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## The World Is Too Much with Us: A Vedantic Reflection

### Jayantakumar Panda

#### Abstract

This paper explores William Wordsworth's "*The World Is Too Much with Us*" through a multidisciplinary lens encompassing literary analysis, philosophical interpretation, and scriptural comparison. By examining its structure, literary devices, and thematic depth, the paper uncovers the poet's central concern: humanity's disconnection from Nature and its enslavement to materialism. Wordsworth's spiritual despair and yearning for mythic consciousness resonate with Vedantic and Upanishadic teachings, particularly the notions of maya, detachment, and divine immanence. Parallels are drawn from the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Vachanamrut, and Shrimad Bhagavatam, demonstrating how the poet's Romantic worldview finds unexpected harmony with Eastern spiritual thought. Ultimately, the paper positions the poem as a modern-day sādhanā (spiritual reflection), inviting the reader to reawaken their lost connection to the sacred within and around them.

#### Preface

William Wordsworth, one of the foremost figures of the Romantic era, composed "*The World Is Too Much with Us*" as a response to the rapid industrialization and spiritual decay of his time. This sonnet transcends its historical context, becoming a timeless expression of existential crisis and metaphysical yearning. The present study aims to unravel the poem's deeper meanings by analyzing its poetic craft and placing it in dialogue with Indian philosophical traditions. The poet's lament over the human estrangement from Nature and his wistful desire to see with "Pagan" eyes opens a rich space for comparative reflection with Vedantic ideals, Upanishadic insight, and Bhakti devotionalism. By bridging Western Romanticism and Eastern spirituality, this research seeks to show how poetry, like scripture, can be a vessel for awakening, critique, and inner transformation.

#### 1. Literary Devices and Figures of Speech

Wordsworth's sonnet is a masterclass in the use of literary devices:

- **Metaphor:** The poem begins with a powerful metaphor: "Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers." This line portrays modern humans as spiritually depleted by materialism, comparing economic activity to a force that wastes human potential.
- **Personification:** Nature is richly personified. The sea "bares her bosom to the moon," and the winds "howl" or are "sleeping flowers." These descriptions give Nature feminine, human-like emotional expressions, reinforcing her divinity and vitality.
- **Imagery:** Vivid imagery like the "sea that bares her bosom" and "Proteus rising from the sea" evokes classical beauty and deep longing.
- **Alliteration:** Examples include "sordid boon" and "sleeping flowers," which add rhythmic cohesion and enhance emotional resonance.

- **Assonance & Consonance:** Repeated sounds such as the “oo” in “sordid boon” and “blow his wreathed horn” create musicality.
- **Oxymoron:** “Sordid boon” is an oxymoron, where something supposed to be a gift (boon) is actually base or degrading (sordid), expressing ironic disillusionment.
- **Irony:** There is irony in Wordsworth’s longing to be a “Pagan suckled in a creed outworn,” as he ironically elevates a supposedly obsolete belief system over his own Christian, materialist society.
- **Symbolism:** Pagan gods like Proteus and Triton symbolize lost mythic consciousness, a deeper connection to Nature and the divine.

## 2. Structure and Form

Wordsworth adopts the **Petrarchan sonnet** form, consisting of an **octave (eight lines)** and a **sestet (six lines)** with a clear **volta** (turn) after the octave.

- **Rhyme Scheme:** ABBAABBA | CDCDCD – the classic Petrarchan sonnet pattern.
- **Meter and Rhythm:** Predominantly **iambic pentameter**, giving the poem a steady, contemplative rhythm.
- **Stanza and Line Breaks:** The poem’s structure is tight and traditional, contributing to the serious and formal tone of lament.
- **Enjambment:** Several lines flow into the next without punctuation (e.g., “...howling at all hours, / And are up-gathered...”), reinforcing the restless and continuous energy of Nature and human discontent.

## 3. Theme and Subject Matter

At its core, the poem critiques **materialism and the alienation from Nature**. Wordsworth laments humanity’s preoccupation with economic pursuits (“getting and spending”) and their loss of spiritual and emotional connection to the natural world.

There’s a deeper message of **spiritual crisis**: the loss of wonder, myth, and nature’s sacredness in the face of industrial modernity. The poem is a cry for **re-enchancement**, for returning to a worldview where Nature is divine.

## 4. Tone and Mood

- **Tone:** The tone is **melancholic, angry, and yearning**. Wordsworth’s disappointment in humankind is palpable, as is his wistful desire to reconnect with a deeper, more spiritual perception of the world.
- **Mood:** The reader is led into a mood of **sorrow, nostalgia**, and ultimately **reflection**, stirred by the poet’s emotional vulnerability and philosophical insight.

## 5. Philosophical and Spiritual Interpretation

The poem aligns closely with **Romanticism**, emphasizing the spiritual significance of Nature and the critique of Enlightenment rationalism and materialism.

From a **Vedantic or Upanishadic** perspective:

- Wordsworth’s lament about humanity’s disconnection mirrors the **Upanishadic** concern with **maya**—the illusion of the material world distracting from the spiritual essence (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.3.14).
- The **Bhagavad Gita** (2.69)<sup>1</sup> says: “*What is night for all beings is the time of awakening for the self-controlled.*” Wordsworth, like the yogi, is “awake” to the spiritual loss others are blind to.
- In the **Vachanamrut (Gadhada I-38)**, Swaminarayan warns against losing oneself in worldly pleasures at the cost of spiritual joy, echoing Wordsworth’s “sordid boon.”
- The **Shrimad Bhagavatam** praises nature as a manifestation of God’s beauty (e.g., 10.20.15-16), aligning with Wordsworth’s reverence for the sea and wind as sacred.

William Wordsworth’s “*The World Is Too Much with Us*” aligns deeply with Upanishadic and Vedantic wisdom, as well as with teachings from the Bhagavad Gita, Vachanamrut, Shrimad Bhagavatam, and Vedas. The poem’s critique of materialism and longing for spiritual communion with Nature echoes core spiritual concerns across these traditions. Below is a detailed analysis with scriptural references.

### 1. Upanishadic Wisdom and the Vedanta

Theme in the Poem:

“Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.”

“Little we see in Nature that is ours; we have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!”

Wordsworth laments the human condition where material pursuits dominate, and spiritual intuition is lost. This resonates with the Upanishadic concept of **maya**—the illusory nature of the material world that distracts the soul from its true purpose.

#### Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (4.4.12):<sup>2</sup>

“*When all desires that dwell in the heart are cast away, then does the mortal become immortal and attain Brahman.*”

This reflects the idea that attachment to wealth and pleasure (like “getting and spending”) is the root of spiritual blindness.

#### Katha Upanishad (2.1.1):<sup>3</sup>

“*The self-existent Lord destroyed the outgoing senses; hence, one sees the outer world and not the inner Self. A rare wise man turns his eyes inward and sees the Self within.*”

Wordsworth’s disappointment that “we are out of tune” with Nature mirrors this teaching—humans are focused outward and have lost the inward, divine vision.

## 2. Shrimad Bhagavad Gita

### Bhagavad Gita 2.70:<sup>4</sup>

*"He attains peace into whom all desires enter as waters enter the ocean, which, filled from all sides, remains unmoved."*

Wordsworth's anguish about modern materialism reflects Krishna's teaching that peace comes from desirelessness—not from "getting and spending."

### Bhagavad Gita 3.42–43:<sup>5</sup>

*"The senses are superior... But beyond the intellect is the Self. Thus, knowing the Self... conquer the enemy which is desire."*

Wordsworth encourages a return to deeper awareness beyond the sensory world—mirroring this exact Vedantic progression from sense to spirit.

## 3. Vachanamrut (Swaminarayan Sampradaya)

### Vachanamrut Gadhada I-38:

*"If one becomes attached to sense-pleasures, then intense love for God cannot be cultivated."*

This clearly resonates with Wordsworth's lament that we have "given our hearts away" to a sordid boon—worldly pleasures. The Vachanamrut calls such choices spiritually costly.

### Vachanamrut Gadhada I-3:

*"One should not focus on the perishable body or world, but on the imperishable soul and God."*

Wordsworth's poetic wish to live with ancient awareness, seeing divinity in nature (e.g., Proteus, Triton), echoes the *divya drishti* (divine vision) praised here.

## 4. Shrimad Bhagavat Mahapurana

The Bhagavatam presents nature as a divine manifestation of Bhagwan's leela (divine play) and as a means to remember God.

### Shrimad Bhagavatam 10.20.15–16:<sup>6</sup>

*"The forests become fragrant with blooming flowers; the rivers swell with waters. All of this is the Lord's leela to give joy to his devotees."*

Wordsworth's reverence for nature's power and beauty aligns with this. His grief at being "out of tune" with such a world reflects the Bhagavatam's call to experience God through nature.

### Canto 2, Chapter 2 (Cosmic Form of God):

The elements of nature—the sun, moon, ocean, wind—are described as parts of the divine body of Vishnu. Wordsworth personifying the sea and wind, and invoking mythic figures, reflects this deeply theistic, spiritual understanding of nature.

## 5. Vedas

The Rigveda often expresses awe and reverence for natural forces, seen as divine.

### Rigveda 1.164.39:<sup>7</sup>

*"The Truth is one; the wise call it by many names."*

Proteus and Triton, as symbolic figures of natural divinity, may be seen as old forms of the same eternal truth. Wordsworth's plea to see "glimpses that would make me less forlorn" echoes this view—multiple forms can point toward the One.

### Rigveda 10.121.1:<sup>8</sup>

*"He who is the soul of the universe, by whom all the elements were set in motion—let us worship that Supreme."*

Wordsworth's longing to reconnect with Nature reflects this ancient Vedic spiritual impulse—to see the Supreme in all of creation.

## Conclusion: A Confluence of Romanticism and Vedanta

Wordsworth's poem mirrors the spiritual longing of Vedantic philosophy—a desire to transcend the illusion of worldly attachment and reconnect with the sacred. His Romanticism is not mere emotionalism, but a deep soul yearning akin to the Vedantic call for moksha (liberation) through awareness of the divine in nature.

In this sense, *"The World Is Too Much with Us"* becomes not just a critique of industrial society but a universal cry—a *shraddha*-filled plea to return to a life aligned with the spiritual rhythm of the cosmos, a message echoed across the Upanishads, Gita, Vachanamrut, and Bhagavatam.

## 6. Historical and Cultural Context

- **Date & Background:** Written in 1802, during the early 19th century industrial revolution in England.
- **Historical Influence:** The poem reflects Wordsworth's deep disillusionment with the growing urbanization, capitalism, and loss of agrarian simplicity.
- **Cultural Movement:** It is firmly embedded in the **Romantic Movement**, which opposed the Enlightenment's cold rationality and celebrated emotion, nature, and individual perception.

## 7. Poet's Perspective and Emotional Mindset

Wordsworth was likely experiencing **spiritual unrest** and **emotional alienation** in response to the social and industrial transformations of his era. He mourns the collective loss of harmony with Nature and myth, and expresses a longing for the innocence and wonder of pre-modern, even pagan, spirituality.

His personal belief in Nature as a moral and spiritual teacher is evident. This piece may also reflect a broader

autobiographical theme—Wordsworth's own spiritual crises and his search for transcendence.

### 8. Target Audience and Purpose

• **Audience:** The poem speaks to **modern industrial society**, aiming to awaken the masses to the cost of progress and consumerism.

• **Purpose:** Wordsworth's goal is **awareness, critique**, and a **plea for reconnection** with Nature. He advocates a shift from material wealth to spiritual richness, from external conquest to internal depth.

### 9. Personal Interpretation

"The World Is Too Much with Us" is a timeless elegy on the human condition in a materialistic age. Through lyrical beauty and emotional urgency, Wordsworth warns that humanity, in its obsession with economic progress, is forfeiting the most profound joys of existence—communion with Nature and the divine.

Personally, the poem invites reflection on **our own disconnection from nature** in the 21st century. Its spiritual yearning resonates with **Vedantic calls for inner awakening**, urging us to seek not the fleeting pleasures of "getting and spending" but the eternal joy of presence and harmony with the natural world.

### Conclusion

"The World Is Too Much with Us" stands as a poignant spiritual critique of modernity. Wordsworth, through lyrical grace and mythic allusion, expresses his anguish at humanity's descent into consumerism and its alienation from the divine rhythms of nature. His plea for a return to sacred vision resonates deeply with Vedantic teachings that emphasize detachment, inner stillness, and the recognition of the divine in all creation. The poet's yearning for a lost spiritual clarity finds echoes in the Upanishads' call for self-realization, the Gita's wisdom of action without attachment, and the Bhagavatam's glorification of nature as God's form. This convergence of Western poetic sensibility and Eastern metaphysical thought illuminates the universal human quest for meaning, wholeness, and transcendence. Wordsworth's poem, thus, becomes more than a Romantic sonnet—it becomes a spiritual manifesto urging us to reclaim our hearts from the world and offer them back to the sacred.

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यस्यां जाग्रति भूतानि सा निशा पश्यतो मुनेः ॥ 69 ॥
- 2 आत्मानं चेद्विजानीयादयमस्मीति पूरुषः ।  
किमिच्छन्कस्य कामाय शरीरमनुसंज्वरेत् ॥ १२ ॥
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स शान्तिमाप्नोति न कामकामी ॥ 70 ॥
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यस्तन्न वेद किमुचा करिष्यति य इत्तद्विदुस्त इमे समासते ॥  
ऋचो अक्षरे परमे व्योमन्यस्मिन्देवा अधि विश्वे निषेदुः ।  
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- 8 हिरण्यगर्भः समवर्तताग्रे भूतस्य जातः पतिरेक आसीत् ।  
स दाधार पृथिवीं द्यामुतेमां कस्मै देवाय हविषां विधेम ॥  
हिरण्यगर्भः समवर्तताग्रे भूतस्य जातः पतिरेक आसीत् ।  
स दाधार पृथिवीं द्यामुतेमां कस्मै देवाय हविषां विधेम ॥