch, listen and feel instead of only focusing on books. Nature has power over civilization, the humanity that makes the world full of

happiness and beauty and is “the gift” for us<sup>18</sup>. Nature only gives us happiness as in the case of Lucy who grows in the lap of nature “the stars of midnight shall be dear to her [...] and beauty from of murmuring sound shall pass into her face”<sup>19</sup> but human takes happiness from us. The same is true of Michael, then “Leech-gather”, the “Solitary Reaper”, the “Highland Girl”, the “Danish Boy”, and “Louisa in the shade”. If human beings adopt and apply the divine and natural values over their lives, they will not go astray from the real path but human beings are so materialized and blind to Nature that they pay no attention to Nature around them. Hence, human beings are wasting their time and energy without recognizing the true value of Nature which Wordsworth calls, “grandeur upon the very humbles face of human life”<sup>20</sup>.

The poet further extends the idea of learning from Nature. The contrast between practical and bookish knowledge becomes more clear because the individual mind and the external universe are wonderfully opposite that should be matched to each other. However, this communication/match is only possible when man’s spirit and mind are in tune with nature. The poet demonstrates how a human being who is cut off from the rest of mankind is disconcerting or unpleasant. Here are the applicable words from the poem “*Three Years She Grew*”, “the silence and the calm, of mute insensate things”<sup>21</sup>. However, the modern man is not ready to learn and see the beauty of Nature but in hurry to discover things or spend time with books. W.H Davies also depicts the nature of humans in his poem *Leisure* “a poor life this if, full of care, we have no time to stand and stare”<sup>22</sup>. However, Wordsworth advice modern man that he can learn more from a tree (a part of Nature) “one impulse from a vernal wood may teach you more of man” about humanity, good and bad “than all the sages can”<sup>23</sup>. In another poem, the author expresses the same thought, claiming that it is nature’s principle that gives each piece a pulse of good. According to the poet in the poem *The Excursion*,

“Whate’er exist hath properties that spread  
Beyond itself communicating good  
A smile blessing or with evil mixed”<sup>24</sup>.

Moreover, Wordsworth concept shows resemblance with Rousseau’s idea of innocent man’s descendant from good to evil. As the poet proclaims- in the “*Ode: Intimations of Immortality*” - in his childhood every ordinary sight

was a metaphor for supernatural light albeit the things have changed because of the desire to excel, the broad visionary mindset of humans have filled with materialism and “the inevitable yoke” of “earthly freight”<sup>25</sup>. Wordsworth’s “*The Tables Turned*” also shows Rousseau’s theory of natural purity in which he communicates and says:

“Sweet is the lore which nature brings;  
Our meddling intellect  
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things;  
We murder to dissect”<sup>26</sup>.

Humans should try to explore, analyze, and inspect Nature but things are opposite and they just enjoy Nature. The poet’s life’s major purpose is to illuminate the unseen forces at work behind nature’s external beauty. In the poem “*To My Sister*” written in 1798, the poet recognizes “a sense of joy”<sup>27</sup> in nature and a kind force that encompasses everything around it. In another sense, to observe and analyze nature is to keep an eye on the events that are happening in society. In relation to events, Wordsworth wanted to be a part of the revolution and kept a careful eye on what was going on in France, but the revolt’s deadly turn left him disheartened and unhappy hence he wrote poems full of reasons but by focusing on Nature. In his book, William Hazlitt, an English writer and literary critic, says “*The Spirit of the Age*” that poetry of Wordsworth “had its origin in the French Revolution [.....] it was a time of promise, a renewal of the world - and of letters”<sup>28</sup>. In his *Introduction to Coleridge Poems*, John Beer observes that Coleridge, Wordsworth and Dorothy were committed to “exploring the idea that exposure to nature might be one of the most beneficent moral resources available to man”. Wordsworth also has the same idea at the end of the poem with the following words,

Enough of Science and of Art;  
close up those barren leaves;  
Come forth, and bring with you a heart  
That watches and receives<sup>29</sup>.

The poet is not against the bookish knowledge but the way of using it. The surface knowledge of books is useless. While humans learn from Nature by using their mind and soul together. It is said the same in the Quran,

Verily in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day, and the ships which sail through the sea with that which is of use to mankind, and in the veering of winds and clouds which are held between the sky and the earth, are indeed Ayat (proofs, evidence, signs, etc.) for people of understanding<sup>30</sup>.

Nature gives us true feeling and reasoning. It provides a pathway to figure out the hidden meaning that is only possible if human beings pay attention to Natural surroundings and Nature.

### **Conclusion**

On the basis of above analysis, it is concluded that William Wordsworth altered the scenario of English poetry. He choose his poetry to provoke the “the inner feeling and “the inner world” of man for nature world created by God. Moreover, the poet is not against the books but the way of using them. History is manipulated in various ways, so books are not less than troubles in the eyes of a poet hence the bookish knowledge only paves the way to build or manipulate things. However, Nature provides us with the true meaning of life and a path to investigate it as God has given us the power of reasoning. Thus, William Wordsworth’s poetry works as a “philosophical vehicle” for society and revolves around the main idea of the poem to “know thyself” because we are not ourselves anymore. We all have the shadow of ourselves. Human beings are entangled in worthless activities such as economic, race and status etc. The publication date of this poem is also worth noting (it was the period) when Europe has seen cultural, artistic, economic, and political development. In such a situation, modern man is not aware and not paying attention to Nature but to worldly progress. Conclusively, even passing many years, this poem is still relevant and gives a message to modern man.

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