



5-3-2018

A Form of Flesh and Blood: Wordsworth's Synthesis of Science and Poetry

Kevin Reynolds

Follow this and additional works at: http://vc.bridgew.edu/honors_proj



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Reynolds, Kevin. (2018). A Form of Flesh and Blood: Wordsworth's Synthesis of Science and Poetry. In *BSU Honors Program Theses and Projects*. Item 269. Available at: http://vc.bridgew.edu/honors_proj/269
Copyright © 2018 Kevin Reynolds

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

A Form of Flesh and Blood: Wordsworth's Synthesis of Science and Poetry

Kevin Reynolds

Submitted in Partial Completion of the
Requirements for Departmental Honors in English

Bridgewater State University

May 3, 2018

Prof. John Mulrooney, Thesis Advisor

Dr. Elizabeth Veisz, Committee Member

Jadwiga Smith, Committee Member

Introduction

Romanticism has long been held to be an essentially anti-scientific movement. It has been thought that the promotion of imagination and feeling over reason is a sentiment irreconcilable with modern natural science. Science is ostensibly the greatest defender of reason and the greatest example of what it can accomplish, and a world-view which assigns reason a subordinate position to feeling and imagination constitutes an attack on science and even on reason itself. This is the rationalist's most sneering critique of Romanticism. It is a caricature of the movement which, in our increasingly scientific world, signifies regression and ignorance. It is also a superficial and inaccurate assessment of the movement, one which must be dramatically altered. The reality is that, just as imagination and feeling are not irreconcilable with reason, neither is Romanticism irreconcilable with science. On the contrary, Romanticism's passionate exploration of nature makes it an endeavor parallel and complementary to science.

This reinterpretation of Romanticism is not only important for its own sake, but for what it can contribute to a broader effort of integrating the sciences and humanities. Recent scholarship placing eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century science in the context of Romanticism has shown that sciences and humanities have indeed grown estranged in the past few centuries, and that this is to the disadvantage of both fields. C.P. Snow's "The Two Cultures" an account of early twentieth century scientists and writers scoffing at one another from a cautious distance resonates with many scientists and writers today such as physicists Marcelo Gleiser, Jennan Ismael, and biographer Richard Holmes. They argue that our increasingly technological world will soon require us to think scientifically, creatively, and interpretively no matter what field of work we enter, making it impossible to isolate the sciences and humanities. A reevaluation of Romanticism can make a significant contribution to this continuation of C.P. Snow's message.

The division between the humanities and sciences has been dramatically exacerbated by certain stigmas attributed to the humanities, and especially to poetry. One persisting stereotype of the poet with some pejorative connotations is the archetypal “Romantic” poet. He is philosophically opposed to reason, and argues that the creative faculty is the true divine spark within humanity. This character, however, is a fiction promoted by literary and scientific people, the former in an effort to romanticize his pursuit, the latter in effort legitimize his. If we study the period, and make the absence of any such absolutely Romantic figure conspicuous, we may do a good deal to dispel what traces of this stereotype continue to have an insidious effect on our culture and, specifically, our academia and arts.

Richard Holmes performs such an exploration of Romanticism in his book *The Age of Wonder*, a collection of biographical portraits of scientists who made ground-breaking discoveries while under the enchanting influence of Romanticism. *The Age of Wonder* suggests that the scientific and literary community are in some way hollow and impotent in comparison with their triumphs under Romanticism. During this period, poets and scientists were influenced by an aesthetic appreciation of nature, and subsequently invented and explored with intense artistic passion and creativity. It is a time when Humphrey Davy, a major chemist and president of The Royal Society who wrote verse in the margins of his lab-notes, would reflect on the creative nature of scientific thinking, “The perception of truth is almost as simple a feeling as the perception of beauty; and the genius of Newton, of Shakespeare, of Michelangelo, and of Handel, are not very remote in character from each other” (Holmes, *The Age of Wonder*, 276), a time when Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a good friend of Davy’s, would say of science that “being necessarily performed with the passion of hope, it was poetical” (Holmes, 268). *The Age of Wonder*, however, also shows the division between sciences and humanities in its nascent stages.

It shows a time when the same Humphrey Davy would argue that the contributions of the great scientists far outweighed those of any artists (Holmes, 428), and the same Coleridge would declare, “I believe that the Souls of 500 Sir Isaac Newton’s would go to the making up of a Shakespeare or Milton” (Homes, 429). But while *The Age of Wonder* reveals some of the beginnings of the prejudice that facilitates the isolation of the sciences and humanities today, it mainly reveals the commonality between these thinkers. Overall, *The Age of Wonder* shows like-minded intellectuals making strides in science and literature, utilizing the same skills, spurred by the same passions, and, significantly, working together and maintaining an intellectual dialogue.

There is, however, one significantly marginalized figure in *The Age of Wonder*, and that is William Wordsworth. Wordsworth, despite being on the forefront of the Romantic movement, is relegated to the edges in Holmes’ book, and when he does make appearances, he is decidedly less pro-scientific than his best friend Coleridge. The one episode in which Wordsworth is a major player is the notorious get-together meant to celebrate Benjamin Haydon’s new painting, itself a celebration of the dominance of religion and art over science. Keats and Wordsworth are among the guests, and Keats delivers a sardonic toast to Newton for “destroying the poetry of the rainbow” (Holmes, 319). This is one of the most open jabs at science by a poet in the book, and Wordsworth is complicit in it. Holmes also briefly mentions that Wordsworth included a hot-air balloon in a poem (Holmes, 162) and quotes a letter to Wordsworth from Coleridge in which Coleridge implies that he and Wordsworth are in agreement that man could not have developed from lower primates (Holmes, 322). This is virtually the full extent of William Wordsworth’s presence in the book. There are obvious reasons for excluding Wordsworth from the others as a less conventionally scientific figure. Wordsworth’s Platonism, if taken literally, is not compatible with the materialist universe described by contemporary scientists, nor is his deism compatible

with the unplanned, unconscious, mechanistic nature of this universe. Wordsworth is also a famous proponent of the essentially anti-industrialist stance of Rousseau. Industrialism being inextricably linked with scientific progress, such an anti-industrial stance can be interpreted as likewise anti-scientific. These criticisms considered, Wordsworth still cannot be satisfactorily characterized as unscientific. Even with all the sentiments extoling mysticism and deriding societal development, there is something essentially scientific about Wordsworth just as there is something essentially scientific about Coleridge or Shelley. This dimension of Wordsworth must be brought to light if an interdisciplinary reappraisal of Romanticism is to be done thoroughly. Wordsworth is the quintessential Romantic poet, and to analyze the scientific undercurrent of Romanticism without including Wordsworth is to miss what should be the major target of this effort.

Section One: Wordsworth's Thoughts on Poetry and Science

Before analyzing the scientific aspects of Wordsworth's poetry, it is important to understand what Wordsworth's thoughts on poetry, science, and the relationship between the two were. These subjects, in intersection and separately, are written on at length in the preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. This document, it should be noted, was written under the heavy influence of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Richard Holmes even cites Coleridge, not Wordsworth, with some of the material concerning science. Regardless of Coleridge's participation, the preface is typically taken as a William Wordsworth piece. Writing of the inclusion of some of Coleridge's poetry in the preface to the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth emphatically states,

I should not, however, have requested this assistance, had I not believed that the Poems of my Friend would in a great measure have the same tendency as my own, and that, though there would be found a difference, there would be found no discordance in the colours of our style; as our opinions on the subject of poetry do almost entirely coincide (Wordsworth, 595).

The preface should especially be considered truthful to Wordsworth's own beliefs as it is written in his own voice, never deviating from the first person or specifying that he is speaking on behalf of anyone but himself. Wordsworth would certainly not have claimed that these words were his own if they in anyway misrepresented his philosophy. There is no reason, then, why the sentiments expressed in the preface should not be held as Wordsworth's own personal sentiments as they were at the time.

The analogy between the poet and scientist is one which Wordsworth himself makes in the preface. This occurs when Wordsworth is extolling pleasure as an influential factor in our learning process. Wordsworth recognizes that objections can be raised against poetry as a source of edification on the grounds that it is merely a source of amusement, a vehicle for pleasure

rather than knowledge. Wordsworth counteracts this criticism by arguing that pleasure is crucial to how we attain knowledge:

Nor let this necessity of producing immediate pleasure be considered as a degradation of the Poet's art...it is a homage paid to the native and naked dignity of man, to the grand elementary principle of pleasure, by which he knows, and feels, and lives, and moves...We have no knowledge, that is, no general principles drawn from the contemplation of particular facts, but what has been built up by pleasure, and exists in us by pleasure alone (Wordsworth, 605).

Having defended the educational properties of poetry by showing that pleasure is not in opposition to learning, Wordsworth goes further and argues that pleasure is integral to science:

The Man of Science, the Chemist and Mathematician, whatever difficulties and disgusts they may have had to struggle with, know and feel this. However painful may be the objects with which the Anatomist's knowledge is connected, he feels that his knowledge is pleasure; and where he has no pleasure he has no knowledge (Wordsworth, 605).

It is pleasure which motivates the scientist to attain his knowledge, and he is united in this respect with the poet. Both the poet and the scientist are inspired by one and the same wonder at the mysterious workings of nature, and without this wonder would have no passion to explore, invent, and discover. The poet differs from the scientist in that he works with those objects which directly give us pleasure, whereas the scientist works with objects that are not themselves pleasurable, but which nonetheless give him pleasure as they help him to reveal the principles of nature. This distinction, however, is not always strictly true, and in some cases the poet's work is even more closely aligned to the scientist. Wordsworth describes showing his readers the principles of their own nature while mitigating whatever discomfort this causes with "an overbalance of pleasure." This means that the poet may also study objects which are not themselves pleasurable aside from providing knowledge. In such instances the poet is much like the anatomist Wordsworth mentions, who must overcome the displeasure produced by fears connected with his object of study in order to accumulate knowledge concerning it. The poet, it

seems, is not only incentivized by pleasure as the scientist is, but must often overcome difficult realities for the sake of attaining this pleasure.

Wordsworth, having linked the poet and scientist together as studies which repay their devotees with knowledge that is itself pleasure, goes on to make bolder claims about the compatibility of the two disciplines. He writes of the possibility of an even closer union between these two fields, when their joint power will give to humanity a truly comprehensive knowledge of life:

The remotest discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist, or Mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the Poet's art as any upon which it can be employed, if the time should ever come when these things shall be familiar to us, and the relations under which they are contemplated by the followers of these respective Sciences shall be manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings. If the time should ever come when what is now called Science, thus familiarized to men, shall be ready to put on, as it were, a form of flesh and blood, the Poet will lend his divine spirit to aid the transfiguration, and will welcome the Being thus produced, as a dear and genuine inmate of the household of man
(Wordsworth, 607).

The future state which Wordsworth envisions is one in which esoteric scientific knowledge is common knowledge, no longer the exclusive property of a minority of professionals but the communal property of humankind. Perhaps, with respect to the scientific knowledge that had been accumulated in Wordsworth's time, we have reached something approaching these conditions in our contemporary moment. Now the astronomical and chemical information which was known to the eighteenth century chemists and astronomers is, if not all common knowledge, at least known to a far greater amount of laymen. However, while the scientific information of a few centuries ago is nearer to common knowledge today, there is now new scientific knowledge that is virtually exclusive to the scientific community and even to specific branches of that community. This will likely always be the trend, the old esoteric information of science becoming the knowledge of nonscientists while new esoteric knowledge is being gathered by

scientists. This trend, unfortunately, does not allow for an age like Wordsworth describes in which all scientific knowledge is commonly known. It does, however, allow for poetry to perform the role Wordsworth proposes with respect to the scientific knowledge that was once esoteric but has become commonly known. It should also be remembered that, fortunately, a far greater proportion of people outside of the scientific community are scientifically knowledgeable and attain this knowledge more rapidly through media than in Wordsworth's time. If this increase in scientific knowledge among nonscientists continues, it means that the role which poetry can play in science will only become more important and powerful.

This role is based on the principle that poetry provides us with a different kind of knowledge than is provided by science, a knowledge that is more integral to the human experience:

The knowledge both of the Poet and the Man of Science is pleasure; but the knowledge of the one cleaves to us as a necessary part of our existence, our natural and unalienable inheritance; the other is a personal and individual acquisition, slow to come to us, and by no habitual and direct sympathy connecting us with our fellow- beings. The Man of Science seeks truth as a remote and unknown benefactor; he cherishes and loves it in his solitude: the Poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion (Wordsworth, 606).

The poet, according to Wordsworth, provides us with knowledge concerning our subjective experience, knowledge that is part of us and what we encounter with our senses, emotions, and intellect. Poetry, then, concerns those things which are common to our experience to help us understand them and ourselves. In an increasingly scientific world, the once esoteric knowledge of science will begin to encroach on ordinary experience, and thereby enter the poet's domain. The poet, in such an age, can help us understand the connection between the abstract doctrines of science and their concrete manifestations as we encounter them in life, making knowledge which seems remote and hypothetical feel local and actual. The power of poetry can produce a change

in how we think of and appreciate the truths of science analogous to the difference between reading about the chemical composition of a substance in a textbook and holding that substance in our own hands. The more poetry illustrates how scientific knowledge intersects with our own, personal lives, the more we will love this knowledge, because it will be at last part of that knowledge which clings to our human existence, and the more we will truly understand this knowledge, because we will know it in terms of our own experience.

In addition to the relationship between the poet and scientist, Wordsworth expounds upon the nature of the poet and poetry themselves without respect to science. Included in this material is Wordsworth's famous description of the creative method, in which he describes poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of feelings" and the result of "emotion recollected in tranquility." Such assertions, by modern standards, appear to be in opposition to a scientific view of poetry. There is no doubt that these lines have contributed to the persona of the poet as a person who works exclusively by sudden, random emotional impulses. This model of poetry centered on spontaneous emotion seems to require minimal thinking, and so dramatically different from the heavily intellectual work of a scientist. Wordsworth's description of poetic invention, however, is not actually incongruous with a scientific view of poetry, and is not as dissimilar from the work of a scientist as it may appear.

One reason that this description of poetry could be denigrated as unscientific is its seeming dearth of analytical reasoning. If poetry is an overflow of emotion, then there doesn't seem to be much place for thinking in the creative process. However, one simply has to read Wordsworth's poetry, which relates complex philosophical ideas in an orderly fashion, to see that this would be a specious interpretation of his description of the creative process. Wordsworth does not believe the act of poetry to be devoid of intellectual activity. For Wordsworth, a sudden surge of emotion

does not preclude reasoning before or even during the emotion. It has already been explained how Wordsworth understands emotion and knowledge to be closely intertwined. The attainment of knowledge, which must involve some degree of analytic thinking at least concerning the fundamental principles of logic, is itself a pleasure and is incentivized by the desire for this pleasure. This inextricable connection of emotion, namely pleasure, with knowledge and thinking, and the necessity of thinking before the surge of emotion which creates poetry, are expressed in the full explanation of this overflow of feelings:

For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: and though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who, being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply. For our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings; and, as by contemplating the relation of these general representatives to each other, we discover what is really important to men, so, by the repetition and continuance of this act, our feelings will be connected with important subjects, till at length, if we be originally possessed of much sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced, that, by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits, we shall describe objects, and utter sentiments, of such a nature, and in such connexion with each other, that the understanding of the Reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections strengthened and purified (Wordsworth, 598).

Though this overflow of emotion is largely impulsive, it is the end-product of a long process of habitual reasoning. The emotion is connected to, and expressed with prior knowledge, and this prior knowledge has been arrived at through reasoning. The poet must be always contemplating and reasoning in preparation for his poetry so that the expression of a powerful overflow of emotion may be informed and intellectually coherent. In the moment of creation, the writing of the poem may seem to be an entirely unpremeditated act, the archetypal poetic inspiration, but considered in as part of a more long-term process, it is in a sense highly premeditated, because it draws on knowledge accumulated through intensive intellectual activity.

Wordsworth's concept of the creative process can also be considered unscientific for seeming to preclude empirical observation. Obviously, what has been said about the accumulation of knowledge for the writing of poetry negates this criticism. Empirical observation is necessary to attain the knowledge which informs the creative process. Still, one could argue that the poet is not so much engaged in empirical observation as the term is used in a scientific sense, which entails the close inspection of physical objects in his environment, but with a different kind of observation, typically designated introspection, which is an inspection of the self, one's own thoughts and emotions. Wordsworth, however, adopts a more comprehensive notion of empirical observation, influenced by the empirical philosophers of the Enlightenment, one which does not make a distinction between observation of external objects and his own thoughts and emotions. In other words, there is no indication in Wordsworth that he considers introspection and empirical observation as separate. Introspection, on the contrary, is treated as if included within the broader activity of empirical observation. Wordsworth has to consider introspection in this manner because he does not consider the mind as separable from nature, so to study external natural objects and to study subjective mental activity are to study different aspects of one and the same thing.

There is also another link between subjective experience and external reality which, to Wordsworth, makes it necessary to study both together. In the preface, Wordsworth explains that he has a "deep impression of certain inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind, and likewise of certain powers in the great and permanent objects that act upon it, which are equally inherent and indestructible." The phrasing of this philosophical assertion is similar to that of John Locke in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, when he defines one kind of primary quality of bodies as "The power that is in any body, by reason of its insensible primary

qualities, to operate after a peculiar manner on any of our senses, and thereby produce in us the different ideas of several colours, sounds, smells, tastes, &c. These are usually called sensible qualities” (Burrt, 270). Wordsworth appears to align with Locke in assigning this power to influence our sensory experience as a quality possessed by external objects. Wordsworth considers this power of affecting us sensually as being inextricably connected to the objects themselves, although he would add to the power of sensory stimulation the power of emotional stimulation. Though the senses, thoughts, and feelings concerning external objects are distinct from the objects themselves, they are not wholly separable from them because they result from the quality within the objects. Accordingly, the only way to study this peculiar quality of objects is by studying the subjective phenomena it influences. Learning the objective, primary qualities of external objects is the goal of natural science, and it appears that this task is not complete without studying their effects on our mind. This is why Wordsworth believes in a comprehensive empirical observation which involves even the most subjective experience, because that experience is inextricably connected with external reality.

Section Two: Wordsworth's Scientific Method

In addition to revealing much of what Wordsworth's thoughts on poetry in general, the preface also reveals how Wordsworth sought to adapt his own poetry to this uniquely scientific vision of the craft. Wordsworth's steps to producing a more scientific poetry involve a greater focus on empirical observation of nature. His push for more empiricism is analogous to the growing role of empiricism in natural philosophy in the preceding centuries which formed what is now called the scientific method. This movement was initiated in large part by Francis Bacon's groundbreaking work *Novum Organum*. Much can be learned about Wordsworth's method of poetry by comparing him with Bacon, and the affinities between Wordsworth's methods and the methods espoused in *Novum Organum* are especially enlightening.

Bacon's main intentions with his *Novum Organum* was to establish a new method of conducting science which placed more emphasis on induction than deduction. Bacon argued that if we observe the materials of nature closely they will tell us all we need to know about how nature operates, and we can use this information to better manipulate nature to our own needs. Bacon criticizes the method of scientific enquiry popular up to his time, which involved a small degree of preliminary empirical observation, followed by wild conjectures about the logical implications of these observations which were never corroborated with further empirical observations. Bacon argued that scholastic thinkers as well as ancients like Aristotle were guilty of conducting science in this way, with the result that they adapted their models of nature to their logic rather than their logic to nature, and lost all connection with objective reality to produce sterile knowledge with no practical applications. Bacon argued that if we expand upon the initial, smaller phase of this process, the empirical observation, and add to that further empirical observation of experiments designed specifically to test the inferences made from the initial

observations, we would, though in smaller steps, go on to make far greater strides. One important aspect of this new kind of experimentation which Bacon proposed was that scientists select for their experiments specific examples of substances in their most elemental forms. Rather than drawing conclusions concerning the principles of nature from observations made of nature generally, choose a single, preferably small and simple object for observation. Before making statements about the constitution of the Earth, examine first a single clot of dirt. Never disregard any object as too lowly and insignificant for serious study, because it is actually those objects which are in their most simple and nascent forms which tell us most about nature's grander complexities (Burtt, 24-123). In addition to this new method of scientific enquiry, Bacon utilized a simplistic method of scientific writing, short, concise, and clear without any ostentation to distract from the meaning of the words.

A major parallel between Wordsworth's new method of poetry and Bacon's new method of science is of course the focus on empirical observation, which shows in the careful verisimilitude of Wordsworth's poetry. This dedication to realistic depiction is focused mainly on three areas, the natural objects, the effects of the natural objects on people, and the language which the narrator as well as characters use to express themselves. Wordsworth does not want to depict romanticized, make-believe natural objects, but those real objects which he has regarded in real forests his whole life. It is very important to him that he relate these features of nature truthfully, so that he can successfully trace the connection between these objects and the emotional, intellectual effects they cause in the human mind. This is also why it is so important to Wordsworth to accurately render the psychology of the narrator and characters as they have experiences with nature. It is only through faithful realism that Wordsworth can hope to truly capture the phenomenon of being aesthetically stimulated by nature. Part of a faithful depiction

of the emotions and thoughts of the narrator and these characters is a faithful depiction of their language. The “language used by real men” is important because it is what real men use to directly or indirectly express their minds. Without realistic speech patterns, the poems would not be able to depict realistic cognitive activity. Careful realism in these three areas, nature, psychology, and language, is what Wordsworth needed to conduct poetry like natural science, making observations about the interplay between these three subjects and documenting those observations in his poems.

Wordsworth also follows Bacon’s methodology in his use of subjects in their most basic, elemental forms. Wordsworth believes, like Bacon, that studying the simple and small things in life closely will reveal the way the nature works in its more complex forms. In these subjects the intricate processes of the universe are more conspicuous and clear, making them the ideal materials for natural science and poetry. This is why Wordsworth chooses rural people for his subjects, because they are closer to man as he is in his natural form. Wordsworth explains how their behavior is more edifying:

Humble and rustic life was generally chosen...because in that condition of life our elementary feelings coexist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings, and, from the necessary character of rural occupations, are more easily comprehended, and are more durable (Wordsworth, 597).

Here Wordsworth proposes that the complexities of human nature are shown in their simple forms and with more vividness and clarity in rural people. Because they are closer to nature, these people have retained and nurtured more of what is natural and universal in humanity, where as in highly populated areas the natural characteristics are suppressed or distorted, making them more difficult subjects to study human nature. Rustic people are also more conspicuous as individuals. In the country, people are independent and often solitary, and so one can study them

with an aim to studying man as a single subject, whereas in the city, a person is more dependent and virtually never solitary, and so one cannot perform as focused a study on that individual but must settle instead for a study of the habit of people en masse. These rural people are also in essentially their natural environment, making it easier to study the relationship between the individual man and his environment likewise in its most elemental form. These are likewise, Wordsworth's reasons for studying children. Children are an even more natural and uncultured object of study than rural adults. They show us our mental faculties, emotions, and physical tendencies at their crudest, offering a unique insight into the most integral nature of the human being. Finally, the stripping of inessentials applies, of course, to the language as well as the subject. By communicating his ideas in the simplest forms of expression Wordsworth, like Bacon, maximizes the clarity of his concepts and leaves minimal room for dishonesty and affectation, so that there is nothing in way between the reader and the truth.

Section Three: Wordsworth's Findings

One consequence of the scientific nature of Wordsworth's poetry is that it yields results that can be compared to those of natural science. Wordsworth's scientific exploration can be said to come with its own "findings" just as an ordinary scientific experiment does, and these are documented in the poems themselves, just as a scientist jots down his results in lab-notes. Wordsworth implies results by consistently writing with a demonstrative tone which suggests he is putting forth conclusive information while at the same time providing evidence to support his hypothesis. He does this, not with open didacticism, but by proposing his ideas as subjective opinions and then making some argument, or providing some evidence for them, much in the way that a geometrician will state a principle he believes to be axiomatic and then support it by showing that an absurdity would result if the principle were not in fact universally true.

Wordsworth can be seen adopting this tone, especially in moments in which he briefly entertains the possibility that his principles are false, as in this passage from "Tintern Abbey", "If this be but a vain belief..." Wordsworth, however, does not follow his imitation of a geometrician to its completion by continuing this hypothetical to illustrate that it results in contradiction, but rather ends passages like these by emotional refutations, in this case stating,

...yet, oh! how oft—

In darkness and amid the many shapes
 Of joyless daylight; when the fretful stir
 Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,
 Have hung upon the beatings of my heart—
 How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,
 O sylvan Wye! thou wanderer thro' the woods,
 How often has my spirit turned to thee!.

The implication is that the powerful emotions which these principles give Wordsworth, or from which his principles are derived, are justification enough for his conviction. This appeal to emotion might be regarded as unscientific, but this is an unfair criticism. When proving a hypothesis about a chemical reaction, an appeal to one's emotions would obviously be inappropriate and illogical, but when proving a hypothesis about the kinds of emotions human beings feel in certain situations, one's own emotions are the only evidence to be reviewed.

These findings, in summary, are that the degree to which an individual is emotionally stimulated by nature substantially influences that individual's mind, inspiring and developing his moral and intellectual faculties. If an individual is subjected to natural objects for extended periods of time, those objects will actively direct him to an optimal moral and intellectual state. Likewise, if an individual is deprived of the stimulation of natural objects he will be rendered emotionally and intellectually stunted. This holds true for society at large, the strength of which is likewise proportional to the strength of the emotional connection between its inhabitants and nature.

Before discussing the societal impact of nature as an emotional stimulus, I will begin, as Wordsworth typically does, with the emotional effects of nature on the individual. The process of maturation facilitated by nature is best illustrated in two poems. It is delineated in miniature in "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey", and elaborated on extensively in *The Prelude*. "Tintern Abbey" provides us with a clearly organized and manageably sized outline of this nuanced process that serves as a useful introduction to the lengthier and more nebulous account found in *The Prelude*.

In "Tintern Abbey", Wordsworth divides his maturation into three distinct periods. The first stage is described as consisting of "glad animal movements." This stage evidently is marked by

purely physical pleasure and a dearth of intellectual activity. This figure is likely Wordsworth as a child or adolescent, before his mind had been sufficiently sharpened. The second stage is when Wordsworth enjoys the world of nature as a “passion” and ran through the woods as a man “running from something he feared, rather than towards something he loved.” This stage is not a great deal more sophisticated than the initial stage, but it can be interpreted nevertheless as a step towards the more intellectual enjoyments of life. The terms Wordsworth uses here are more emotional; it is a “passion” which drives this Wordsworth rather than a pure, bodily excitation. Whereas the young boy from the first stage enjoyed only direct stimulation to his own body, this older boy or young man seems to be enjoying stimuli as it affects his imagination, albeit the most rudimentary form of imagination, the expectation or recollection of bodily pleasure. The third stage of development, which Wordsworth is now experiencing in his adulthood, is marked by a sophisticated, intellectual, and moral appreciation of nature. He describes sensing, “the deep pulse of humanity, though of ample power to chasten and subdue, and I have felt a more sublime presence of something more deeply interfused, whose dwelling place is the round ocean and the living air and the light of setting suns. A movement and spirit that rolls through all things.” Here, Wordsworth’s mind is directed towards philosophical matters when he looks on nature, and this contemplation is uninterrupted by any bodily excitement. Wordsworth makes clear that this development is not merely coincident with his journeys in nature, but a result of them. Nature is an active agent in this process of intellectual maturation. It assumes a maternal role and guides people through a hierarchy of pleasures, which become incrementally less sensual, until they have reached at last the sobriety that the mature Wordsworth has attained. At first, there is the simple, physical relationship with nature, which leads to an emotional, and then intellectual

relationship which is marked by the knowledge of a God-like omnipresent power as well as a natural basis for morality.

“Tintern Abbey” presents the basic model for Wordsworth’s ideal life influenced by the aesthetic power of nature. It sets the formula of a gradual progression from purely bodily pleasures, to more emotional pleasures, to intellectual pleasures as well as more refined emotional pleasures of a moral and spiritual nature. Wordsworth doubtless planned to expound upon this model in *The Prelude*, filling in each stage with more specific detail and showing the gradual progression of the stages with more appropriate length so that the reader may note the subtle shades of spiritual maturation over the course of decades. Wordsworth ultimately did provide a depiction of maturation with vastly more depth and detail in *The Prelude*, but in doing so he had to dissolve much of the clear boundaries he had established in “Tintern Abbey.” One simply cannot divide *The Prelude* into three neatly defined stages of maturation like those found in “Tintern Abbey.” *The Prelude* depicts instances of rather mature thinking and feeling in Wordsworth’s earliest reminisces, along with some regressive episodes in later life. What must be accepted in comparing the two poems is that the stages of “Tintern Abbey” cannot be applied too literally or exactly. Each period cannot be assigned a determinate beginning or ending. Most importantly, each period cannot be defined by any completely uniform pattern of behavior as in “Tintern Abbey”, meaning that one cannot expect that Wordsworth’s childhood was occupied entirely with “glad animal movements” without occasional interruption of higher, intellectual experiences, or that Wordsworth’s adulthood was spent in perfect sober contemplation without instances of more physical delights and deviations from this collected, intellectual serenity which defines the period. Rather, we should accept the periods of “Tintern Abbey” as useful categories in that Wordsworth’s behavior within them is generally consistent, so that we can safely claim

the earlier part of Wordsworth's life was marked by a higher frequency of "glad animal movements" than the later period of his life while still possessing infrequent moments of profundity. The three stage system of "Tintern Abbey" is best considered as a useful guide-book to help the reader navigate the more circuitous course of maturation delineated in *The Prelude*.

It should be mentioned that Wordsworth endorses Plato's theory that we are born with knowledge latent in our minds from a past existence. Perhaps, as one can argue concerning Plato, Wordsworth is entertaining a metaphor for a priori thoughts, thoughts not derived from experience, but, as it were, built into our minds. It seems, however, that Wordsworth takes this theory fairly literally, that he considers us to have a life before and after our earthly one in which we exist within a single divine being. This belief, however, does not hinder our scientific analysis of the effects of nature on a growing mind. While Wordsworth professes knowledge from a pre-existence, he never specifies that knowledge or how we come to regain it, but rather attributes our knowledge to be coeval with our experience. He speaks of a child being born from out of a divine state, but focuses minutely on the development from the in utero baby onwards without relying on this past state for explanation, rather attributing knowledge to our earthly experiences with nature. While he speaks of this past-existence more as a possible explanation for our feelings of affinity with nature, it otherwise has little to do with the gradual maturing effects of our experiences with nature. Wordsworth, it seems, believed people have a preexistence which they can vaguely sense as an intuition, but learn chiefly from empirical observation, with the help of certain in-born intellectual faculties. This pre-existence, then, should be considered as predating the process of maturation of "Tintern Abbey" and *The Prelude*, not as a part of it, and as contributing only the intuition of immortality, all the rest of our knowledge coming from elsewhere. While Wordsworth alludes to this vague memory of

past-existence, he never depicts a person drawing knowledge from this existence, but only from empirical experience.

Mental development, for Wordsworth, begins at a shockingly nascent stage, with the baby. Obviously Wordsworth cannot rely on his own experiences as a baby to philosophize on the state of mind in that condition, but his writing shouldn't be taken as pure theorizing without any empirical observation as he had children of his own which he could have observed in order to form his ideas on the minds of babies. He also could have guessed at the nature of the mind of babies by the stage of his mind in his later, remembered childhood, which would tell him what development had already been made before memory formed. Based on this observation and introspection, Wordsworth presents the mind of a baby as one of unassuming but considerable complexity. The baby is in a mostly passive mental state, but is absorbing his surroundings with a receptiveness perhaps unequalled in later life. If the baby is not thinking, exactly, he is nevertheless learning, forming an essential bond to the outside world through his very first sensory impressions. Wordsworth writes of the typical hyper-receptive baby:

Blest the infant Babe,
 (For with my best conjecture I would trace 235
 Our Being's earthly progress,) blest the Babe,
 Nursed in his Mother's arms, who sinks to sleep
 Rocked on his Mother's breast; who with his soul
 Drinks in the feelings of his Mother's eye!
 For him, in one dear Presence, there exists 240
 A virtue which irradiates and exalts
 Objects through widest intercourse of sense.
 No outcast he, bewildered and depressed:
 Along his infant veins are interfused

The gravitation and the filial bond 245

Of nature that connect him with the world. (*The Prelude*, I, 234-346)

This passage does not explicitly mention the aesthetic influence of nature on the developing mind, but it does provide a sketch of the embryonic form of that mind and its relationship with external stimuli generally. The baby's emotional self is expanded by the affectionate interactions with his mother. He recognizes, seemingly instinctively, a being like himself in his mother, and feels, again by instinct, a unifying bond between them. The love of the mother is almost literally transmitted to the baby, who "drinks in the passion of his mother's eye." This affection and sensory stimulation assists the baby in learning to discriminate and group sensory phenomena together, recognizing affinities in a plurality of objects. This is the beginnings of what Wordsworth terms our love for "similarity in dissimilarity." This simple mental activity is the tool by which, in later life, we perform the categorization into species and genera that makes up so much of our intellectual pursuits. It is also the means by which we may recognize our own affinity to nature and to other humans, by detecting the essential affinity between these superficially dissimilar objects. The baby, it seems, has already developed this sense of affinity with nature and people, a sense that there is a fundamental "Presence" in which all things exist, sharing a binding similarity despite their dissimilarities. In addition to this recognition of oneness, another important step of our emotional development is made in this period, the association of life with joy. This takes place when the baby recognizes a virtuousness attached to all objects of his sensory experience. This is the joyfulness connate with life which Wordsworth speaks of in "Lines Composed in Early Spring": "And I must think, do all I can, that there was pleasure there" and which he asserts emphatically at the close of *The Prelude*: "that there is one spirit nature and that spirit is joy." From here on, he will instinctively sense a goodness at the

base of all life, an affection for existence which persuades us to live and promote the lives of others as a moral duty and aesthetic joy.

These mental functions constitute the germ of what Wordsworth calls the “true poetic spirit” and the essence of “genius.” He doesn’t elaborate on what exactly these terms mean but their meaning can presumably be gleaned from the following history of his life in *The Prelude*, as he asserts that these qualities, while they are extinguished in later life for most, have for him been “augmented and sustained.” The meaning of true poetic genius can likewise be interpreted from Wordsworth’s descriptions of the poet found in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. In this description he explains that the poet is a man of enhanced sensitivity, perceptivity, and imagination, able to use his strong emotional connection to sensory phenomena to inform his reason and imagination. This is the acute perceptiveness and creativity which Wordsworth exhibits in his mature years in *The Prelude*, examining nature attentively, experiencing a profound emotional response, and inferring from these emotions truths about the nature of reality.

Some of the earliest moments of Wordsworth’s life mentioned in *The Prelude* are likewise in his infancy. They can be found in one passage somewhat past the beginning of the poem in the form of a question posed to a river:

Was it for this

That one, the fairest of all rivers, loved 270
 To blend his murmurs with my nurse's song,
 And, from his alder shades and rocky falls,
 And from his fords and shallows, sent a voice
 That flowed along my dreams? For this, didst thou,
 O Derwent! winding among grassy holms
 Where I was looking on, a babe in arms,
 Make ceaseless music that composed my thoughts

pleasure itself, or the influence of the pleasure, remains in memory. The influence of the river while Wordsworth is asleep adds further shades to this phenomena, in that it suggests that the pleasurable experience does not have to be fully recognized even while it is happening, that the experiencer can be only semi-conscious of the influence of nature even in the moment of its stimulation, and that this habitual, subliminal aesthetic effect can have a long-term impact. This single passage, the earliest episode in Wordsworth's life-history, suggests the aesthetic influence of nature to be at work on our deepest level of consciousness.

In the material of *The Prelude* dealing with a slightly older Wordsworth, now in his remembered childhood, we find a more comprehensive account of the character of children and their interactions with nature. Young Wordsworth and his friends are characterized by an unadulterated wildness. In their uncultivated state, they exhibit all the various propensities of human kind in their most nascent forms. Whether it be kindness, curiosity, greed, or ambition, it is shown to be dimly present in these children as if the kernel of all the potentialities of behavior in adulthood is imbedded within the child. Just which of these potential characteristics become actualities depends on the experiences of this early developmental stage. It is the tendency of nature, Wordsworth argues, to work on these dimensions of the child and make sure that what is good in them comes to fruition, while what is bad is mellowed such that the individual can control it.

The method by which nature shapes our moral and intellectual maturation is essentially binary. Simply put, nature either awes and chastens us with solemn, intimidating, or sad stimuli, or pleases us with relaxing, comforting, or otherwise enjoyable stimuli. Wordsworth hints at this binary process when he speaks of nature utilizing "fear and beauty" to educate him, or "leading me on with pleasant and pathetic thoughts." These two distinct emotional experiences are akin, if

not identical to, Edmund Burke's classifications of beauty and sublimity. Beauty, Burke postulates, is the experiencing of love or a love-like affection towards sensory phenomena, and is caused when that phenomena either directly induces pleasure or does so by causing us to imagine pleasure. Sublimity, Burke postulates, is the experience of fear of sensory phenomena, and is caused when that phenomena either directly induces pain or does so by causing us to imagine pain. The way in which these pleasurable and painful experiences can, over time, contribute to our moral development is easy to conjecture. Beauty and sublimity would direct our actions, incentivizing us towards what is pleasurable and dissincentivizing us to certain modes of action, and eventually informing our notions of good and bad, right and wrong. This is the argument that empiricists like Hume were promulgating at the time, countering those philosophers who held morality was dictated by objective principles, either rational or divine. While Wordsworth, with his professed belief in some form of God and his virtual deification of nature, clearly believes an objective, divine basis for morality, he also suggests that our subjective experiences play a significant role in our moral development, guiding us towards those objective principles.

Wordsworth mentions two or three early experiences of sublimity which were clearly morally edifying. One instance is when the young Wordsworth, venturing in the woods alone, gives way to certain primal feelings of greed and violence:

Scudding away from snare to snare, I plied
 That anxious visitation;—moon and stars 315
 Were shining o'er my head. I was alone,
 And seemed to be a trouble to the peace
 That dwelt among them. Sometimes it befell
 In these night wanderings, that a strong desire
 O'erpowered my better reason, and the bird 320

Which was the captive of another's toil
 Became my prey; and when the deed was done
 I heard among the solitary hills
 Low breathings coming after me, and sounds
 Of undistinguishable motion, steps 325
 Almost as silent as the turf they trod. (*The Prelude*, I, 314-326)

This moment is notable for illustrating the worst qualities of humanity in their nascent forms present in Wordsworth himself. These selfish, sadistic urges are, it seems, the lot of every human, but can be tamed by feelings guilt and self-reprobatation. Wordsworth has his first serious pangs of guilt in this moment, a guilt which seems to be connected to a governing power intrinsic to nature. He feels that he has transgressed rules which have almost otherworldly origins.

Another similar incident occurred when young Wordsworth was travelling alone in a canoe. Spying a great edifice before him rising ominously in his field of vision, Wordsworth experiences a moment of profundity:

When, from behind that craggy steep till then
 The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge,
 As if with voluntary power instinct, 380
 Upreared its head. I struck and struck again,
 And growing still in stature the grim shape
 Towered up between me and the stars, and still,
 For so it seemed, with purpose of its own
 And measured motion like a living thing, 385
 Strode after me. With trembling oars I turned,
 And through the silent water stole my way
 Back to the covert of the willow tree;
 There in her mooring-place I left my bark,—

And through the meadows homeward went, in grave 390
 And serious mood; but after I had seen
 That spectacle, for many days, my brain
 Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
 Of unknown modes of being; o'er my thoughts
 There hung a darkness, call it solitude 395
 Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes
 Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
 Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
 But huge and mighty forms, that do not live
 Like living men, moved slowly through the mind 400
 By day, and were a trouble to my dreams. (*The Prelude*, I, 378-401)

In this episode Wordsworth does not feel guilt exactly, but rather a fear similar to awe and respect. He experiences a closer encounter with the power which he felt had chastened him in the woods. This is perhaps his first major experience of sublimity and an important precursor to the piety of his adulthood. It also seems to spur intellectual growth of a nature which is peculiar to this early period of his life. Wordsworth's dim conception of forms and secret principles indicate that his mind is making its first attempts to grasp complex metaphysical speculations about the nature of reality. This is perhaps the initial burst of the kind of philosophical enquiry

Wordsworth devotes himself to in his poetry.

These are irregular spikes in the development of morality and intellect for Wordsworth at this period of his life. Mostly, he and the children are without such considerations and are led, rather, by the allure of bodily excitation, specifically the joy of exercise, play, and adventure. It seems these children have a single operative principle in life, to have fun. Wordsworth does not depict this fun-centric childhood as wasteful sport without any edifying quality. On the contrary,

Wordsworth's intention is to illustrate just how edifying and maturing a childhood led solely by the natural incentive of fun can be. It is a similar sentiment to Wordsworth's praise of pleasure in the Preface, in which he proudly asserts that pleasure is not a frivolous, inconsequential factor in life, but rather the extremely significant motivating agent which makes our lives purposed and productive. Similarly, Wordsworth suggests that a childhood led by this principle of pleasure is nature's own educational system. It is this bodily pleasure caused by direct experience which will eventually mature into pleasure derived from the moral and intellectual.

It is important that this early stage of intellectual development was not unaided by books. As powerful an educational force Wordsworth believes nature to be, he does not argue that it can endow us with all of the knowledge found in print. Still, the fact that we must have recourse to books in our education is never treated as a slight on nature as an educator. Books and nature are, for Wordsworth, complimentary and equal influences on a growing mind. A true mental and moral development would not be complete without both of these important teachers. It is important also that Wordsworth endorses literature on analytical reasoning and imaginative literature as equally essential to an education. At this young age, it seems, one shouldn't dull one's imagination with analytical reasoning, but rather, should feed the budding imagination with stories of an adventurous nature, just as Wordsworth hungrily consumes *The Arabian Nights*.

The next period of Wordsworth's young life featured in *The Prelude* is his first experiences at Cambridge University. One would expect these to be a seminal development in his education, but they are actually noted for their dearth of intellectual and moral stimulation. This is the first evidence we are given that this process of maturation can include lapses and regresses. The scholastic educational methods, which included a battery of analytic reasoning, were not

conducive to Wordsworth's spiritual development, but rather facilitated a kind of spiritually numbed period in which Wordsworth was comparatively insensitive to aesthetic stimuli and unimaginative in his thinking. There is, however, some intellectual and aesthetic growth in this period of numbness. Wordsworth writes with pleasure of his first studies in Euclidian geometry:

Mighty is the charm
 Of those abstractions to a mind beset
 With images and haunted by herself, 160
 And specially delightful unto me
 Was that clear synthesis built up aloft
 So gracefully; even then when it appeared
 Not more than a mere plaything, or a toy
 To sense embodied: not the thing it is 165
 In verity, an independent world,
 Created out of pure intelligence. (*The Prelude*, VI, 158-167)

In addition to works of mathematics, Wordsworth delves into canonical imaginative literature such as Shakespeare, Milton, Spenser, and Chaucer. Despite these positive experiences this period is still characterized as mainly unstimulating and as enforcing some negative intellectual habits, namely the pursuit of knowledge through books alone without recourse to the grandeur of nature. This period is important, however, for illustrating that such lapses and regresses in the course of spiritual maturation can be withstood, that there is something seemingly indestructible within us that will remain sensitive to the beautiful and sublime despite whatever unnatural conditioning.

Whatever insidious work the school system has performed on Wordsworth, its effects seem to subside when during the summer, when he is set free once more to explore a natural

environment. This is the period in which Wordsworth finally senses his moral faculty truly awoken:

Nor less do I remember to have felt,
 Distinctly manifested at this time,
 A human-heartedness about my love
 For objects hitherto the absolute wealth
 Of my own private being and no more; 235
 Which I had loved, even as a blessed spirit
 Or Angel, if he were to dwell on earth,
 Might love in individual happiness.
 But now there opened on me other thoughts
 Of change, congratulation or regret, 240
 A pensive feeling! It spread far and wide;
 The trees, the mountains shared it, and the brooks,
 The stars of Heaven, now seen in their old haunts—
 White Sirius glittering o'er the southern crags,
 Orion with his belt, and those fair Seven, 245
 Acquaintances of every little child,
 And Jupiter, my own beloved star!
 Whatever shadings of mortality,
 Whatever imports from the world of death
 Had come among these objects heretofore, 250
 Were, in the main, of mood less tender: strong,
 Deep, gloomy were they, and severe; the scatterings
 Of awe or tremulous dread, that had given way
 In later youth to yearnings of a love
 Enthusiastic, to delight and hope. 255 (*The Prelude*, V, 231-255)

He experiences the dawning of a new kind of affection that is more general than that of his earlier youth. Clearly, Wordsworth has displayed a natural emotional connection to those individuals whom he was close with, such as his friends and mother. This new development is not the development of the moral faculty in its entirety, but an extension attached to the already existing moral sensitivity towards people and nature which is present at birth. This faculty expands to include, not merely inanimate natural objects, and not merely those individuals one has personally encountered, but humanity as a whole. This moral feeling towards humanity generally is a phenomenon which stems from the familiarity with people and objects of nature experienced simultaneously:

Call ye these appearances—
 Which I beheld of shepherds in my youth, 295
 This sanctity of Nature given to man—
 A shadow, a delusion, ye who pore
 On the dead letter, miss the spirit of things;
 Whose truth is not a motion or a shape
 Instinct with vital functions, but a block 300
 Or waxen image which yourselves have made,
 And ye adore! But blessed be the God
 Of Nature and of Man that this was so;
 That men before my inexperienced eyes
 Did first present themselves thus purified, 305
 Removed, and to a distance that was fit:
 And so we all of us in some degree
 Are led to knowledge, wheresoever led,
 And howsoever; were it otherwise,
 And we found evil fast as we find good 310
 In our first years, or think that it is found,

How could the innocent heart bear up and live!
 But doubly fortunate my lot; not here
 Alone, that something of a better life
 Perhaps was round me than it is the privilege 315
 Of most to move in, but that first I looked
 At Man through objects that were great or fair; (*The Prelude*, VIII, 294-317)

It is not enough, Wordsworth asserts, to merely have encounters with people, nor merely encounters with nature, as these only engender a love of certain individuals and nature respectively. In order to love humanity in general, one must see individuals in connection with their natural environment. Wordsworth cites his observations of rural people at their agricultural work as the experiences which imprinted a love for humanity in his mind. Seeing these people interact with nature, the natural personal affection for individuals and natural affection and religious veneration we have for nature blend together inextricably as one realizes that individual people are each a part of nature, and nature is the essential underlying commonality which binds individual people together into a collective whole.

The next major section of *The Prelude* is Wordsworth's residence in London. Like his residence in Cambridge, this period is marked predominantly for its ill effects and is likewise a testament to the resilience of our connection to nature despite society's efforts to sever it. Before entering the city, Wordsworth's imagination is rapt with the idea of London as an edifice of culture:

There was a time when whatsoever is feigned
 Of airy palaces, and gardens built
 By Genii of romance; or hath in grave
 Authentic history been set forth of Rome, 80
 Alcairo, Babylon, or Persepolis;

Or given upon report by pilgrim friars,
 Of golden cities ten months' journey deep
 Among Tartarian wilds—fell short, far short,
 Of what my fond simplicity believed 85
 And thought of London (*The Prelude*, VII, 76-86)

The self-conscious mockery of the expectations of this young Wordsworth suggests that there is something idolatrous and superficial about this infatuation with the great city. The young Wordsworth's awe of a work of man is mistakenly commensurate with the awe with which he usually observes the works of nature, and this, to the mature Wordsworth, is a gross absurdity. This is a perfect example of the importance of empirical observation in Wordsworth's study of aesthetic influence. Wordsworth, having no personal experience with urban life, accepts the cultural beliefs of its grandeur and impressiveness. He must see the city for himself to understand that he, as well as his society, are mistaken. The young Wordsworth's disappointment with London, when it fails to meet his fantastical expectations, is an indication that Wordsworth's experiences with nature have at least partially buttressed him from the superficial allure of urban life. Wordsworth, however, is not entirely safeguarded from the city's wild attractions. On the contrary, he plunges himself into lurid, overly stimulating entertainments, and sometimes embraces acts of mild debauchery. These excitations do not entirely disintegrate his intellectual and moral capabilities. He witnesses tragic scenes of social apathy, the callous neglect of disabled beggars, and is profoundly moved. His emotional response is largely depressive, but never despairing, and mostly he is struck with a deep sense of personal sympathy and social concern:

With deep devotion, Nature, did I feel, 70
 In that enormous City's turbulent world

Of men and things, what benefit I owed
To thee, and those domains of rural peace,
Where to the sense of beauty first my heart
Was opened (*The Prelude*, VIII, 70-75)

His aesthetic training among objects of nature has prepared him to retain his most human feelings in the face of such societal insensitivity.

Another seminal period included in *The Prelude* is Wordsworth's residence in France during the burgeoning revolution. Wordsworth's newly sharpened sensitivity to social conflict is intensified in this fervent political climate. His associations with French soldiers and his long walks through the French countryside, peopled with the country's most impoverished citizens, strengthen his dedication to the new movement promoting equity and liberty for every French citizen. This political experiment becomes, for Wordsworth, an obsessively consuming project which will, when enacted, actualize all of his highest social ideals. Wordsworth is extremely hopeful during these initial stages of the revolution, even claiming to be somewhat unimpressed with developments because he had anticipated the progress to have happened sooner. As the revolution takes on a gradually darker and less politically motivated form, Wordsworth becomes disillusioned with the political movement he had previously considered the launching pad of world peace. Wordsworth's disillusionment with the revolution becomes a general disillusionment. All of Wordsworth's ideals were so tied into the revolution that its transformation into a violent spectacle of corruption cast doubt on all of his most strongly held philosophical beliefs and plunged him into despair and confusion. This is another instance of tragic societal conditions causing damage to the human spirit. Wordsworth faced a similar challenge in London, but the chaos of the French revolution has had a more dramatic influence on him, one which seems irremediable. In this moment, Wordsworth seems to feel that the

innocent faith in the power of nature which has guided him up to this point has vanished, perhaps forever. Wordsworth, for a while, turns away from his imagination, applying himself to mathematical sciences, as if he has wholly abandoned the hope of any coherent moral philosophy. In time, however, he is rejuvenated by the presence of nature, and comes to believe again in its power to guide humanity towards forming societies which facilitate peace and love among their citizens.

This final chapter of Wordsworth's autobiography is meaningful as a testimony to the indestructibility of a well-grounded faith in nature. The French revolution is used as a symbol, the epitome of all that human kind can do to make us lose faith in human kind, and even nature. The only thing that could be more disheartening to a hopeful, young progressive than the initial corruption of pre-revolution France is the corruption of post-revolution France, when equity and liberty are destroyed by the very people fighting for them. The fact that Wordsworth is able to witness such a demonstration of the failures of humanity and, after a relatively short period of convalescence, return to again to his former nature-based optimism is meant as a proof that the individual, having been habitually comforted and instructed by nature, retains a hopefulness which can never be entirely defeated.

This regaining of one's personal philosophical ideals is also representative of the possibility of institutional, societal recovery from incidences such as the French revolution. Throughout *The Prelude*, though Wordsworth seems to cling exclusively to the self as an individual distinct from the rest of society, he also suggests ways in which his system of spiritual maturation can have larger societal benefits. The inference must be made that if, as Wordsworth proposes, the individual's capacity to be aesthetically stimulated substantially forms his intellectual and moral leanings, then it must substantially form the character of a society generally, society being

composed of individuals. Sensitivity to nature, then, must play a significant role in the success or failure of a society, just as it plays a significant role in the life of the individual.

Wordsworth, throughout *The Prelude*, describes cities, not in material terms, but in terms of the emotional atmosphere inhabiting them. He first includes such a description concerning Switzerland at the time of its revolution:

Oh, most beloved Friend! a glorious time,
 A happy time that was; triumphant looks
 Were then the common language of all eyes;
 As if awaked from sleep, the Nations hailed
 Their great expectancy: the fife of war 760
 Was then a spirit-stirring sound indeed,
 A blackbird's whistle in a budding grove.
 We left the Swiss exulting in the fate
 Of their near neighbours; and, when shortening fast
 Our pilgrimage, nor distant far from home, 765
 We crossed the Brabant armies on the fret
 For battle in the cause of Liberty.
 A stripling, scarcely of the household then
 Of social life, I looked upon these things
 As from a distance; heard, and saw, and felt, 770
 Was touched, but with no intimate concern;
 I seemed to move along them, as a bird
 Moves through the air, or as a fish pursues
 Its sport, or feeds in its proper element;
 I wanted not that joy, I did not need 775
 Such help; the ever-living universe,
 Turn where I might, was opening out its glories,
 And the independent spirit of pure youth

Called forth, at every season, new delights,
 Spread round my steps like sunshine o'er green fields. 780 (*The Prelude*, IV, 756-580)

France especially is characterized by its emotional atmosphere. He describes the intensification of all social feeling in every citizen at the time, and the radical transformation of their characters while swept up in the revolutionary fervor. Later, when the revolution has taken a turn for the worse, he describes its causes as being essentially emotional, explaining that the revolutionaries had become obsessed with themselves and their own power and lost sight of their initial benevolent intentions. For Wordsworth, the direction of society is determined, not so much by material factors, but by the general emotional state of the citizens.

This emotionally driven model of society is closely aligned with the political philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau's common will, the aggregate of the individual will of the citizens, is analogous to the emotional atmosphere Wordsworth attributes to societies. The common will is what determines the direction of society. It is what leaders and legislators should examine when making their decisions, their job being merely to assist the mass in its vast, collective operation. A good leader, Rousseau argues, must make his citizens love liberty and virtue. He must facilitate an environment in which citizens have a passion for working together and promoting the common good. Rousseau, in essence, is emphasizing the importance of a variable of society which does not get much attention, virtue. No matter how sophisticated the formal elements of a political structure, the society will be at a loss, Rousseau argues, if the virtue of its citizens is not properly nurtured.

Wordsworth adopts this vision of society moved by a powerful emotional undercurrent, and adds to it the importance of aesthetic influence, particularly that of nature. Wordsworth's first societal commentary is present in his description of the children and particularly the atmosphere

of Cambridge. In these children, the vital forces which energize society are in their rawest form. They possess within themselves the beginnings of the ambition and greed which manifests in societal corruption, but because they are given free rein in nature, what is positive in this energy is strengthened while what is negative is tempered. Again we find a microcosm of society in the school children of Cambridge. Wordsworth is transparent with his symbolism concerning Cambridge:

I play the loiterer: 'tis enough to note
 That here in dwarf proportions were expressed 585
 The limbs of the great world; its eager strifes
 Collaterally pourtrayed, as in mock fight,
 A tournament of blows, some hardly dealt
 Though short of mortal combat; and whate'er
 Might in this pageant be supposed to hit 590
 An artless rustic's notice, this way less,
 More that way, was not wasted upon me—
 And yet the spectacle may well demand
 A more substantial name, no mimic show,
 Itself a living part of a live whole, 595
 A creek in the vast sea; for, all degrees
 And shapes of spurious fame and short-lived praise
 Here sate in state, and fed with daily alms
 Retainers won away from solid good;
 And here was Labour, his own bond-slave; Hope, 600
 That never set the pains against the prize;
 Idleness halting with his weary clog,
 And poor misguided Shame, and witless Fear,
 And simple Pleasure foraging for Death;
 Honour misplaced, and Dignity astray; 605

Feuds, factions, flatteries, enmity, and guile,
 Murmuring submission, and bald government,
 (The idol weak as the idolater),
 And Decency and Custom starving Truth,
 And blind Authority beating with his staff 610
 The child that might have led him; Emptiness
 Followed as of good omen, and meek Worth
 Left to herself unheard of and unknown. (*The Prelude*, III, 584-613)

This is the first indicator that what is ostensibly a spiritual autobiography will actually have something to say about the condition of society broadly. It is not just an account of the Individual but of the Individual's place in society and likewise of society considered as a collective of individuals. These writings on children are much like the usual initial passages of a work of political philosophy. Hobbes's *Leviathan*, Locke's *Essays of the Nature of Government*, and Rousseau's *The Social Contract*, all begin at the same point, with the natural state of man. These philosophers, before suggesting the ideal political structure, ask what man is like in his most fundamental form, before the trappings of societal institutions mold them into citizens.

Wordsworth, in his own way, performs such an experiment with his writings on children. The pre-Cambridge children Wordsworth describes are as free from the fetters of culture and law as real children can be, and so serve as representatives for those attributes of man which are innate. Conversely, the children of Cambridge are no longer entirely natural, but institutionalized man. Once these children have been put under the society constraints and indoctrinated in the ideals and methods of the societal authorities, the raw natural tendencies which they exhibited in a virtual state of nature are refined into more insidious characteristics, those behaviors which are conducive to societal corruption. They're natural robustness and selfishness are molded into deceptiveness, vanity, greed, idolatry, and other worldly vices. Wordsworth's natural man, then,

is similar to that of Rousseau, with perhaps some darker Hobbesian tendencies. His convictions about the influence of government, however, are decidedly against Hobbes and almost exactly those of Rousseau. Government intervention in the life of the individual takes whatever negative faculties present in the natural man and perverts them into subtly darker, society-corroding behaviors.

Wordsworth concludes his sections on children by summarizing his thoughts on education, beginning with a prolonged description of the child that is the typical product of the current system of education:

This model of a child is never known 300
 To mix in quarrels; that were far beneath
 Its dignity; with gifts he bubbles o'er
 As generous as a fountain; selfishness
 May not come near him, nor the little throng
 Of flitting pleasures tempt him from his path; 305
 The wandering beggars propagate his name,
 Dumb creatures find him tender as a nun,
 And natural or supernatural fear,
 Unless it leap upon him in a dream,
 Touches him not. To enhance the wonder, see 310
 How arch his notices, how nice his sense
 Of the ridiculous; not blind is he
 To the broad follies of the licensed world,
 Yet innocent himself withal, though shrewd,
 And can read lectures upon innocence; 315
 A miracle of scientific lore,
 Ships he can guide across the pathless sea,
 And tell you all their cunning; he can read

The inside of the earth, and spell the stars;
 He knows the policies of foreign lands; 320
 Can string you names of districts, cities, towns,
 The whole world over, tight as beads of dew
 Upon a gossamer thread; he sifts, he weighs;
 All things are put to question; he must live
 Knowing that he grows wiser every day 325
 Or else not live at all, and seeing too
 Each little drop of wisdom as it falls
 Into the dimpling cistern of his heart:
 For this unnatural growth the trainer blame,
 Pity the tree.—Poor human vanity, 330
 Wert thou extinguished, little would be left
 Which he could truly love; but how escape?
 For, ever as a thought of purer birth
 Rises to lead him toward a better clime,
 Some intermeddler still is on the watch 335
 To drive him back, and pound him, like a stray,
 Within the pinfold of his own conceit.
 Meanwhile old grandame earth is grieved to find
 The playthings, which her love designed for him,
 Unthought of (*The Prelude*, V, 300-340)

According to Wordsworth, school is a place in which, although the rational faculty is exercised, neither sentiment, imagination, nor critical thinking are adequately nurtured. The children are assigned the task of passively accumulating facts. They are to learn the culturally accepted standards of knowledge and their intellect is to be measured by their recitation of the information given them. They are never encouraged to skeptically evaluate established doctrine or imagine alternative philosophies. They are also never encouraged to engage with their material

emotionally and to investigate their own emotions. In essence, the school system operates on the assumption that children are treated as intellectual automatons devoid of feeling and volition.

The result is that instead of hungering for true knowledge and embracing their connectivity with nature and mankind, the children are incentivized mainly to rehearse popular thought and chase worldly ambitions.

Wordsworth's account of his residence in London is the first explicit and drawn-out societal critique in *The Prelude*. The superficial allure which London holds for Wordsworth is representative of its effects on the imagination of all Englishmen, especially Londoners. They are impressed with the grandeur of London as they should be impressed with the grandeur of nature. If they were to look beyond the impressiveness of London as an elaborate work of human artifice, they would find little to celebrate. Something unfortunate happens to the moral faculties of those inhabiting the city. They never observe people as Wordsworth did in the countryside, individually and in their natural environment. Because they experience people in this way, they never develop the general love for humanity and acute sensitivity to human suffering which those of the country have. These urban citizens are also bombarded with a greater amount and more intense degree of stimuli than the average individual in the country and, through overexposure, are dulled to the more mild and natural stimuli which impact the aesthetic and moral faculties. This callousness to humanity and need for violent stimulus are responsible for the greed and corruption which infects urban life. Wordsworth summarizes these societal ills:

I glance but at a few conspicuous marks,
 Leaving a thousand others, that, in hall,
 Court, theatre, conventicle, or shop, 575
 In public room or private, park or street,
 Each fondly reared on his own pedestal,

Looked out for admiration. Folly, vice,
 Extravagance in gesture, mien, and dress,
 And all the strife of singularity, 580
 Lies to the ear, and lies to every sense—
 Of these, and of the living shapes they wear,
 There is no end. (*The Prelude*, VII, 573-583)

Wordsworth is able to keep his simple faith in nature intact during his stay in the city, and in this way maintains his moral turpitude. The people of the city, however, are not as lucky. They have been habituated to overstimulation and moral and aesthetic numbness. With their natural tastes perverted, these citizens cannot act like contributing members of a united society, but only individuals seeking personal benefit.

This perversion of natural tastes and its negative societal consequences is repeated in more extreme forms during the French revolution. It is, firstly, the cause of the oppression which initiated the revolution. The French aristocracy were too concerned with indulging themselves to take care of their impoverished countrymen, who subsequently revolted. Later, the same self-centeredness which brought the country to revolt began to cloud the judgment of the revolutionaries. Their philosophy, unaided by nature, becomes dangerous sophistry, and their impassioned patriotism turns into egoism and hunger for power. Wordsworth illustrates their transformation when describing the zeal with which they beheaded those whom they saw as their oppressors:

They made it proudly, eager as a child,
 (If like desires of innocent little ones
 May with such heinous appetites be compared),
 Pleased in some open field to exercise 370
 A toy that mimics with revolving wings

The motion of a wind-mill; though the air
 Do of itself blow fresh, and make the vanes
 Spin in his eyesight, 'that' contents him not,
 But with the plaything at arm's length, he sets 375
 His front against the blast, and runs amain,
 That it may whirl the faster.

Amid the depth
 Of those enormities, even thinking minds
 Forgot, at seasons, whence they had their being 380
 Forgot that such a sound was ever heard
 As Liberty upon earth: yet all beneath
 Her innocent authority was wrought,
 Nor could have been, without her blessed name.

Here we see that both oppressors and the oppressed can succumb to viciousness and greed. It is likewise caused by the same factors, an alienation from nature, and overexposure to people and intense stimuli. The result is that the revolutionaries' very thought is distorted, because political philosophy, as any normative philosophy, is largely dependent on moral feeling, something these men have stifled.

Wordsworth concludes *The Prelude* by giving us, in subtle terms, the answer to the political debacles he has described. He asks to examine the common, rural people in all their simplicity. They are, Wordsworth considers, sufficiently educated individuals, having escaped the fetters of formal education. They also coexist harmoniously with such ease, and one could add that in addition to be intellectually able, they are exceptionally good citizens.

When I began to enquire, 160
 To watch and question those I met, and speak
 Without reserve to them, the lonely roads

Were open schools in which I daily read
 With most delight the passions of mankind,
 Whether by words, looks, sighs, or tears, revealed; 165
 There saw into the depth of human souls,
 Souls that appear to have no depth at all
 To careless eyes. And—now convinced at heart
 How little those formalities, to which
 With overweening trust alone we give 170
 The name of Education, have to do
 With real feeling and just sense; how vain
 A correspondence with the talking world
 Proves to the most;

These portraits of rural people constitute an argument for the ideals of classical liberalism. Instead of advocating for this style of government like a standard political theorist, by writing a commentary on government itself, Wordsworth advocates political doctrine like a poet, by focusing on the people who make up society as living individuals with emotional and intellectual nuances. It is this close study of humanity which must act as the foundation of any worthwhile political philosophy. What Wordsworth, though not openly, is advocating when describing these rural people, is a hands-off governmental structure which allows individuals their natural freedom. These rural people are what would make such a government successful. The quality which Wordsworth especially emphasizes about these people is their completeness. They do not need to be formally educated or otherwise culturally refined in order to become the perfect individuals to people a society. They are already valuable to society by virtue of the natural growth of their own natural faculties. Considering the suitability of these people for society, we should think of the model citizen as someone who has become a model citizen, not because of

societal interference, but because of a lack of societal interference. Accordingly, society should be arranged in such a way as to allow individuals free-reign to govern themselves and access to mild, natural aesthetic stimuli like that found in nature. This is the only way to ensure the emotional and intellectual health of the citizenry.

Works Cited:

Burt, Edwin Arthur. *The English Philosophers: from Bacon to Mill*. Modern Library, 1994.

Holmes, Richard, and Jennifer S. Uglow. *The Age of Wonder: How the Romantic Generation
Discovered the Beauty & Terror of Science*. Folio Society, 2015.

Wordsworth, William, and Stephen Charles. Gill. *The Major Works*. Oxford University Press, 2008.