NATURAL IN ENGLISH POETRY
A SHORT SURVEY
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Nature as a theme of inspiration in poetry is pretty old in the history of English letters. It easily dates back to Spenser and Shakespeare. Sporadically even in earlier poets, it is possible to come across passages devoted to the actual description of nature in its wildness or calm sublimity. But it is only in Spenser and Shakespeare that distinctly we discover an attempt on the part of the poet to read a meaning into nature. Spenser's treatment of nature, like all things else in him, is surcharged with allegorical significance. Shakespeare, in plays like 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', and 'As You Like It', revels in creating excellent scenes of lovely landscape beauty in woods and valleys. Flowering meadows and brimming rivers overshadowed by branches of intertwining trees, are very familiar in the idyllic romances of Shakespeare. The wealth of his imagination may be here distinctly discerned. It was evidently this woodland atmosphere that Milton was thinking of when he described Shakespeare as

"Sweetest Shakespeare, fancy's child,
Warbling his native woodnotes wild."

But one passage in 'As You Like It' is of special significance in the nature-poetry of England. It is the famous passage in which the banished Duke points to his faithful followers the way to find "sermons in stones, tongues in trees, books in running brooks and good in everything". Here is the distinct striking of a Wordsworthian note long before Wordsworth.

Subsequent poets, Milton and others, except for occasional descriptions such as that of the enchanting garden of Eden in 'Paradise Lost', were not fascinated by the beauty of nature for its own sake. The young Milton during his Horton days was alive to the charms of nature as he has amply proved to us in his companion pieces of those days, 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso'. How the beauty of nature would affect a scholarly young poet, now in the mood of mirth and again in the mood of solemn reflection, is evidenced in these two poems. The 18th century poets, particularly under the influence of Dryden and Pope, made poetry practically devoid of charming descriptions of the beauties of nature. In other words, the poets of this age were town-bred and were blind to nature. Dr. Johnson, who considered the City of London as a veritable University, did not display anywhere in his writings an earnest passion for the loveliness in the world of nature. In a word, it
may be said of these poets that their gospel was that the proper study of mankind is man. Chiefly it was the life of man in the higher circles of the aristocratic classes with their pomp and prudery, their intriguing and their vanity that came to be studied by these poets. Their verse compositions may best be described as proverbial commonsense communicated in metrical language. This was a period when the muse of nature-poetry was not eloquent.

But, even in the heart of this century dominated by Pope and Johnson, were a few poets who reached forward to something not quite in conformity with the traditions of their day. These were Gray, Goldsmith, Cowper and Burns. All of them are properly described as transitional poets. They are transitional in more senses than one. They tried a few bold experiments in versification; even more, they introduced, though hesitatingly, new themes into the realm of poetry. Cowper revelled in descriptions of calm rural scenery. Gray could write an immortal elegy sympathising with the obscure lot of the humble poor living and passing away as the children of the Earth.

"The breezy call of incense breathing morn,
The swallow twittering from its straw-built shed,
The cock's shrill clarion, the echoing horn,"

were effective sources of inspiration to this poet who could feel pity for the benighted life of the unhappy rustics. Goldsmith shed warm tears of genuine sympathy at the devastation he had come to witness in the lot of 'Sweet Auburn', the loveliest village of the plain.

"Where health and plenty cheered the labouring swain
Where smiling spring its earliest visit paid,
And parting summer's lingering blooms delay'd."

Many a simple village maiden living in innocence and happiness, was in the eyes of this poet "Sweet as a primrose (which) peeps beneath the thorn".

"The sheltered cot, the cultivated farm,
The never-failing brook, the busy mill,
The decent church that topped the neighbouring hill,"

all these objects, simple in their grandeur, were things of exquisite delight inspiring to rapture the poet, who was himself poor and therefore a true friend of the poor. Burns the peasant poet, the 'plough-boy' of literature, was the inspired and melodious singer of the joy he had found in watching the ways of the rustics and in gazing upon the loveliness of the mountain daisy, or in studying the timidity of the field-mouse.

In these poets we have a vague heralding of the age to come. They are the harbingers of the mighty Romantic Movement that was sponsored in English literature by Wordsworth a little later.
The year 1798 is an epoch-making year in the history of English literature. English romantic poetry, as a distinct and clear phase in the history of literature, may be said to date with this year. If any one poet may be said to have ushered the epoch, Wordsworth must be recognized as that poet. This poet of the Cumberland Hills was a young man of twenty-eight at the time. He had had a first-hand knowledge of the forces that shook France in that mighty upheaval she was then suffering. The French Revolution. It was in France that he had felt "the authentic beat of a nation's pulse". The religion of liberty taught to a responsive world by Voltaire and Rousseau necessarily produced its powerful effect on the youthful mind of Wordsworth. He was in rapturous enthusiasm as he imagined the future glory of man. It was referring to his own state of mind then and that of other young spirits that he later wrote:

"Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very heaven."

But after a time he was utterly disappointed with what he saw in France. Having himself fallen into a state of dejection after witnessing the excesses of the revolutionaries, Wordsworth turned to nature for consolation and solace to his hurt mind. Even before that, the silent influence of majestic mountains and sailing clouds had produced a vague impression on his mind. Now, when his mind was seeking a refuge from the horrors that man had perpetrated against his brother man in the war of liberty, the poet found effective relief in developing, as it were, a Religion of Nature. He described himself in the famous poem of 1798 as an ardent worshipper of Nature, a 'high-priest' of Nature. It was a revelation to him that the calm contemplation of the placid beauty that appealed to the eye and the ear of man in the world without, in itself could act as a beneficent education. Reviewing his past he could discover distinct stages in his attitude towards nature. There was a boyish time of giddy raptures and aching joys. The poet then hardly knew the cause of his ecstasy. He was then throbbing with animal spirits. This stage soon gave way to another. Then nature was to him all in all. The leaping cataract haunted him like a passion and the tall rock was to him an appetite. But these did not convey to him any joy unborrowed of the eye. The reflective side in him was hardly developed at this stage of his contact with nature. Knowledge of history, vital contact with the woes of humanity, a close study of what man had made of his brother man through the ages—all these made him look upon Nature, at a later stage, with a philosophic eye. Years had brought to him the 'Philosophic Mind'. Listening to the still sad music of humanity, 'with ample power to chasten and subdue', he had grown wise in humility. He was ready to read a new meaning into
his observation of nature. In other words, the moral sense in him was evoked and strengthened by contemplating nature's beauty with a mind chastened and enlarged by knowledge of humanity. Then it was that he was able to discover in Nature a living presence, informing all objects of thought and sensation, making its abode of the ample ether, the round ocean, the light of the setting sun, the majestic earth, and even the mind of man. Nature became to him the nurse, the guide, the guardian of his heart and the soul of all his moral being. This was the abiding phase of Wordsworthian thought. The gospel he proclaimed to the world repeatedly was:—

"Up, up, my friend, shut up your books,
Let Nature be your teacher."

He could ever assert:

"One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good
Than all the sages can."

The meditative side in him was deeply developed by silent contemplation on the beauty of Nature. A radiant rainbow became to him a mystic bridge for happy souls to ascend from earth to heaven. Every wayside flower was instinct with life. It was his poetical creed that every flower enjoyed the air it breathed. With confidence he asserted,

"To me the meanest flower that blows
Can give thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

Such was the Nature Religion of Wordsworth. Hence his influence on the age in this regard. In the calm places of the world and in the humble habitations of the poor, he had found matter for inspired meditation.

"Love had he found in huts where poor men lie,
His daily teachers had been woods and rills,
The silence that is in the starry sky,
The sleep that is among the lonely hills."

The mysterious power which Wordsworth discovered in nature was to him essentially a moral power. It co-operated with man in all his higher endeavours. It admonished him in his acts of thoughtless cruelty towards the helpless lower animals. It mutely sympathised with these humbler creatures of God, and ever kept a watchful eye on them. The poet gave inspired expression to this faith in the famous lines:

"The Being that is in the clouds and air,
That is in the green leaves among the groves,
Maintains a deep and reverential care
For the unoffending creatures whom he loves,
* * * * *
One lesson, shepherd, let us two divide
Taught both by what she shows and what conceals,
Never to blend our pleasure or our pride
With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels."

It is difficult to estimate accurately the influence of this creed of Wordsworth on the nature-poetry of his own age and the subsequent ages.

Next to Wordsworth must be mentioned, among the Nature poets of England, the poet of the elder Romantic School, who was also the inner critic and philosopher of the new school of poetry,—Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Coleridge was in essence a subtle-souled psychologist. The deeper processes at work in the mind of man, when examined by one’s own self, were of vital interest to him. It is with this spirit of introspection that he approached all problems. Poetry itself as an art was in his eyes nothing short of the communication in the best arranged words of excellence, of the vision of beauty possible to the poet’s soul. No wonder, therefore, that Coleridge’s attitude towards Nature should be in conformity with this psychological self-projection into the world without, possible to the artist in words. In a famous poem, talking of the poet’s understanding of the beauty and sublimity in Nature, Coleridge said:

"We receive but what we give
And in our life alone does Nature live;
My genial spirits fail;
And what can these avail
To lift the smothering weight from off my breast?
I may not hope from outward forms to win
The passion and the dream whose fountains are within."

Here is stated the fundamental difference between Wordsworth’s attitude towards Nature and that of his friend and fellow-poet,—Coleridge. To Wordsworth Nature was a living presence, a spiritual entity, independent and absolute, moral in power, establishing subtle communion between itself and the thinking mind of man. Coleridge, while prepared to recognise such a spirit for occasions, considered it purely the creation of the imagination of the perceiving poet. When, for example, the mind was depressed and brooded upon its inalienable sorrows, all the gorgeous play of colours in the clouds about the sun or the myriad hues of the magic rainbow, the majesty of the mountains, or the love and laughter in the world of birds, could not in the least bring spiritual consolation to the poetic mind of Coleridge. But, when in the responsive mood, Coleridge could paint the beauty of Nature with the power of an artist unexcelled. Such passages in his works are among exquisite pieces of perfection in the realm of poetry. For example, in ‘Christabel’,
when he describes the stillness of the winter night and of the cold full moon, we feel as if we actually see with our own eyes

"The one red leaf,
The last of its clan,
That dances as often as dance it can."

Elsewhere, in his one finished poem,—‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’—the poet touches with elfin fingers the calm light and the clear sound of the sea side:

"The moon-light steeped in silentness
The steady weather-cock."

This is pictorial poetry applied to the purpose of painting the beauty of Nature with vividness. It is delicate ivory work, worthy of a poet with subtle psychological insight. In the same poem the poet uses similar imagination to describe the weary waste of the expansive South Sea, so inimical to life, in its icy coldness. It is difficult to resist the gathering impression as one reads these passages that the poet for the occasion was imaginatively conscious of a mighty being inhabiting these wilds, controlling their operations.

When we turn to the younger school of Romantic Poets, the most notable name, in regard to the treatment of Nature, is that of Byron. As to Wordsworth, mountain regions were a delight and a passion to him. The Alpine solitudes with their majestic isolations were frequent sources of inspiration to Byron. One repeatedly comes across, in the nature-poetry of Byron, lines which have a distinct Wordsworthian ring. For example, one might almost mistake this for a line of Wordsworth's:

"To me high mountains are a feeling."

This line of Byron's from 'Manfred' reminds one of the appetite for the tall rock and the leaping cataract one so often meets in Wordsworth. But the poem of Byron's in which his nature-creed is most clearly stated is 'Childe Harold', particularly the final part of Canto IV. The famous address to the mighty ocean in it is inspired poetry, in its very quality a rapturous pouring forth of a full heart ravished by the sublimity and power it could discover in the wild spaces of Nature:

"Roll on, thou dark blue deep ocean, roll,
Ten thousand ships sweep over thee in vain,
Man marks the earth with ruin
But his control stops with the sea."

Talking of his own attitude towards Nature Byron said:

"I love not man the less, but nature more."

Like Wordsworth, he found delight in Nature:

"There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,
There is society where none intrudes,
By the deep sea, and music in its roar."
One feels that one is closest to Wordsworth in these passionate descriptions of the pleasures of solitude in Nature. Only with the conviction of a living presence mysteriously influencing the mind of man could Byron write verse of this sort. But the difference between Wordsworth and Byron arises here. It was always the thundering force, the limitless energy, the majestic power in Nature that mocked the transient achievements of man, which appealed to Byron. Wordsworth was more inclined to allow his heart to watch and brood over the harvest of its quiet eye as it kept its gaze upon places of calmness and placidity in Nature. Flowers, for example,—even wayside flowers—in their modesty and in their fragrance, were effectual messengers of the divine to the sensitive mind of Wordsworth. Byron is not so clearly a poet of flowers. A tempestuous spirit, vividly conscious of the higher destiny of man as a lover of liberty, it was with the wilder elements in Nature that Byron was more in tune.

It is by no difficult transition that one passes from Byron to Shelley. It was the dynamic element in nature which again was most alive to the energetic mind of Shelley. Convinced at the root of his personality that comprehensive love was the sovereign panacea for all the ills of life, Shelley, when he viewed with a poet's eye the beauty and power in Nature, could not but identify this spirit of Nature with his lordly conception of love, the light of life, "the benediction that kindles the universe from above and sustains it from below". In the melancholy moaning of the distant ocean or its unquiet slumber, as he hints at in 'Adonais', and in the boisterous energy of the west wind, which was at once to him a destroyer and a preserver, it was this spirit of energy in Nature that Shelley was aware of. With his passion for seeing in the world a better order of things come to prevail, he often identified himself in imagination with these elemental beings. He could sing most poignantly addressing the West Wind,

"Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud,
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!
A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed
One too like thee: nameless, and swift, and proud.
Make me thy lyre even as the forest is.
*
Be thou, Spirit fierce,
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one."

All the while, out of this saving melancholy and creative despair was born the faith that made him ask himself,

"If winter comes, can spring be far behind?"

The sublime truths of his discovery as poet and prophet he poured forth in unpremeditated song in the hope that the world would listen to him some day,
even as he listened then to the melody of the skylark, soaring in the sky and lost in the privacy of a glorious light. Shelley was an ethereal spirit. Intuitively he visualised the beauty and power in Nature as nothing short of life-giving love. In a sense, he stands apart from and above the other romantic poets of his age in his treatment of Nature, as in his treatment of everything else that ever appealed to the poetic imagination.

When we turn to Keats, the youngest of the Romantic Poets, and in a sense more purely poetical than any other, we find that we have to deal with one who by natural inclination, hardly by any systematic educational training, had in him a developed passion for the beauty of Nature unexampled. He differs fundamentally from all the three essentially romantic poets,—Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley. He is conscious of no philosophical creed as regards any subtle communion between a spirit in Nature and the thinking mind of man. The notion of the Living Being in Nature which Wordsworth conceived as Thought, and which Shelley identified with comprehensive Love, Keats did not favour; nor did he, like Coleridge, the psychologist, think of Nature’s beauty as an emanation from the perceiving mind of the observing poet himself. Rather, with the keen eye of an artist gifted with word-painting powers, he portrayed “Nature’s gentle doings” for their own sake, as they made an appeal to his creative imagination. Indeed, more than any other poet of that age, and at a period of life earlier than was to be noticed in the case of others, Keats, who was born in London, and brought up in Middlesex, watched the colours of the incensed flowers, the beauty of the woodlands full of “verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways”, and the calm grandeur of grassy meadows, rich in “fast-fading violets covered up in leaves.” He described every one of these in richly eloquent poetic language. More than any other poet of this part of the century, Keats may be described as the poet of landscape-painting.

There was, besides, one distinguishing feature in his nature-poetry marking him from the other poets of the time. Every individual object in Nature, he invested with a presiding deity in the manner of the ancient Greeks. He did not, like Wordsworth, affirm that woodland and valley, mountain and meadow, were instinct with an all-pervasive life, participating in the thought-life of man. On the other hand, borrowing the language of Greek mythology, he gave vent to the belief that there was an eternal naiad or dryad dwelling in every one of these objects of beauty in Nature. In other words, this, the youngest born of the Romantic Poets, was out and out Greek in temper. The vision of Proteus, which Wordsworth had wished for, and the song of Triton blowing on his wreathed horn, which would have
delighted that High Priest of Nature, were constantly present before the mind’s eye and the mind’s ear of this poet. It is no wonder, therefore, that in the sonnet with which he prefaced, by way of dedication, his volume of poems in 1817, he should express the regret that “Pan is no longer sought”. “The leafy luxury of roses and pinks and violets to adorn the shrine of Flora in her early May” which he pined after, only occasionally was to be the delight of the poets of a later day. Keats, for himself, particularly in the poems written before ‘Endymion,’ revelled in the luxury of landscape, in woodlands and in pleasant fields. It was in the spirit of Spenser that this young poet, inspired by Nature, could write of the silver clouds, sleeping in heaven, “like new-shorn sheep”, and

“The little noiseless noise among the leaves,
Born of the very sigh that silence heaves.”

It is one of the marvels of literature how this poet, born in humble surroundings amidst the din of the noisy city of London, denied all systematic contact with the literature of the earlier ages could yet discover the places of “nestling greens in nature, for poets made”.

This tendency which did set in early, is to be noticed in him even in his later poems. The Hymn to Pan in ‘Endymion’ is a well-known example of this persistent passion for the beauty of Nature informed by divine beings. Another example to be found in one of the latest of Keats’s compositions is too good to be missed even in such a short survey. It is the tribute the poet pays to the eternal life in the things of beauty in Nature, brought home to him by the song of the nightingale. His manner of immortalising man’s consciousness of this enduring life is typical of the poet whose purpose in life was stated in the words, “I have loved the principle of Beauty in all things.” The sweet, sad song of the nightingale appeals to him as

“The self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amidst the alien corn,
The same that oft times hath
Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.”

Here, in addition to the abundant evidence as regards the magic spell that Nature had cast on this great poet, we have proof of the happy blend of the pictorial and the musical, so characteristic of the higher efforts of all distinguished poets. Instinctively, any one acquainted with the graces of literature can here recognise poetry of the purest and the most enduring sort. The nature-poetry of Keats, therefore, is one aspect of his cult of Beauty which he identified with ultimate Truth. It was inspired throughout by the instinctive conviction born in him that a thing of Beauty is a joy for
ever, having in itself ever-increasing powers of loveliness. The abundant sensuousness, the evident pictoriality, the inspired imagery and the happy luxury of language we notice in these passages of poetry, clearly prove to us wherein lay the strength of Keats in his approach to the beauty of Nature. It cannot be forgotten, in the course of this discussion, that the thought-inspired life in Nature which was part of the philosophical creed of Wordsworth, is not accepted by Keats. He draws no moral lessons. He does not turn to the beauty of woodlands for moral good, or any saving impulse which might teach sobriety or improve the ways of the world. The beauty of nature for him is a passion in itself, leading to nothing beyond, except it be that it partially reveals to him the magic Beauty, identical with Truth, underlying all creation, of which he feels convinced all through his brief poetic career. In this respect Keats stands apart. He is, as it were, a Greek among the moderns. Here again might be seen by the intelligent student the aloofness of Keats and his total apathy to the political and social thought currents of his day.

Among his successors, so far as the appreciation of the beauty of Nature is concerned, prominent mention is to be made of Tennyson. While the passion for the beauty of Nature was one of the heritages of the poets of England who came after Wordsworth, it forces itself on one’s attention that the handling of Nature by Tennyson in the Nineteenth century remains unique in more ways than one. It is true that Tennyson succeeded Wordsworth as Poet Laureate. It is true that among his formative influences were Wordsworth and his master, Milton. But the glowing enthusiasm for Nature in herself and the rooted conviction that Nature is informed by a living presence beneficently working in co-operation with the higher tendencies in man for which Wordsworth is so famous are not shared by Tennyson. In this respect, he has nothing in common with the Romantic Poets, who, with subtle varieties among themselves, attributed life to Nature. Tennyson’s approach to Nature was more intellectual than emotional. The educational influence exerted on him in the University of Cambridge, famous then and since for its scientific studies, could not but affect this part of Tennyson’s poetic personality. In the language of criticism, it may be stated that Tennyson materialised the ethereal spirit of nature of which the Romantic Poets were conscious. His attitude towards Nature is the attitude of a scientist with a clear eye for beauty that is furnished in the universe to the sentient soul. He never, except on very rare occasions as when he wrote the lines on ‘the flower in the crannied wall’, looked beyond what was visible, or audible, to deeper influences, subtler shades, or enduring presences, vitally affecting the thought-life of man. Neither as a holy Presence of Thought, as Wordsworth con-
ceived it, nor as all-comprehensive Love sustaining the universe, as Shelley conceived it, did Tennyson look upon Nature. Even the psychological identification of the individual personality of the sensitive poet-soul with the indwelling being in Nature, which Coleridge defined as his attitude towards Nature, was not admitted by Tennyson. He is nearer Keats than any other poet of the Romantic Period in this respect.

The young Keats, however, was bubbling over with rich sensuousness. At the core of his being, in spite of his early acquaintance with grave suffering, there was genuine gladness. ‘The temple of delight’, though not far from melancholy, which was not altogether invisible, was the sacred shrine which Keats particularly sought in the early part of his all too brief career. This persistent sensuousness, born of genuine mirth, we do not find in Tennyson. Indeed, the joy with which the Romantic Poets revelled in Nature for her own sake, we altogether miss in Tennyson. He is not the poet of isolated mountains and shady spaces with lessons of their own for men. While his landscape painting is vivid, pictorial, accurate and definite, it does not appear to be informed with life of the sort attributed to Nature by the earlier poets. Very rarely does Tennyson paint Nature’s beauty for its own sake. It is always as a background for human tragedy or comedy that Tennyson pictures Nature. He, then, makes Nature, with a bold stroke at pathetic fallacy, mourn or rejoice in conformity with the human figures in the foreground. The landscape painting of ‘Œnone’, so rich and glorious, so effectively poetical, is all invented landscape. Tennyson did not live through it. He has made it harmonise with the sorrows in the solitary life of the bereaved wife, Œnone, the daughter of a River-god. It is the affliction of this forlorn woman that is of greater interest to us in the poem than the nature-painting against which her tragedy is enacted. Even so, while the three figures of ‘Divinity disrobed’ are painted for us by the poet, the joyous description of the abundant flowers that burst into bloom on their arrival, as the divine feet touched the earth, is all calculated to harmonise with the majesty of the goddesses that stood on the slopes of Mount Ida. So too in the famous poem, ‘Lotus-Eaters’, with its wonderful landscape painting of a sleepy island in which it was always afternoon, we find that every tiny picture is intended to suggest the concord between the mind of the melancholy men and the heaviness of the atmosphere. The “charming sunset lingering low adown the red West”, the thin vapoury rivers descending like thinnest lawn into the chasm below, lingering on every wayside rock, the slow-moving mist, the shadowy granite, the ‘cool mosses deep’, the long-leaved flowers in the stream and the poppy hanging in sleep from the craggy ledge,—every one of these is a tiny poem in itself. But, all the while, the poet is deliberately
making the picture harmonise with the sleepy state of the men who had arrived on the island and had found comfort in the lulling gospel, "there is no joy but calm." While the description of Nature here is of a superb sort revealing the exquisiteness of form of which Tennyson was a master, and indicating his poetic power in blending the pictorial and the musical, all of it is effective only in so far as it paints a background for the state of mind of the "mild-eyed, melancholy lotus-eaters".

To consider the last example of all from Tennyson, in that haunting little elegy—"Break, break, break, On thy cold grey stones, O, Sea ", the wonderful power of the poet as an artist in words for describing the enduring energy and youth of Nature in sea and wood, is evidently revealed. But no one gifted with the elementary capacity for appreciating the charm of poetry can fail to see that it is the breaking heart of the bereaved friend that is of greater significance here than the unending breaking of the waves on the crags. The regret for 'the tender grace of a day that is dead', and the yearning for 'the touch of a vanished hand and the sound of a voice that is still',—these with haunting persistence, leave on us a sense of the intense bereavement felt by the poet against the background of the breaking waves of the sea, and the stately ships that sail on to their havens under the hills. Nature to Tennyson meant nothing when it was not associated with man. He is the poet of man in his varied surroundings, one of them being Nature in her calmness or in her wild grandeur.

Yet another respect in which Tennyson differs from Wordsworth must be noted. To half of Nature Wordsworth was wilfully blind.

"Nature red in tooth and claw,
With ravine shrieks against the creed
That God is Love
And love creation's eternal law."

This note we nowhere hear in Wordsworth. The cruelty, the internecine feud, the unceasing struggle for existence among the wild and the tame creatures of Nature,—"so careful of the type, but so careless of the single life"—this we do not hear of anywhere in Wordsworth. It is the calmness and placidity, the softness and fragrance of the flowers, and the loveliness of the green grass, which figure frequently in the poetry of Wordsworth. Tennyson was not blind to this aspect of Nature, certainly. But in passing he did also refer to the deadly feud and destructive force often evident in the world of Nature around him.

One poem of Tennyson's stands out significant in his poetry as revealing just an occasional reach on his part towards the higher mysticism of Wordsworth, identifying the spirit in Nature with the divine that has brought
into being man and the rest of creation. It is the well-known poem, ‘The Flower in the Crannied Wall’. It concludes with the assertion that if he could but understand all about the tiny flower in the crannied wall, he would then surely understand what God and Man are. We might say that here he touches the confines of Wordsworth’s mystical speculations:

“Flower in the Crannied Wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies,
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower,—but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and Man is.”

While other poets coming in the wake of Tennyson made of Nature an occasional or enduring theme of inspiration, notice deserves to be taken only of the treatment of Nature by one of the greatest of them, the novelist and poet, Thomas Hardy. His views on life and man’s destiny are well known to all serious students of literature. In novel after novel, and in poem after poem, he pictures men and women as helpless puppets in the hands of a mocking fate. Character with its individual virtues or failings is not persistently shown as the ruling principle of life’s triumph or failure in the powerful works of Hardy. On the other hand, Hardy pictures life as full of little ironies. An invisible, malicious power mockingly subjects men and women against their best intentions to harrowing misery and an unenviable doom. The sufferers are alike unable to discover the cause or the cure for this misery that involves them in ruin. Hardy as a consummate artist makes of Nature a silent co-operative power with this gloomy Fate, which delights in making men miserable. His novels and poems are full of vivid and realistic descriptions of rural scenery of the Wessex District, but the spirit in Nature Hardy always conceives as working with Fate to lead men to their unenviable doom.

What Tennyson described as Nature red in tooth and claw is persistently present before the mind’s eye of Thomas Hardy. The constant struggle of an internece type in the universe—a struggle leading to mutual destruction on lines parallel to the spirit of love which is at the root of life—this is what is ever evident to the judgment of Hardy who is cruelly realistic in paintings of this description. The feud between the parasite and the plant in which not always the victory is for the plant, Hardy’s conception of the unending warfare within the realm of the universe between life struggling for self-determination and the forces working for its total annihilation. The mysterious power of Fate leading men to an unhappy destiny which we notice in his powerful tragic works has its counterpart in this ruthless and malicious, yet at the same time evident, force in Nature often annulling all the nobler
achievements of love and lofty idealism. It is, as it were, a piece of bold
and sustained pathetic fallacy which is worked out here by this, the latest of
the great literary artists of his century. The powers in Nature seem to work
in mute co-operation with the malicious and mysterious agency of Fate,
leading men inevitably to their ruin. In the powerful novel of "The Return
of the Native", for example, the scene of the pitiless sun scorching to death
the unfortunate mother of Yoebright on the day of her disappointed return
from her son's house, is one of the potent suggestions of Hardy as regards the
method in which the powers in Nature work with cruel Fate. So also, if
a second example were wanted, the turmoil in the elements on the night of
the self-destruction of the heroine, Eustacia Vye, is an artistic, though
terribly suggestive, picture of the storm-tossed spirit of the lady who had
much to regret in life and wilfully sought refuge in the coldness of death.
It is significant that just to reflect the bitter sorrows of her life, often occa-
sioned by misunderstanding or error of judgment, Hardy makes use of the
agency of Nature. Love and laughter, friendliness and fellowship, the genial
mirth of the fireside or the robust hilarity of the field, Hardy seldom called
to aid when he dwelt upon the power of Nature to influence human life.
After all, the attitude that an artist develops towards any powerful agency
influencing his life and work depends entirely upon the philosophy of life
that by slow stages grows upon him. An uncompromising pessimist,
though not without pity for human folly, it is not to be wondered at that
Hardy should use Nature as a sullen and silent background to deepen our
sense of life's misery, and the failure involved in all human endeavour in
spite of the best intentions. The heritage of the earlier poets and artists
is used for his own purpose, for developing a sombre philosophy of life by
this, the latest of the great literary masters of the late Victorian era.

Thus, it may be seen that having been elevated to the status of a poetic
creed by Wordsworth, Nature has come to be in the later history of English
letters one of the most powerful and stimulating themes of inspiration to
the poet, and a subject for the most varied artistic handling to the literary
enthusiast of other descriptions. So persistent has become the treatment
of nature in modern literature that most of the "week-end poets" who rush
out of London at intervals, leaving behind their bustle and their business,
aspire to literary celebrity only when they are able to write out a few enchant-
ing lines on the calmness of a distant hill-top or the majesty of the expansive
sea. Nature has come to be an enduring source of high inspiration to poets
exalted and amateur. Yet, when the history of this literary theme comes to
be properly written, all honour must of course be justly paid to the protago-
nist of the Nature Movement in English Literature, namely, Wordsworth,
the poet of the Lakes.