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### The Prelude as a Philosophical Poem

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### Abstract and Keywords

*The Prelude* is 'philosophical' in three related and, to Wordsworth, increasingly consequential senses. First, it is philosophical in conception. As an introspective reckoning of the origin and quality of the poet's philosophical capacities, the poem represents Wordsworth's attempt to fulfil the first commandment of western philosophy, to 'know thyself'. *The Prelude* is, moreover, philosophical in content. Wordsworth's account of the growth of the philosopher-poet's mind is, though highly personalized, nonetheless attentive to central issues in eighteenth-century philosophy of mind. Tracking 'the first poetic spirit of our *human* life' from infancy to maturity, Wordsworth emphasizes the active, creative role of affect in psycho-social development. Finally, and most importantly, *The Prelude* is philosophical in execution. Wordsworth communicates his philosophy of the active affective mind through poetic means that produce analogous affects in readers, as it were proving his philosophy on the very pulses of their poetic experience.

Keywords: Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, active mind, affect, psycho-social development, philosophy, poetics

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THE question of *The Prelude*'s status as a philosophical poem ought not to be vexed. If, as Samuel Taylor Coleridge claimed, 'the postulate of philosophy and at the same time the test of philosophic capacity, is no other than the heaven-descended Know thyself!' (CCBL, I. 252), then *The Prelude* must in fact be William Wordsworth's *most* philosophical poem. Yet it was Coleridge himself who cast the first doubt by pronouncing upon Wordsworth's capacity to write *the* philosophical poem, 'The Recluse', which *The Prelude* evidently is not.<sup>1</sup> *The Prelude* may be an 'appendix', 'tributary', or 'ante-chapel' to that mostly imaginary edifice and was certainly goaded on by it, but it is clearly not the comprehensive statement of Wordsworth's views on 'Nature, Man, and Society' that

Coleridge impatiently expected and against which both he and Wordsworth measured *The Prelude* (*EY*, 212, 440, 454; *PrW*, III. 5). Still, Coleridge admired *The Prelude* for what it was, and so should we: in the two-book version, a ‘divine self-Biography’, in the five-book version, ‘a philosophico-biographical Poem’, and in the thirteen-book version, ‘A Tale divine of high and passionate Thoughts | To their own music chaunted!’ (*CN*, I. 1801; *CL*, II. 1104; *Prel-NCE*, 543).<sup>2</sup>

If we can thus easily settle the question of whether *The Prelude* is a (not *the*) philosophical poem—even the testy Coleridge classifies it as such, at least in part—we are immediately confronted with the truly debatable issue of what exactly is meant by ‘philosophical’ or, in Coleridge’s more exact phrase, ‘philosophico-biographical’. For example, does the adjective ‘philosophical’ relate to the substantive ‘poem’ with the same transitivity as the adjective ‘biographical’ does? Wordsworth’s autobiographical poem (p. 398) is evidently a poetic autobiography. Is his philosophical poem equally a poetic philosophy? If so, where, when, how, and according to what definition of philosophy exactly?

Taking the last question first—for its answer inevitably determines the answers to the preceding three—is *The Prelude* to be considered philosophical insofar as it stands in the Socratic tradition to which Coleridge refers? Socrates, ‘in accordance with the Delphic inscription’, made self-knowledge the precondition for all other forms and objects of philosophical inquiry. ‘I am not yet capable of “knowing myself”’, he tells Phaedrus, ‘it therefore seems absurd to me that while I am still ignorant of this subject I should inquire into things which do not belong to me. ...I inquire not into these but into myself’.<sup>3</sup>

Wordsworth offers a similar apology in his Preface to *The Excursion*, explaining that it was only reasonable that he should pursue a Socratic first philosophy of self-knowledge before undertaking a philosophy of everything else (in his initial excitement about the ‘Recluse’ project, Wordsworth had exclaimed, ‘Indeed I know not any thing which will not come within the scope of my plan’ (*EY*, 212)). *The Prelude* was thus ‘preparatory’ in the Socratic sense, ‘a review of his own mind’ undertaken to ‘examine how far Nature and Education had qualified him’ for ‘the arduous labour which he had proposed to himself’ in ‘The Recluse’ (*PrW*, III. 5).

Wordsworth’s characterization of the ‘long finished’ work as designed ‘to record, in verse, the origin and progress of his own powers, as far he was acquainted with them’ (*PrW*, III. 5), squares well with his early sense of the poem as an effort to ‘trace’ with ‘my best conjectures...| The progress of our being’ (1799, II. 268–9).<sup>4</sup> As the plural pronoun ‘our’ suggests, from the first Wordsworth was concerned with the *generic* implications of his self-reflexive inquiry and findings. Though ultimately a story of his special election as a philosopher-poet, Wordsworth asserts the admittedly conjectural

history of his individual mind as nonetheless exemplary for the kind. 'Our being', in Wordsworth's view, is naturally and primarily creative; we are born poets, not made (to put a Wordsworthian spin on the old adage). In the repetitious course of subsequent development, however, most of us are *unmade* from this original endowment of our species:

Such, verily, is the first  
Poetic spirit of our human life—  
By uniform control of after years  
In most abated and suppressed

(1799, II. 305–8).

Certain individuals, however, 'favored...from [the] very dawn | Of infancy' with the 'quiet' ministrations and 'severer interventions' of 'seldom recognized' 'powers', are able to preserve their 'first poetic spirit' 'Preeminent' 'Through every change of growth or of decay' (1799, I. 70–1, 79, II. 309–10). The growth of the poet's mind therefore provides an (p. 399) instructive exception to the general human rule, showing how 'the mind of man is fashioned' and *may be* 'built up | Even as a strain of music' (1799, I. 67–8).

The earliest version of *The Prelude* accordingly begins with the infant poet's first creative act, the 'perceptual blending' of the river Derwent's 'murmurs with my nurse's song' (1799, I. 3).<sup>5</sup> The evolving poem tracks this imagined 'stream' of consciousness 'From darkness, and the very place of birth | In its blind cavern, whence is faintly heard | The sound of waters', down to

The time, which was our object from the first,  
When we may (not presumptuously, I hope)  
Suppose my powers so far confirmed, and such  
My knowledge, as to make me capable  
Of building up a work that should endure.

(1805, XIII. 172–5, 269–78)

The poem's governing metaphor of 'the river of my mind' is not simply rhetorical or structural but also logical, for the philosophical poet's 'powers' and 'knowledge' derive their essential force and elemental substance from an identifiable (if not fully scrutable) source: the 'infant sensibility, | Great birthright of our being, [that] was in me | Augmented and sustained' (1799, II. 248, 315–17).

The 'Blest the infant babe' sequence that precedes and specifies this claim represents one of Wordsworth's earliest and, from a psychological point of view, most successful analyses of this original dower of 'our' human being. 'Passion' and 'feelings' stimulated

by mother-infant interaction ‘awaken’ the infant’s mind to ‘the first trial of its powers’, including those of interest and attention (‘prompt and watchful’), of perceptual integration and categorization (‘combin[ing] | In one appearance all the elements | And parts of the same object’; ‘Tenacious of the forms which it receives’; ‘apprehensive’), and of affect and emotion (‘A virtue which irradiates and exalts | All objects through all intercourse of sense’; ‘feeling has to him imparted strength’; ‘powerful in all sentiments of grief, | Of exultation, fear and joy’). These decidedly *active* powers of mind cooperate ‘emphatically’ with the no less ‘*active* universe’, making the infant mind a contributing ‘agent’ in its own perception. Like the poet whom he proto-typifies, the newborn infant ‘Creates, creator and receiver both, | Working but in alliance with the works | Which [he] beholds’ (1799, II. 267–310, *passim*).

Wordsworth had advanced this very idea only a year before as the ‘elevated thought’ of ‘Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey’ (1798) concerning ‘the mighty world | Of eye and ear,—both what they half create, | And half perceive’ (105–7); in the ‘infant babe’ sequence, he renders the same insight as it were *ab ovo*. Henceforth, the originally half-creative nature of the affectively empowered mind forms the principal and single most enduring article of Wordsworth’s philosophical faith. The presupposition of the newborn’s ‘feeling-imparted strength’ undergirds the affective argument of ‘the spots of (p. 400) time’, which iteratively illustrate, as Wordsworth spells out in 1805, how ‘feeling comes in aid | Of feeling, and diversity of strength | Attends us, if but once we have been strong’ (1805, XI. 325–7). This same belief motivates the (to Coleridge objectionable) apostrophe to the ‘little child’ as ‘best Philosopher’ in ‘Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood’ (written 1802–4), which climaxes in a ‘song of thanks and praise’

...for those first affections  
Those shadowy recollections,  
Which, be they what they may,  
Are yet the fountain light of all our day,  
Are yet a master light of all our seeing

(P2V, 151–5).

Later in 1804, as he expanded *The Prelude* and sought to understand the process by which ‘Love of Nature Lead[s] to Love of Mankind’, Wordsworth returned again to this foundational myth of mental ‘virtues’ or powers rooted in the infant’s ‘first affections’. In the MS. Y sequence ‘We live by admiration and by love’, originally drafted for Book VIII but ultimately rejected (perhaps because, like the ‘infant babe’ sequence, this more extensive developmental meditation is written mostly in the third-person and in the generic aspect), Wordsworth is again intent to trace

What subtle virtues from the first have been

. . . . .  
At every moment finding out their way  
Insensibly to nourish in the heart  
Its tender sympathies, to keep alive  
Those yearnings, and to strengthen them and shape,  
Which from the mother's breast were first received

(*Prel-NCE*, 505, ll. 215–19).

Doubly 'favored' in development by the 'constitution of his frame | And circumstances', MS. Y's generic 'child' 'Burn[s] within to irradiate all without', clearly sustaining and even augmenting that infant 'virtue which irradiates and exalts | All objects through all intercourse of sense' (*Pre-NCE*, 503, ll. 125–6, 129; 1799, II. 289–90). Like the infant babe, 'Working but in alliance with the works | Which it beholds', the growing and increasingly self-reflective child of MS. Y comes to feel in the 'season of his second birth'

that be his mind however great  
In aspiration, the universe in which  
He lives is equal to his mind, that each  
Is worthy of the other—if the one  
Be insatiate, the other is inexhaustible.

(*Prel-NCE*, 504, ll. 168–74)

This unpublished work of 1804 looks forward to the 'high argument' of 'The Recluse' concerning the reciprocal 'fitness' of 'the external World' and 'the individual Mind' and the phenomenal 'creation (by no lower name | Can it be called) which they with blended might | Accomplish' ('Prospectus', 62–71), but it also looks back to the 'first creative (p. 401) sensibility' of 1799 and Wordsworth's original assertion of 'that universal power | And *fitness* in the latent qualities | And essences of things, by which the mind | Is moved with feelings of delight' (II. 373–5, 409 emphasis added).

Attesting to the remarkable inertia at the foundation of Wordsworth's philosophical thought, it is precisely this theme—of an essential 'fitness' in the 'qualities' and 'essences of things' that moves the mind 'with feelings of delight'—that, fifteen years later, Wordsworth will publicly announce as the central philosophical concern of 'The Recluse':

*On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life,  
Musing in solitude, I oft perceive  
Fair trains of imagery before me rise,  
Accompanied by feelings of delight  
Pure, or with no unpleasing sadness mixed;*

And I am conscious of affecting thoughts  
And dear remembrances, whose presence soothes  
Or elevates the Mind, intent to weigh  
The good and evil of our mortal state.  
—To these emotions, whencesoe'er they come,  
Whether from the breath of outward circumstance,  
Or from the Soul—an impulse to herself,  
I would give utterance in numerous Verse.

(‘Prospectus’, 1–13, *CExc*, p. 39; emphasis added)

Strikingly, Wordsworth’s ‘whether/or’ construction leaves open and unresolved what had been the central issue in metaphysical and moral philosophy since Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*: is the mind a blank slate formed outside-in by circumstance and sensation, or is it rather formed inside-out by its own innate powers and the ‘ideas’ to which they preferentially conduce (of unity, identity, relation, etc.)? Wordsworth subordinates and effectively neutralizes the question, suggesting that the formative ‘emotions’ of ‘pure delight’, ‘pleasing sadness’, ‘affecting thoughts’, and ‘dear remembrances’ may be traced to *both* ‘outward circumstance’ *and* ‘an impulse’ provided by ‘the Soul...to herself’. Rather than arguing the precedence of external or internal causes of particular instances of such feelings—he takes both the human constitution and natural circumstances as necessary and given in any case—Wordsworth proposes to investigate the excitatory and inhibitory roles (‘sooth[ing] | Or elevat[ing]’) played by such feelings in human moral and intellectual development.

Insofar as *The Prelude* was the cradle and proving ground of these developmental ideas—and very clearly it was both, answering the ancient Socratic demand to *Know thyself!* with a distinctively modern theory of ‘thought’ seeded by and ‘steeped in feeling’ (1799, II. 447–8)—it appears to justify Coleridge’s precise if somewhat cumbersome categorization of it as a ‘philosophico-biographical poem’. But we may well still ask, what then constitutes the *poetic* dimension of this ‘philosophico-biographical poem’, and how and where does this dimension intersect and interact with the philosophy? As it happens, Wordsworth was occupied with exactly these questions when, late in 1798, he abandoned an ‘Essay on Morals’ in prose to commence composition in the same notebook of the first self-exploratory verses of *The Prelude*. In the little that survives of the ‘Essay’, Wordsworth insists upon the union of thought and feeling as the *sine qua non* for any ‘book or system of moral philosophy’: it must be ‘written with sufficient power to melt into our affection[?], to incorporate itself with the blood & vital juices of our minds’ if it is ‘to have any influence worth our notice in forming those [moral] habits of which I am speaking’ (*PrW*, I. 103). This remarkably embodied statement of what Wordsworth hoped to achieve in his unfinished ‘Essay on Morals’ antedates his first draftings toward *The*

*Prelude* by a few weeks at most, if not indeed by days (*PrW*, i. 101). If *The Prelude* was to be the poem that would confirm his possession of ‘powers’ and ‘knowledge’ befitting a philosophical poet (‘was it for this...?’), it would need, according to Wordsworth’s own pre-determined standard, to meet or otherwise demonstrate this affective capacity of making the reader *feel* the truth of its claims. To be designated philosophical by this standard, the poem’s introspective self-reckoning would have to be ‘written with sufficient power to melt into *our* [i.e. the readers’] affections’ and ‘to incorporate itself’—presumably through the skilful use of imagery and diction, rhythm and repetition—‘with the blood & vital juices of *our* minds’.

So written, *The Prelude* would answer more closely to Wordsworth’s own definition of philosophical poetry, set down in the Preface to the 1802 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. Echoing the ‘Essay on Morals’ from four years earlier, Wordsworth observes that, though nothing distinguishes poetry’s ‘vital juices from those of prose’ for ‘the same human blood circulates through the veins of them both’, still, ‘Poetry is the most philosophic of all writing:...its object is truth, not individual and local, but general, and operative; not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion; truth which is its own testimony’ (*LBOP*, 751–2). Stephen Gill remarks that this is ‘a vision of Poetry as both a species of knowledge *and* a vehicle for knowledge of the profoundest kind, which in its operation brings into unity mind and heart’.<sup>6</sup> This conception of philosophical poetry explains Wordsworth’s particular satisfaction in readers’ responses to the *Lyrical Ballads*, especially ‘Michael’, confirming the success of ‘my attempt to excite tender sensations in the hearts of my Readers’ and thereby ‘to rectify men’s feelings, to give them new compositions of feeling, to render their feelings more sane and permanent, in short, more consonant to nature, that is, to eternal nature, and the great moving spirit of things’ (*EY*, 325, 355; see 322). It is this insistently *affective* moral purpose that justifies Wordsworth’s representation of ‘low and rustic life’ in *Lyrical Ballads*, for ‘in that situation our elementary feelings...may be *more accurately contemplated and more forcibly communicated*’ (*LBOP*, 743, emphasis added). Parsing this poetic transmission from the reader’s perspective, the feeling being communicated must first be strongly felt before it can be accurately contemplated: we are to be *moved* (p. 403) through ‘essential passions of the heart’ (e.g. ‘feelings of delight’) to a fuller knowledge of our own human nature. Wordsworth aims ‘to describe objects and utter sentiments of such a nature and in such connection with each other, that the understanding of the being to whom we address ourselves...must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, his taste exalted, and his affections ameliorated’ (*LBOP*, 745). By this more demanding but inarguably Wordsworthian standard of judgement, *The Prelude*’s claim to being a ‘philosophical poem’ ultimately rests upon the degree of intellectual enlightenment, aesthetic exaltation, and moral amelioration experienced by its reader.

Meeting this standard of philosophical *efficacy* or *potency*, Wordsworth wrote in Germany after completing a first book of *The Prelude*, would require

that considerate and laborious work,  
That patience which, admitting no neglect,  
[? By] slow creation doth impart to speech  
Outline and substance, even till it has given  
A function kindred to organic power—  
The vital spirit of a perfect form

(*Prel-NCE*, 495).

Wordsworth envisions a form of utterance that replicates the ‘organic power’ or powers that inspired the underlying thought, which in the case of *The Prelude* concerns the developmental interplay of mind and nature mediated by strong feelings. If this draft fragment that defines the goal of ‘vital’ or ‘perfect form’ in terms of efficacious power does not itself achieve that goal, this is precisely because it expresses the idea prosaically rather than poetically, with theoretical clarity but without affective force or consequence.

Consider for contrast a passage from Book VIII of *The Prelude*, composed c.1804–5, in which Wordsworth reflects upon how nature and education cooperated to endow him, even in London, with an overpowering sense of ‘human nature’ as ‘a spirit | Living in time and space, and far diffused’ (1805, VIII. 763–4). In a first pass at this theme, Wordsworth merely asserts and explains, but does not ‘forcibly communicate’, his meaning:

In this my joy, in this my dignity  
Consisted: the external universe,  
By striking upon what is found within,  
Had given me this conception, with the help  
Of books and what they picture and record.

(VIII. 765–9)

Happily, anything worth saying, Wordsworth is sure to say twice, and in the next pass he scores the same thought (as Coleridge might say) to its own music:

And less  
Than other minds I had been used to owe  
The pleasure which I found in place or thing  
To extrinsic transitory accidents,  
To records and traditions; but a sense  
Of what had been here done, and suffered here

(p. 404)

Through ages, and was doing, suffering still,  
Weighed with me, could support the test of thought—  
Was like the enduring majesty and power  
Of independent nature. And not seldom  
Even individual remembrances,  
By working on the shapes before my eyes,  
Became like vital functions of the soul;  
And out of what had been, what was, the place  
Was thronged with impregnations, like those wilds  
In which my early feelings had been nursed,  
And naked valleys full of caverns, rocks,  
And audible seclusions, dashing lakes,  
Echoes and waterfalls, and pointed crags  
That into music touch the passing wind.

(VIII. 777–96)

Thematically, these lines describe self-revelatory experiences in which long-dormant memory traces blossom into active powers of imaginative perception ('vital functions of the soul'). This has, of course, been a key theme of the poem from the outset—the mysterious workmanship by which the living mind is built up through the accumulation and recuperation of incidental impressions:

The earth  
And common face of Nature spake to me  
Rememberable things—sometimes, 'tis true,  
By quaint associations, yet not vain  
Nor profitless, if haply they impressed  
Collateral objects and appearances,  
Albeit lifeless then, and doomed to sleep  
Until maturer seasons called them forth  
To impregnate and elevate the mind.

(1799, I. 418–26)

The London sequence, written more than five years later, speaks to the same point: what Wordsworth in his youth had casually absorbed of English history and London hearsay, the dead letter of 'record and tradition', comes unexpectedly to life in the 'maturer season' of young adulthood, 'impregnating' the actual perceptual scenes of London with imagined figures and fabled actions, with a 'weight' of history that derives from and makes manifest the depth and force of his own mind. For Wordsworth, the experience affectively confirms a foundational metaphysical truth: 'human nature' is 'not a punctual presence' delimited by the here and now, but rather 'a spirit | Living in time and space,

and far diffused', one that answers with memorial and imaginative resources of its own whenever 'the external universe' 'strik[es] upon what is found within' (VIII. 761–4).

Wordsworth's metaphor is evidently of a bell or some other resonant object: when external stimuli strike the sensory periphery of the human nervous system, the perceptual signals activate memory traces and emotions within that, like reverberant sound waves, flow back upon the perceptual signals, amplifying and augmenting them. Thus, (p. 405) in the London passage, recollected knowledge endows otherwise inscrutable monuments, place names, and sights with 'sense' and 'weight', with a conceptual substance and affective heft that originates not in the immediate scene or sign but rather in the mind that beholds and reads it. 'Not seldom' the substance and heft of 'individual remembrances' seemed actually to overflow upon the perceptual scene, so that 'the place | Was thronged with impregnations, like those wilds | In which my early feelings had been nursed'. The simile asserts that this instance of the mind's 'vital' contribution of significance and value to its own perceptions is in its essential features comparable to those early experiences of 'creative sensibility' or 'plastic power' that have been Wordsworth's theme from the first (1799, II. 409, 411).

'All objects', Wordsworth writes in Book VIII, 'being | Themselves capacious, also found in me | Capaciousness and amplitude of mind—| Such is the strength and glory of our youth' (757–60). This responsive or 'correspondent' power of mind (1850, VIII. 606) originates in the infant 'virtue' (or 'feeling...imparted strength') that 'irradiates and exalts | All objects through all intercourse of sense' (1799, II. 299, 289–90), and it comes to full self-recognition in the vision atop Snowdon, which Wordsworth interprets as 'the perfect image of a mighty mind' (1805, XIII. 69):

One function of such mind had Nature there  
Exhibited by putting forth, and that  
With circumstance most awful and sublime:  
That domination which she oftentimes  
Exerts upon the outward face of things,  
So moulds them, and endues, abstracts, combines,  
Or by abrupt and unhabitual influence  
Doth make one object so impress itself  
Upon all others, and pervades them so,  
That even the grossest minds must see and hear,  
And cannot chuse but feel.

(XIII. 74–84)

If it is to be a philosophical poem on Wordsworth's own terms, *The Prelude* must convey this theme of the exertive and self-exhibiting mind *in effect* by 'melt[ing] into our

affections' and 'incorporating itself with the blood & vital juices of our minds'. Only when it is *felt*, 'carried alive into the heart by passion', will Wordsworth's developmental account of mind register with the self-witnessing force that he requires it to have. The question thus becomes, by what means does he 'augment and sustain' the 'creative sensibility' and 'powers' of his readers, so that 'even the grossest minds must see and hear | And cannot chuse but feel' the philosophy he intends to advance?

The London passage under consideration illustrates an array of such poetic means, ranging from immediate and obvious kinds to subtler varieties that are farther to seek and for that reason even more affecting. The sequence is concerned with memorial 'impregnations' that augment and amplify immediate experience in ways that will be *felt* before they can be properly *thought*. Ideally, a parallel process will characterize a reader's experience of these verses; if so, his or her unfolding 'thoughts' will likewise be 'steeped' in memory-stimulated 'feeling'. An obvious example of this kind of effect may be seen, or (p. 406) rather heard, in the resonant sound structure of the passage's concluding lines, in which consonance ('naked', 'caverns', 'rocks', 'seclusions', 'lakes', 'echoes', 'craggs', 'music') and internal rhymes ('naked'/'lakes'; 'seclusion'/'music') create an effect of ambient 'echoing' or amplification that is analogous to the one being described. Each successive iteration of /k/ refreshes the previously articulated one(s) in phonetic working memory and is (at least potentially) thereby endowed with a swelling amplitude that is pre-conceptual to begin with, a *felt* experience of actual or imagined audition that may (but needn't necessarily) be subsequently *thought* by being consciously appreciated and conceptually correlated with the semantics of the lines ('impregnations', 'echoes' and echoing 'caverns', 'dashings' of oars, the cascading sound of 'waterfalls', etc.). These local sound techniques and others—for example the perfect pentameter of the final line, 'touching into music' the caesura-punctuated rhythms of the preceding three lines—set Wordsworth's 'passionate thought', his felt experience of a scene 'thronged with impregnations', 'to its own music'. Such harmony of sound with sense the reader and especially the auditor may well 'see and hear' but at some pre-conceptual level 'cannot chuse but feel'.

With less obvious but more far-reaching effect, Wordsworth populates these already resonant lines with diction and imagery drawn from earliest recollection, both the poet's, who is remembering 'those wilds | In which my early feelings had been nursed', and the reader's, who first encountered 'those wilds' and the terms that epitomize them in the now distant opening book of the poem. Thus, 'nurse' and 'naked' hearken back to what was originally the poem's opening verse paragraph; 'audible seclusions' indexes the following scenes of woodcock-snaring and nest-plundering, with their 'low breathings', 'sounds of indistinguishable motion', and 'strange utterance'; and 'cavern' and 'dashing lakes' recall the subsequent boat-stealing episode (1805, l. 273, 292, 331-2, 348, 389-90,

395). Layered upon local sound effects of consonance, rhyme, and rhythm, these global semantic echoes may refresh mental imagery and emotional responses generated in the reader by the poem's original episodes, imbuing his or her mental model of Wordsworth in London with elements of the very Lakeland memories that Wordsworth himself (in composition) metaphorically projects upon the scene. What Wordsworth says of his experience of London, the reader might well reiterate to characterize his or her experience of the sequence that describes it:

With strong sensations teeming as it did  
Of past and present, such a place must needs  
Have pleased me...I sought not then  
Knowledge, but craved for power—and power I found  
In all things. Nothing had a circumscribed  
And narrow influence; but all objects, being  
Themselves capacious, also found in me  
Capaciousness and amplitude of mind

(1805, VIII. 752–9).

Extending the analogy between the poet's recollection and the reader's reproduction: to the degree that we recognize the active powers of imagination, memory, and feeling at work in our conceptualization of Wordsworth's no less active mental experience, (p. 407) to just that degree will we feel what the poet nominates as 'the highest bliss | That can be known': 'the consciousness | Of whom [we] are, habitually infused | Through every image, and through every thought, | And all impressions' (1805, XIII. 107–11). Wordsworth ultimately refers 'such minds' to 'the Deity', but this insight will be clear and convincing only to one 'whose soul hath risen | Up to the height of feeling intellect' (1805, XIII. 106, 205). Wordsworth's immediate poetic goal is thus to cultivate his readers' sensitivity to 'feeling intellect' by producing their direct experience of it.

The most potent poetic strategies by which Wordsworth 'forcibly communicates' the experience of 'feeling intellect' involve the typological model of predictive type and fulfilling anti-type, which harmonize like call and response across a gapped temporal span or history, whether universal, individual, or, in the reader's experience, textual. As Erich Auerbach defines it, typological or 'figural' signification 'combines two events, causally and chronologically remote from each other, by attributing to them a meaning common to both'; as opposed to allegory or symbolism, in which 'at least one of the two elements combined is a pure sign,...in a figural relation both the signifying and the signified facts are real and concrete historical events'.<sup>7</sup> The second line of the doxology *Gloria Patri*—'as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be'—provides a paradigmatic example, familiar to Wordsworth from the literary as well as the liturgical tradition (e.g. Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, 1.245, 'this was, and is, and yet men shal it

see', personalized by Wordsworth in the final sonnet of the Duddon sequence of 1820, l. 4, 'I see what was, and is, and will abide').

In the London passage, Wordsworth invokes the same figural pattern in ironic circumstances and truncated form:

but a sense  
Of what had been here done, and suffered here  
Through ages, and was doing, suffering, still,  
Weighed with me, could support the test of thought

(1805, VIII. 781-4).

These lines embed a structure of chiasmus ('here done, and suffered here') within a compound predicate governed, as its biblical archetype is (see Rev. 1:8), by parallelism and inflectional variation ('what had been...done, and suffered', 'and was doing, suffering'). Such semantic and syntactic repetitions tend (like those involved in consonance, rhyme, and rhythm) to increase the amplitude of the reiterated words and phrases through the reactivation of memory traces that re-echo or 'resonate' within the present instance. Given its temporal theme and variation at the scale of 'ages' and some familiarity with its figural precedents, this passage may additionally generate an expectation of a third rhetorical step that 'fulfils' the movement from the perfected past to the still progressing past (or narrative present) by reiterating their terms in the future progressive tense (i.e. 'and would [continue to] be doing, suffering'). Even if it is registered only pre-conceptually, this prospective or anticipatory orientation will function as a form of (p. 408) suspense, creating an ongoing mental 'Effort, and expectation, and desire' for 'something evermore about to be' (and typically recognized only in the fulfilment) (VI. 541-2). In this state, as Wordsworth put it earlier using the very same structures of chiasmus and incremental repetition, the mind or 'soul'—

Remembering how she felt, but what she felt  
Remembering not—retains an obscure sense  
Of possible sublimity, to which  
With growing faculties she doth aspire,  
With faculties growing still, feeling still  
That whatsoever point they gain they still  
Have something to pursue.

(1805, II. 334-41)

The figural structure of the London sequence, in which the concrete historical past of London and its concrete historical present share 'a meaning'—'suffering'—'common to both', may likewise stimulate 'an obscure sense' of 'something' implied but still to be

pursued, in this case, the anticipated but as yet unspoken third term that would project the common meaning of the first two terms into perpetuity. This *felt* anticipation of a future iteration of the figural pattern is partially but nonetheless pleurably fulfilled and reinforced when, seven lines on, Wordsworth repeats the two-part structure—‘And out of what had been, what was, the place | Was thronged with impregnations’—but again defers the anticipated third term.

Wordsworth coordinates this prospective typological strategy at various scales throughout *The Prelude*, from local rhetorical and syntactic patterns like the ones just analysed to global cross-referencing of key motifs. All such techniques involve what Kenneth Burke dubbed the psychology of form,<sup>8</sup> whereby the poet plants imagistic and thematic seeds that blossom in a subsequent word, phrase, or episode, redoubling its impact, pleasure, and meaning. A fine example of this is the beautiful sequence of night-time perambulation that prefaces (and makes all the more arresting for both speaker and reader) the Discharged Soldier episode in Book IV. This meditative miniature foreshadows the Snowdon epiphany and explicitly announces its reader-response poetics. Wordsworth here, too, is breasting an ascent in an introspective ‘silence’ that ‘assumes | A character of deeper quietness | Than pathless solitudes’:

I slowly mounted up a steep ascent  
Where the road’s wat’ry surface, to the ridge  
Of that sharp rising, glittered in the moon  
And seemed before my eyes another stream  
Creeping with silent lapse to join the brook  
That murmured in the valley.

(1805, IV. 370–5)

As in the Snowdon episode that will close the poem, the description of the scene is organized vertically from the moon above to the vocal waters below, with a figure of (p. 409) elemental transformation or ‘usurpation’ standing in the middle ground (here, earth mimicking water; on Snowdon, the billowy mist mimicking—simultaneously!—sea and earth). On a first reading of these lines, we are necessarily like the speaker who has not yet encountered Snowdon and so cannot take the immediate scene and signs at their full measure. We too are as yet ‘all unworthy of the deeper joy | Which waits on distant prospect—cliff or sea, | The dark blue vault and universe of stars’ (1805, IV. 382–4). However unwittingly, we are nonetheless being prepared for that experience, stored with resonant memories that the poet will reduplicate on a sublime scale in the later sequence. Wordsworth is creating *here* the ‘elevated taste’ by which he may be enjoyed *there*, when these ‘beauteous pictures’ may revive as ‘harmonious imagery...from some distant region of [the] soul | And c[o] me along like dreams’ (IV. 392–5).

Because of this scene and related ones throughout the poem, we arrive at Book XIII (XIV in 1850) greatly predisposed to *feel*, with a premonitory passion carried alive into the heart, the quality and conviction of the poet's awe-struck response to Snowdon. The opening description emphasizes the 'close' and 'covered' aspect of the night, the speaker and his companions 'hemmed round on every side by fog and damp' through which 'nothing' could be 'either seen or heard', each 'silently...sunk |...into commerce with his private thoughts'. The emphatically imageless exposition, 'dull', muted, and confined to interiority, sets a cramped and darkened stage for the 'universal spectacle' of sight and sound Wordsworth is about to unfurl, 'at height' and depth 'Immense' (1805, XIII. 41-2, 60). Though the unexpected 'scene' 'Upon the lonely mountain' is thus 'Grand in itself alone' and clearly 'shaped' by the poet to win our 'admiration and delight', it gains a good deal more in affective potency from the typological precedents it invokes and organizes, including Milton's impressive rendering of the 'concrete historical' scene of creation:

when God said,  
Be gather'd now ye Waters under Heav'n  
Into one place, and let dry Land appear.  
Immediately the Mountains huge appear  
Emergent, and thir broad bare backs upheave  
Into the Clouds, thir tops ascend the Sky:  
So high as heav'd the tumid Hills, so low  
Down sunk a hollow bottom broad and deep,  
Capacious bed of Waters

(*Paradise Lost*, VII. 282-90).<sup>9</sup>

Wordsworth's vision of *ad hoc* de- and re-creation from the side of Snowdon accordingly stands as a figural 'fulfilment' of Milton's original type:

A hundred hills their dusky backs upheaved  
All over this still ocean, and beyond,  
Far, far beyond, the vapours shot themselves

(p. 410)

In headlands, tongues, and promontory shapes,  
Into the sea, the real sea, that seemed  
To dwindle and give up its majesty,  
Usurped upon as far as sight could reach.

. . . . .  
At distance not the third part of a mile  
Was a blue chasm, a fracture in the vapour,  
A deep and gloomy breathing-place, through which  
Mounted the roar of waters, torrents, streams  
Innumerable, roaring with one voice.

(XIII. 45–51, 55–9)

Though the elemental events of Milton's and Wordsworth's descriptions are 'causally and chronologically remote from each other', their typological relation infers that the same essential meaning—divinely inspired creativity—is 'common to both'.

The Snowdon scene is similarly enriched by typological relations extending back through *The Prelude* to the 'genesis' story of the poet's 'first creative sensibility' (1799, II. 409). For example, Snowdon's 'moon...naked in the heavens' looks back through the glittering moon of the parallel ascent of Book IV to 'that giddy bliss' of Book I, 'when the sea threw off his evening shade | And to the shepherd's huts beneath the crags | Did send sweet notice of the rising moon' (1805, I. 596–9). The Snowdon sequence figurally amplifies every one of these themes, from 'Bethkelet's huts' where they 'Rouzed up the[ir] shepherd' guide (XIII. 3, 8) to the 'mountain-crags' they ascended among (XIII. 24; see IV. 88–9) to the suddenly illuminated 'sea of mist, | Which meek and silent rested at my feet' (XIII. 43–4). The child of Book I—and the reader along with him—had unwittingly rehearsed the experience of the man in Book XIII. Similarly, Snowdon's 'homeless voice of waters' traces its source back through Book IV's 'brook | That murmured in the valley' to the poem's original experience (for the reader no less than the poet) of 'the fairest of all rivers' who 'loved to blend his murmurs with my nurse's song' and 'sent a voice | That flowed along my dreams' (I. 272–6). Even the sudden 'light' that 'Fell like a flash upon [Snowdon's] turf' derives at least half of its charge from typological precedents, extending back through Book VI's 'light of sense | Going out in flashes that have shewn to us | The invisible world' (VI. 534–6) to Book I's 'Gleams like flashings of a shield' (I. 614).

By concentrating so many figural relations in this single sequence, Wordsworth contrives for readers' experiences of the Snowdon episode to be, analogously to his own, 'exalted by an under-presence, | The sense of God, or whatsoe'er is dim | Or vast in [their] own being' (XIII. 71–3). The reader's conscious 'sense' of these 'exalt[ing]... under-presence[s]' may indeed be 'dim'—it is more critical for Wordsworth's purposes that they be intensely felt than immediately understood. In Wordsworth's theory of philosophical poetry (as in his philosophy of the poetic mind), accurate self-understanding is predicated upon, and therefore logically follows from, originally affective forms of power. As he writes in the concluding lines of Book V, his meditation on 'Books',

Visionary power

Attends upon the motions of the winds

(p. 411)

Embodied in the mystery of words;

There darkness makes abode, and all the host

Of shadowy things do work their changes there

As in a mansion like their proper home.  
Even forms and substances are circumfused  
By that transparent veil with light divine,  
And through the turnings intricate of verse  
Present themselves as objects recognised  
In flashes, and with a glory scarce their own.

(v. 619–29).

Thanks to the ‘intricate’ typological and other structural ‘(re)turnings’ of Wordsworth’s verse, the vision of Snowdon may well affect readers as an ‘object recognized | In flashes, and with a glory scarce [its] own’. The glory that does not emanate from the objects of Wordsworth’s description must be imaginatively bestowed by the mind that beholds them, which in that very process exercises and extends, or augments and sustains, its inborn powers, in particular that ‘virtue which irradiates and exalts | All objects through all intercourse of sense’. Affectively prepared by Wordsworth’s prospective art, the reader of *The Prelude* is, like the poet, ‘By sensible impressions not enthralled’ but rather empowered, ‘quickened, roused, and made thereby more fit | To hold communion with the invisible world’ (XIII. 103–5), that is, with the ‘world’ of their own human ‘spirit | Living in time and space, and far diffused’.

Wordsworth’s poetry is thus philosophical both in a ‘general’ Socratic sense of self-knowing and, still more decisively, in an ‘operative’ or self-witnessing sense that stands by ‘its own testimony’ rather than Wordsworth’s ‘external testimony’. Mere ‘systems’ being, as he wrote in 1798 just before commencing work on *The Prelude*, ‘impotent’ in ‘all their intended good purposes’ and thus incapable of ‘hav[ing] any influence worth our notice’ (*PrW*, I. 103), Wordsworth set about to adapt the elements of poetic pleasure to philosophical purpose, convincing not by rational argument but instead by irresistible affect. Poetry that attains this excellence, according to Wordsworth, ‘proceed[s] from the depth of untaught things’ and ‘become[s] | A power like one of Nature’s’, ‘Enduring and creative’ (1805, XII. 310–12). The Snowdon episode celebrates these correspondent powers: the power that ‘Nature there | Exhibited’ to the poet and its ‘express | Resemblance’ and ‘genuine counterpart’, the power ‘Which higher minds bear with them as their own’. Such minds, exemplified by the poet’s, ‘from their native selves can send abroad | Like transformation, for themselves create | A like existence, and, whene’er it is | Created for them’, they can, like the affectively empowered reader of Wordsworth’s poem, ‘catch it by an instinct’ (1805, XIII. 86–96). In Wordsworth’s double analogy, nature’s power is to the poet’s power just as the poem’s power is to the reader’s power. Both the naturally disposed poet and the poetically disposed reader ‘build up greatest things | From least suggestions, ever on the watch, | Willing to work and to be wrought upon’ (98–100).

This active state of mind has in both cases been *developed*, for the poet through interaction with nature, for the reader through interaction with the poem, and in both cases it manifests and exercises the 'Great birthright of our being', the inborn 'Poetic spirit' (p. 412) based in 'passion' and 'feelings' that makes even the baby's mind, 'in the first trial of its powers', a 'creator and receiver both, | Working...in alliance with the works | Which it beholds' (1799, II. 273-4, 303-5). In *The Prelude*, M. H. Abrams has compellingly argued, Wordsworth

sets out to show the slow and complex workings of 'those first-born affinities that fit | Our new existence to existing things' [1805, I. 582-3]...Natural objects enter, flow, are received, and sink down into the mind, while the mind dwells in, feeds on, drinks, holds intercourse with, and weaves, intertwines, fastens, and binds itself to external objects, until the two integrate as one. These are Wordsworth's recurrent metaphors, the essential lexicon he developed to enable him to say, about the development of man's cognitive and emotional involvement with the milieu into which he is born, what had never been said before, and with a subtlety that has not been exceeded since.<sup>10</sup>

Wordsworth's subtlety is chiefly one of expression, of finding the verbal means (lexical, yes, but also syntactic, imagistic, metaphoric, phonetic, metrical, typological, etc.) by which to secure his reader's own 'cognitive and emotional involvement' and thereby to 'communicate to the reader an active "power" to cooperate with the "powers" of the poet' and *bring home* the poem's metaphysical and moral themes.<sup>11</sup> Setting his thoughts and feelings 'to their own music', Wordsworth in *The Prelude* orchestrates experiential effects that verify his developmental philosophy of the active mind. He thereby leads readers to experience, as it were on their pulses, how 'feeling comes in aid | Of feeling, and diversity of strength | Attends us, if but once we have been strong', and so to have very good affective reason for believing that 'there are in our existence spots of time, | Which with distinct preeminence retain | A renovating virtue' (XI. 257-9).<sup>12</sup>

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## **Notes:**

(<sup>1</sup>) See Richard Gravil's essay on the 'Recluse' (chapter 19) in this volume.

(<sup>2</sup>) The quoted lines are from Coleridge's poem 'To William Wordsworth', 39–40, as printed in *Prel-NCE*, pp. 542–5.

(<sup>3</sup>) Plato, *Phaedrus*, tr. Christopher Rowe (London: Penguin, 2005), 6.

(<sup>4</sup>) All citations of the *Prelude* refer to *Prel-NCE* and will include the designations 1799, 1805, or 1850 to distinguish between, respectively, the two-part *Prelude*, the thirteen-book *Prelude*, and the fourteen-book *Prelude* as presented in that edition.

(<sup>5</sup>) See Francis F Steen, “‘The Time of Unrememberable Being’: Wordsworth’s Autobiography of the Imagination”, *A/B: Autobiography Studies* 13 (1998), 7–38.

(<sup>6</sup>) Stephen Gill, ‘The philosophic poet’, in Stephen Gill (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 155.

(<sup>7</sup>) Erich Auerbach, ‘Typological Symbolism in Medieval Literature’, *Yale French Studies* 9 (1952), 5–6.

(<sup>8</sup>) Kenneth Burke, *Counter-Statement* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1968 [1931]), 31.

(<sup>9</sup>) John Milton, *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (Indianapolis, IN: Odyssey Press, 1957).

(<sup>10</sup>) Abrams, M. H., *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), 281.

(<sup>11</sup>) Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 397–8.

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