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21 William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1798, 1799, 1805, 1850)

Abstract: This chapter takes a triply genetic approach to *The Prelude*, situating it within the eighteenth-century literary culture in which it took its origins, more narrowly within the arc of Wordsworth's poetic apprenticeship from precocious imitator to Romantic innovator, and more narrowly still within the manuscript notebook in which Wordsworth carefully crafted the first verses of the poem in late 1798. These nested literary-historical contexts are indispensable for evaluating Wordsworth's achievement in *The Prelude*: his transvaluation of inherited philosophical ideas through the naturalization, internalization, and temporalization of inherited poetic devices. Wordsworth pointedly reconfigures these devices in order to amplify and historicize their *affectivity*, and thereby to elicit in his readers' experience a passionate analogue of the formative passionate experience his poem would not just recount but equally convey.

Key Terms: Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man*, poetics, affect, chiasmus

1 *The Prelude* in its Literary-Historical Context

How to take the measure of William Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, a poem begun in 1798, profoundly extended by 1805, and painstakingly revised over the next four decades, all in lieu of a still greater philosophical poem, *The Recluse*? Should we read *The Prelude*, then, as a "prelude" to that more comprehensive but mostly unwritten work on "Nature, Man, and Society" and, thus, as somehow prefatory to such portions of it as Wordsworth did manage to complete? Though Wordsworth and Coleridge often took this view, because of the order of publication of *The Recluse*'s more and less finished parts (*The Excursion* in 1814, *The Prelude* in 1850, *Home at Grasmere* in 1888, and *The Tuft of Primroses* in 1949), no one else in their day and almost no one since has ventured a sustained reading of *The Prelude* in this diminishing light (Johnston is the exception that proves the rule, but even here, see 1984, 101). On the contrary: by the time Ernest de Selincourt published the 1805 version of the poem in 1926, *The Prelude* had eclipsed *The Excursion* and all other tributaries to *The Recluse* to stand independently as the landmark achievement of Wordsworth's career and, for many, of British Romanticism at large.

The fact of a "completed" thirteen-book *Prelude* by 1805 makes it clear why the poem is likewise rarely stacked up against the mid-century long poems among which it first appeared or, for that matter, even the long poems of the second-gen-

eration Romantics, which instead took their bearings from *The Excursion* (see Piper 1962, 186). *The Prelude* is patently the work of a previous generation, indeed, in its origins, of the previous century. To judge it aright, we might better consult, not what the poem was antecedent to, but rather what was antecedent to it: most immediately William Cowper's mock-heroic *The Task*, with its expansively self-indulgent development of "humble" (1785, I.5), personal themes in alternately declarative and descriptive modes, as well as Coleridge's conversation poems of 1795–1798, where familiar diction and supple rhythms render blank verse for the first time a convincingly *intimate* medium of address. These immediate models themselves trace to a common and perhaps surprising source. Blank verse notwithstanding (for that, we must look back through Thomson to Shakespeare; see Potts 1953, 247–248), the towering influence on both hands is Alexander Pope, whose *Rape of the Lock* (1712) and *Dunciad* (1728) paradoxically authorized Cowper's low seriousness, and whose verse epistles, including *An Essay on Man* (1733–1734) and *Moral Essays* (1735), supplied Coleridge with models of friendly, ruminative, and often colloquial poetic discourse on a variety of social, philosophical, and aesthetic themes (see Griffin 1995, 59–60; 85). This line of descent helps to explain many features of *The Prelude*, from the mock-heroic notes that are already present in "The Two-Part *Prelude* of 1799" (e.g., Wordsworth 1979, I.206–225) to the proleptic benediction that crowns the full-blown versions of 1805 and 1850, which, in its direct personal sentiment, its present political disappointment, and its confidence in a better future, uncannily echoes the concluding verses of *An Essay on Man*, prophesying the enduring glory of the poem's addressee, Pope's "guide, philosopher, and friend" (1950, IV.390), Henry St. John, 1st Viscount Bolingbroke (see Potts 1953, 54).

The derivation from Pope, and specifically from his avowedly philosophical poem on "*Man* in the abstract, his *Nature* and his *State*" (1950, 7; emphases in the original), is further justified by the salient fact that Wordsworth wrestled with this particular poet and poem from the start of his poetic career, and precisely on the score of how best to represent the moral relation of feeling to thought (see Potts 1953, 30–62). In Pope's ironic faculty psychology, man is a "Chaos of Thought and Passion, all confus'd" (1950, II.13). "Passions" may be "the elements of Life" but they are almost irredeemably at "strife," dividing the self against its "superior Part" and thus "discompos[ing] the mind," so that "What Reason weaves, by Passion is undone" (1950, I.168–I.170; II.39; II.42). Wordsworth in *The Prelude* also figures passions as "The elements of feeling and thought," but his coordination of "feeling *and* thought" implies the opposite of Pope's: for Wordsworth the passions are not disorderly and divisive but rather cooperatively "intertwine[d]," from infancy onward "build[ing] up our human soul," "[e]ven as a strain of music," "until we recognize / A grandeur in the beatings of the heart" (1979, I.68; I.131–I.141 [1799 version]).

This is a wholesale reversal of Pope's philosophical position and, concomitantly, of the position Wordsworth staked for himself in his prize-winning "Lines on the Bicentenary of Hawkshead School," penned in early 1785 at the tender age of four-

teen. Much later in life Wordsworth confessed that “These verses were much admired, far more than they deserved, for they were but a tame imitation of Pope’s versification, and a little in his style” (1997, 354). The Cornell editors propose *The Dunciad* as Wordsworth’s chief inspiration (see Wordsworth 1997, 355) but it is “the Book of Man” that the young Wordsworth, ventriloquizing a personified Education, singles out as an exemplary text “to regulate the mind’s disorder’d frame / And quench the passions['] kindling flame” (Wordsworth 1997, ll. 85–86). Evidently at Hawkshead as elsewhere, Pope was taught and admired as a repository of moral “precepts” calculated to “quell[...] the passions’ strife” (Wordsworth 1997, 103; see Griffin 1995, 72).

Within just nine years, however, though Wordsworth is still writing “a little in the style of Pope,” his purpose is no longer “tame imitation” of his former master but rather pointed self-differentiation. Among the so-called “Windy Brow” additions and corrections to *An Evening Walk* (published the preceding year in 1793), Wordsworth composes a number of sequences that clearly look forward to the natural, passionate, and self-reflective themes of *The Prelude*, for example:

A Mind, that in a calm angelic mood
Of happy wisdom, meditating good,
Beholds, of all from her high powers required,
Much done, and much designed, and more desired;
Harmonious thoughts, a soul by Truth refined,
Entire affection for all human kind;
A heart that vibrates evermore, awake
To feeling for all forms that Life can take,
That wider still its sympathy extends,
And sees not any line where being ends:
Sees sense, through Nature’s rudest forms betrayed,
Tremble obscure in fountain, rock, and shade;
And while a secret power those forms endears
Their social accents never vainly hears.
(1984, 135, ll. 119–132; see 15; Piper 1962, 73; Gravid 2003, 76)

With its theme of ever-extending, boundless sympathy “for all forms that Life can take,” the passage also looks backward, however, to the penultimate paragraph of *An Essay on Man*, in which Pope outlines a universal “System of Benevolence” motivated entirely by self-love:

Self-love but serves the virtuous mind to wake,
As the small pebble stirs the peaceful Lake;
The centre mov’d, a circle strait succeeds,
Another still, and still another spreads;
Friend, parent, neighbour, first it will embrace,
His country next, and next all human race,
Wide, and more wide, th’o’erflowings of the mind
Take ev’ry creature in, of ev’ry kind [...] (1950, IV.363–IV.370)

Reading these parallel passages side by side highlights the ways in which Wordsworth now works to subvert his former preceptor's doctrine. In Pope it is the human *mind* that, urged by self-love, wakes to an eventually all-embracing love; in Wordsworth it is pointedly the human *heart* that “awake[s] / To *feeling* for all forms that Life can take, / That still its *sympathy* extends.” Where Pope half-heartedly advances the conventional wisdom that “true SELF-LOVE and SOCIAL are the same” (1950, IV.396), Wordsworth counters with the radical proposal that the “social accents” of human feeling are natural sensations (“*through* Nature’s forms betrayed”) that are anything but self-centred in origin and effect (“never *vainly* heard”; all emphases mine).

The Prelude takes up where these ultimately cancelled revisions to *An Evening Walk* leave off, on poetic ground chartered by Pope but appropriated and transvalued by Wordsworth. A remarkable example appears in the summative conclusion of “The Two-Part *Prelude* of 1799,” which turns Pope’s surprising metaphor of “o’erflowings of the mind” both inside out – it is *Nature* now that overflows *into* the mind – and upside down – so that thought itself is suffused and finally surpassed by feeling:

Thus did my days pass on, and now at length
 From Nature and her overflowing soul
 I had received so much that all my thoughts
 Were steeped in *feeling*. I was only then
 Contented when with *bliss* ineffable
 I felt the *sentiment* of being spread
 O’er all that moves, and all that seemeth still,
 O’er *all that, lost beyond the reach of thought*
And human knowledge, to the human eye
Invisible, yet liveth to the heart[,]
 O’er all that leaps, and runs, and shouts, and sings,
 Or beats the gladsome air, o’er all that glides
 Beneath the wave, yea, in the wave itself
 And mighty depth of waters. Wonder not
 If such my *transports* were, for in all things
 I saw one life, and *felt* that it was *joy* [...]
 (Wordsworth 1979, II.445–II.460 [1799 version]; emphases mine)

Wordsworth has Pope’s *Essay* still squarely in his sight, most obviously in the list of natural creatures that comprises earth-bound animals (“all that leaps, and runs, and shouts, and sings”), air-borne animals (“beats the gladsome air”), water-going animals (“glides / Beneath the wave”), and the element of water (“the wave itself / And mighty depth of waters”), all of which express the “one life” of Nature. As these specific ideas and the order of their presentation attest, Wordsworth adopted the pattern whole-cloth from Pope:

Whate’er of Life all-quickening æther keeps,
 Or breathes thro’ Air, or shoots beneath the deeps,
 Or pours profuse on earth; one nature feeds

The vital flame, and swells the genial seeds.
(1950, III.115–III.118; see Griffin 1995, 122, for related arguments)

However faithful in semantic reference and syntactic order Wordsworth's allusion may be, its specific context, in which Wordsworth celebrates the primacy and pre-eminence of feeling in relation to thought, assures that it functions critically rather than honorifically, marking not an endorsement but an inversion of Pope's moral-philosophical views and values. The "one nature" Pope renders from an external, purportedly objective viewpoint, Wordsworth avowedly internalizes and affectively subjectivizes ("I saw one life, and *felt* that it was joy"). In doing so, he endows Pope's abstract, Lucretian conception of nature with phenomenal immediacy and passionate probability. At the same time, and by the very same internalizing gesture, he asserts a much more integral and formative relationship between man and nature than Pope cared to, and perhaps could even possibly, imagine.

2 Fitting (Unremembered) Sound to (Undetermined) Sense: The Revolutionary Poetics of *The Prelude*

What makes Wordsworth's transvaluation of Pope's *Essay* momentous is less its general philosophical tendency (vital as that is – see Gill 2003) than its specific poetic result, which emerges all the more clearly in light of the foregoing literary-historical considerations. Auguries of the ensuing Romantic revolution as they were, Wordsworth did not retain the "Windy Brow" revisions for *An Evening Walk* but instead adapted and perfected them as part of the earliest composition toward *The Prelude*. Part of that perfecting involved abandoning the closely counterpointed rhythms and epigrammatic logic of Pope's couplets in favour of a more various, discursive, and conversational blank verse. Though Wordsworth thus liberated himself from the prosodic and logical traces of Pope's neoclassical style, he inevitably retained many of its other poetic devices, from specific metaphors to general rhetorical schemes, which nevertheless seem wholly transfigured in his verse. Where Pope deploys his "ornaments" to underline the semantic or logical thrust of the poetic argument and thus the facility of the speaker's rational wit (see 1950, 8), Wordsworth apportions the same devices not just according to the *thought* or theme of the given passage but simultaneously according to his particular affective design upon his readers, the *feeling* he means to communicate, in both senses of the term.

To get a sense of the poetic difference Wordsworth hereby makes, we may examine virtually any poetic device or design he shares with Pope, analyzing examples from each poet for semantic and structural differences and corresponding differences in effect. Both poets, for example, employ the metaphor of a river to summarize their respective poems on man. Pope does so in the final paragraph of "The Design" of *An*

Essay on Man, where he switches from a spatial cartographical metaphor to an apparently temporal navigational metaphor to describe his project:

What now is published, is only to be considered a *general Map* of MAN, marking out no more than the *greater parts*, their *extent*, their *limits*, and their *connection*, but leaving the particular to be more fully delineated in the charts which are to follow [i.e., yet-to-be-penned “maps” or verse epistles]. Consequently, these Epistles in their progress (if I have health and leisure to make any progress) will be less dry, and more susceptible of poetical ornament. I am here only opening the *fountains*, and clearing the passage. To deduce the *rivers*, to follow them in their course, and to observe their effects, may be a task more agreeable. (1950, 8; emphases in the original)

While Pope’s river metaphor is indeed associated with temporality, this is not the developmental time of “MAN” but rather the future time of composition allotted to the author, wherein he hopes to “deduce the *rivers*” that follow from “the *fountains*” of philosophical insight he has “opened” in *An Essay on Man*. Pope’s river metaphor characterizes not a general developmental progress in individual human beings but his own *poet’s* progress, from a comparatively “dry” statement of general moral precepts concerning the human species here in *An Essay* to a “more agreeably” diversified application of these precepts to contemporary human behaviour in *Moral Essays* and other forthcoming verse epistles. Far from suggesting any real development in human moral experience, Pope is in fact asserting the timeless accuracy of his “general Map of MAN” and thus, implicitly, the essentially unchanging nature of the moral landscape it depicts.

In the concluding verses of the 1805 *Prelude*, Wordsworth develops a similar metaphoric concept in the same schematic order (i.e., source-path-goal), but here we must register, for a variety of converging reasons, quite different effects. Like Pope, Wordsworth is summarizing the purpose and strategy of his “long labour” concerning, not unchanging “*Man* in the abstract,” but rather developing “imagination” in a particular individual. “This faculty,” Wordsworth at last announces,

hath been the moving soul
Of our long labour: we have traced the stream
From darkness, and the very place of birth
In its blind cavern, whence is faintly heard
The sound of waters; followed it to light
And open day, accompanied its course
Among the ways of Nature, afterwards
Lost sight of it bewildered and engulfed,
Then given it greeting as it rose once more
With strength, reflecting in its solemn breast
The works of man, and face of human life;
And lastly, from its progress have we drawn
The feeling of life endless, the one thought
By which we live, infinity and God. (1979, XIII.167; XIII.171–XIII.184 [1805 version])

In contrast to Pope, Wordsworth infuses his metaphoric vehicle with properties and qualities of its tenor (his developing imagination), creating thereby what Herbert Lindenberger has aptly termed an “image of interaction” (1963, 69–98). Pope’s “fountains” thus become a singular, personified “place of birth,” and the issuing river image is developed in terms that may equally apply to the poet’s imaginative mind. For example, a river may literally become “bewildered” (surrounded by wilderness) and “engulphed” (submerged in a deeper waterway or basin); by the very same tokens, an imaginative individual may be figuratively “bewildered” (in a psychological sense) and “engulphed” (in a circumstantial or socio-political sense). Insofar as Wordsworth’s equivocal diction and ambiguous syntax are themselves slightly disorienting – what or who exactly is “bewildered and engulfed”: “it,” that is, the metaphoric river and the imagination it represents, or “we” who “Lost sight of it”? – the lines “engulph” the reader in a momentary experience of irresolution whose affective correlates, which may be verbalized as tension, uncertainty, difficulty, and the like, correspond to those to which Wordsworth’s metaphor indirectly refers (i.e., his affective reactions in the disastrous aftermath of the French Revolution – “A conflict of sensations without name” [1979, X.265 (1805 version)] – recounted in Book X).

Such local effects of Wordsworth’s sequence are resourced, amplified, and temporalized or *historicized* by verbal and imagistic anticipations that percolate throughout the preceding verses, going all the way back to Book I, that is, to the origin of the reader’s own “long labour” of imagining that has likewise developed to this summative juncture. Perhaps the most deeply invested images in this respect are the natal “sound of waters” and the river that “rose once more,” enjambed with palpable “strength.” The first image harks back to the inaugural “Was it for this” sequence, which grounds Wordsworth’s subsequent use of the river metaphor in an original experience of the actual River Derwent, flowing beside the home where the poet was born in Cockermouth:

Was it for this
That one, the fairest of all rivers, loved
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? (1979, I.1–6 [1799 version])

The figurative “murmur[ing]” “voice” of the literal Derwent provides a specific historical source – in the lived experience of the poet and, analogously, the textual experience of his reader – for the generalized “sound of waters” that surfaces “once more” in the concluding retrospect of Book XIII.

Between these first and last invocations of the river as originally external tenor and as fully internalized vehicle, Wordsworth threads multiple references that timestamp this figurative development, marking the gradual inward shift and endowing each successive iteration with memorial, which is to say, *felt*, complexity. Thus, in the

1805 version, following Book I's impassioned personification of the River Derwent (Wordsworth 1979, I.271–304), Book II inverts the metaphorical relation, transforming river-as-person into person-as-river and expressing the result with a skeptical rhetorical distance reminiscent of Pope:

Who that shall point as with a wand, and say
 'This portion of the river of my mind
 Came from yon fountain?' (1979, II.213–II.215 [1805 version])

But in Book IV Wordsworth shifts the figure again, rendering it now as an informal, personal simile that self-consciously resonates with Derwent's originary "murmurs": "I sauntered, like a river murmuring / And talking to itself" (1979, IV.110–IV.111 [1805 version]). This careful intercalation of restructured and re-evaluated versions of the same metaphorical figure throughout *The Prelude* potentiates a cumulative and amplifying effect, so that subsequent iterations are increasingly likely to evoke and "blend" information from earlier ones:

I have singled out
 Some moments, the earliest that I could, in which
 [...] several currents, blended into one –
 Weak yet, and gathering imperceptibly –
 Flowed in by gushes. (1979, VIII.174–VIII.178 [1805 version])

Wordsworth's rhythms subtly enact his felt, force-dynamic metaphor of confluence: metrically, the penultimate line is itself "weak," having only one full stress in its final three feet; the two diminished stresses are quietly present, however, and their deferred weight, "gathering imperceptibly," lands with augmented trochaic and colloquial force in the final line. In similar fashion, the larger formal structures of the text, "weak yet" in their first iteration, accumulate dimly perceived affective force as they are reiterated through the poem, so that subsequent instances come to feel increasingly (if unaccountably) moving, precisely as though diverse "currents" were "Flow[ing] in by gushes" from the past (see Bruhn 2015a).

Now return to Pope, from whence, unsurprisingly by now, Wordsworth derives the image of blended streams "gush[ing]" to sanative effect:

For me, the mine a thousand treasures brings;
 For me, health gushes from a thousand springs. (1950, I.137–I.138)

Even if we short-circuit the distancing effect that obtains from the fact that Pope is ironically mocking the voice of pride, his ostensibly parallel use of the river metaphor will have none of the force of Wordsworth's, for Pope's in fact refers to nothing in reality – not to a nameable river, not to a lived or possible experience, not even to his preceding invocation of the river metaphor in "The Design." The "thousand springs" that grammatically converge upon Pope's "gushes" are *merely* ornamental,

deriving wholly from the counterbalancing constraints of the heroic couplet, which compel the line's specification in the otherwise irrelevant terms of the preceding line. When, by contrast, Wordsworth invokes in the final climax of *The Prelude* "the roar of waters, torrents, streams / Innumerable, roaring with one voice" (1979, XIII.58–XIII.59 [1805 version]), his figure is surcharged with affective potential both by virtue of being grounded in a possible (if not probable) actual experience atop Snowdon and, more potently still, by virtue of being variously prefigured in the twelve preceding Books, so that this latest instantiation of the river figure may indeed seem to "roar" with a "voice" amplified by "innumerable" sources in the reader's foregoing textual experience.

Wordsworth thus naturalizes, internalizes, and temporalizes the inherited poetic device in a way that translates, analogically, to his reader, who can verify Wordsworth's developmental "argument" about passion on the basis of his or her own actual, psychological, and developing responses to the poetry that communicates it. This doubly transformative poetics is all the more remarkable for the swiftness and self-awareness with which Wordsworth worked it out. Among his first scribbles toward *The Prelude* in late 1798 is a brief fragment that appears to specify his poetic object for the verses that follow, that is, both what he intends to represent and what to evoke:

what there is
Of subtler feeling of remembered joy
Of soul & spirit in departed sound
That can not be remembered. (Wordsworth *MS JJ*, DSMS19.Zv)

These slightly cryptic and paradoxical lines can be glossed by a related sequence drafted earlier the same year for *The Ruined Cottage* and transferred the next to "The Two-Part *Prelude*":

I deem not profitless these fleeting moods
Of shadowy exaltation; not for this,
That they are kindred to our purer mind
And intellectual life, but that the 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 still growing, feeling still
That whatsoever point they gain they still
Have something to pursue. (Wordsworth 1979, II.361–II.371 [1799 version])

As Wordsworth was doubtlessly feeling if not indeed remembering exactly, these earlier, more finished lines amass their peculiar power from his densely layered use of chiasmus, a rhetorical device (AB:BA) that schematically "remembers" its own

original constituents (AB) and projects them, now in reversed order, upon its own subsequent development (BA):

Remembering [A] how she felt [B], but what she felt [B]
 Remembering not [A] . . .
 With growing [A] faculties [B] she doth aspire
 With faculties [B] still growing [A] . . .
 . . . feeling still [A]
 That whatsoever point they [B] gain they [B] still [A]

In *MS JJ*, Wordsworth takes the recollected point immediately to heart, turning the page and commencing the “Was it for this” sequence, crisscrossing it with chiasmic patterns at all levels of verbal structure, as Table 1 briefly illustrates:

Table 1: Examples of chiasmic patterns in the first verse paragraph of the 1799 *Prelude*. The left column indicates line numbers.

Syntactic:

2–3 loved to blend his murmurs with my nurse’s song [A: verb phrase]
 4 and from his alder shades and rocky falls [B: prepositional phrase]
 5 and from his fords and shallows [B: prepositional phrase]
 5–6 sent a voice that flowed along my dreams [A: verb phrase]

Phonetic:

4 alder *sh*ades [A] and rocky *f*alls [B]
 5 *f*ords [B] and *sh*allows [A]

Rhetorical/Lexical/Conceptual

1 Was it for this [A: interrogative]
 2 fairest of all rivers [B: encomiastic appositive]
 16 fairest of all streams [B: encomiastic appositive]
 17 Was it for this [A: interrogative]

Wordsworth apparently recognized that, with its temporally unfolding, backward glancing, and symmetrical or internally centred structure, chiasmus was the rhetorical form *par excellence* with which to embody the passionate development of his own mind. Especially insofar as these chiasmic structures are interwoven across spans of five, seventeen, or even twenty-five or more lines, they are likely to affect the reader below the threshold of awareness, dimly stimulating a “subtler feeling of remembered joy / Of soul & spirit in departed sound / That [is] not [itself] remembered.” In other words, the lines are likely to provide not a conceptual but a *felt* grasp of time’s passage and the affective developments it has wrought.

Pope, of course, also makes frequent use of chiasmus, but to markedly different effect. This is partly because he typically measures its mirror-symmetrical form to the two lines of his couplet or, more narrowly still, the two hemistiches of his line, a procedure which foregrounds the prosodic and syntactic *fitness* of the chiasmic structure (and, hence, the poet's wit) but which circumscribes any "subtler feeling" the structure might potentiate across larger stretches of the sequence:

Say rather, Man's as perfect as he ought [to be];
His knowledge measur'd to his state and place,
His time [A] *a moment* [B], and *a point* [B] *his space* [A]. (Pope 1950, I.70–I.72; emphases in the original)

As this example suggests, a deeper reason for the affective difference in Pope's chiasmi is the fact that he has no real use for the *temporality* of its forward-going-by-backward-looking form, even when time is his explicit theme. With regard to the human creature, all earthly time is one to Pope, "a moment" when rightly "measur'd" to man's singular "state." This state, a perdurable link in the "great chain" of being (Pope 1950, I.33), is essentially unchanging over the course of the human lifespan, any apparent "development" being nothing but a repetition of the same passionate error, from infancy to death:

Behold the child, by Nature's kindly Law,
Pleas'd with a rattle, tickled with a straw:
Some livelier play-thing gives his youth delight,
A little louder, but as empty quite:
Scarfs, garters, gold, amuse his riper stage,
And beads and pray'r-books are the toys of age:
Pleas'd with this bauble still, as that before;
'Till tir'd he sleeps, and Life's poor play is o'er! (Pope 1950, II.275–II.282)

With no room for true development and therefore no significant role for time in his moral psychology of man, Pope's chiasmic structures tend to be strictly spatial in imaginative effect, as appears in the key passage on spreading benevolence to which we've already referred:

Self-love but serves the virtuous mind to wake,
As the small pebble stirs the peaceful lake;
The centre mov'd, a circle strait succeeds,
Another [A] *still* [B], and *still* [B] *another* [A] spreads,
Friend, parent, neighbour, first it will embrace,
His country [A] *next* [B], and *next* [B] *all human race* [A] . . . (Pope 1950, IV.363–IV.368; emphases mine)

Wordsworth, too, of course, exploits the visual-spatial symmetries of chiasmus where appropriate; indeed, Geoffrey Hartman, one of the few critics who attends to

Small circles glittering idly in the moon
 Until they melted all into one track
 Of sparkling light
 When from behind the rocky steep till then
 The bound of the horizon just between
 The summit & the stars a hug[e] high cliff
 As if with voluntary power instinct
 Upreared its head I [s]truck again
 And growing still stature the huge
 Strode after [?me]
 Rose up between me & the stars & still
 With measured motion like a living thing
 Strode after me unusual was the power
 Of that strange spectacle for many day
 There was a darkness in my thought no show
 Of usual objects images of trees
 Of sea or sky no colours of green fields
 But huge and mighty forms that do not live
 Like living men [?&]
 By day and were the trouble of my dream
 A working with an undetermined sense
 Of unknown modes of being (*MS JJ*, DCMS19.Sv and Tr)

Composition halts here and Wordsworth begins immediately revising the sequence, with his most significant intervention coming at the ambiguously marked juncture of the narrative climax and psychological denouement: “Strode after me unusual was the power / Of that strange spectacle for many day[s].” As though sensing that, while he has *described* a critical event of “unusual [...] power,” he has not yet *captured* or *conveyed* the developmental force of that power itself, Wordsworth flips to the next page in his manuscript notebook and recommences composition of the episode at its climax, which he now follows with a first attempt at falling action:

When from behind that rocky steep, till then
 The bound of the horizon a huge cliff
 As if with voluntary power instinct
 Upreared its head I struck & struck again
 And growing still in stature the huge cliff
 Rose up between me and the stars & still
 With measured motion like a living thing
 Strode after me. With trembling hands I turned
 Back to the willow tree, the mooring place
 Of my small bark (*MS JJ*, DSMS19.Rv)

Here again, however, composition halts; Wordsworth now backtracks two lines and inserts “And through the silent water stole my way,” then, still dissatisfied, flips back two pages to an empty space and briefly reworks these few lines of falling action in what turns out to be the critical way:

with trembling hands I turned
 And through the silent water stole my way
 Back to the cavern of the willow
 And to my [?home] again (Wordsworth *MS JJ*, DCMS19.Tv)

Recognizing the imagistic and emotional reversals implicit in these lines, Wordsworth doesn't even bother to finish them: with the simple insertion of "cavern," he discovers the chiasmic key to the structure of the falling action, incidentally solving the problem of the unfinished fourth line of the original draft (see above) – its blank will clearly be filled by a word or phrase synonymous with "cavern." In the next (surviving?) draft of these lines, appearing not in *MS JJ* but in a December 1798 letter to Coleridge, Wordsworth renders the falling action in confidently expanded and finished terms that are inversely convergent with those of the episode's exposition, as Table 2 shows:

Table 2: Macro-chiasmic structure in the boat-stealing episode. Line numbers refer to the 1799 *Prelude*, Part 1.

81	<i>They guided me: one evening led by them</i> [A]
82	I <i>went</i> [B] alone into <i>a shepherd's boat</i> [C],
83	<i>A skiff</i> [C], that to <i>a willow tree</i> [D] was tied
84	Within <i>a rocky cove</i> [E], its usual home.
85	The moon was up, <i>the lake</i> [F] was shining clear
	* * * *
115	And through <i>the silent water</i> [F] stole my way
116	Back to <i>the cavern</i> [E] of <i>the willow-tree</i> [D].
117	There in her mooring place I left <i>my bark</i> [C]
118	And through the meadows homeward <i>went</i> [B] with <i>grave</i>
119	<i>And serious thoughts</i> [A?] . . .

Though it can be discovered only by analysis, after the fact of reading, this does not mean that Wordsworth's macro-chiasmic scheme has no real impact during the actual course of reading. On the contrary: unfolding across a gap of thirty lines, it is very likely to work exactly as Wordsworth wished, by suggestion rather than assertion, yielding that "subtler feeling of remembered joy / Of soul & spirit in departed sound / That can not be remembered." Because the details of the falling action schematically and emotionally transvalue their mirrored counterparts from the exposition – the "trembling" retreat "Back to the cavern" is not simply a replay in reverse of the "skill[ful]" voyage that launched from "a rocky cove," nor is the "stealth[y]" boy who "proudly rowed" in one direction quite the same as the "grave and serious" child who returned in the other – the reader's initial and terminal responses to these outward- and inward-going images must involve "an obscure sense" both of repetition and of difference, and of a developmental relation between them. Each has a distinct affective valence: repetition yields the simple, continuous pleasure of satisfied (often unconscious) expect-

tations, while difference involves the more complex, contrastive pleasure associated with surprise (however dimly registered). In combination, these two affects produce a third kind of valence, at once continuous and contrastive, memorial and novel, which is to say, *historicized*.

Considered under analysis, Wordsworth's chiasmus divulges a newly historicized power to yoke together ideas that ought to be sheer antitheses (à la Pope) but that now intertwine in a more complex temporal relation of primacy and recency (to use psychologists' terms). Thus, while the doubled and inverted B through F members of the macro-chiasmus illustrated in Table 2 are either direct repetitions or obvious synonyms, the corresponding A terms discover an unexpected relation: "They guided me: one evening led by them" [A] = "grave and serious thoughts" [A]. The pronouns of the first of these lines refer, famously (and, I should mention, chiasmatically: "*They* [A] *guided* [B] me: one evening *led* [B] by *them* [A]"), to the "spirits" of the preceding verse paragraph, presumably external "powers" of nature that tutored the child through "Severer interventions" such as the apparent uprising of the monitory cliff (Wordsworth 1979, I.69; I.73; I.79 [1799 edition]; emphases mine). The child's "grave and serious thoughts" refer, by contrast, to a deeply internalized though "dim and undetermined / Sense of being." The narrative chiasmus both underscores and harmonizes the fundamental relation of *inversion* between these animistic and psychological interpretations of the episode. What motivated the boy's "act of stealth, and troubled pleasure": tutelary spirits of external nature or internal "Work[ings]" of his own impassioned "brain"? In answering *the external spirits re-cognized in terms of internal passions*, the chiasmus implicitly asserts the developmental point of the whole poem concerning the vital interaction of the feeling mind with living nature in the formation of morally sensitive human beings.

Return to Pope one last time. For Pope, as we have seen, moral *development* is essentially out of the question; he can thus instruct "Man" to "Know thy own *Point*" (1950, I.283). As a direct corollary of this philosophical position, in Pope there is no *actual* "nature" for man to interact with and develop over against. Indeed, where nature is depicted in anything like its own terms in *An Essay on Man*, those terms may appear proto-Wordsworthian, except for the fact that Pope's nature thrives in its own right, which is to say, in despite of foolish man:

Has God, thou fool! work'd solely for thy good[?]

* * * *

Is it for thee the lark ascends and sings?

Joy tunes his voice, Joy elevates his wings:

Is it for thee the linnet pours his throat?

Loves of his own and raptures, swell the note [...] (1950, III.27; III.31–III.34)

Man has nothing to learn from nature's joys and raptures except an object lesson in his own presumption – as though any of this has anything to do with him! But that nature does have something, and something *essential*, to do with man is precisely

Wordsworth's belief. Wordsworth thus appropriates, internalizes, and temporalizes even this image in order to characterize the developmental history of his contra-Popean poem on the nature of (a) man:

Anon I rose
 As if on wings, and saw beneath me stretched
 Vast prospect of the world which I had been,
 And was; and hence this song, which like a lark
 I have protracted, in the unwearied heavens
 Singing [...] (1979, XIII.377–XIII.382 [1805 edition])

That Wordsworth really does have Pope still in mind, even at this late date (May–June 1805), is confirmed by the fact that this countervailing passage is embedded in a longer sequence whose terms – “He *cleared a passage* for me, and *the stream / Flowed* in the bent of Nature”; “the termination of my *course / Is nearer now*”; “Whether to me shall be allotted life / And with life power to accomplish aught of worth” (Wordsworth 1979, XIII.366–XIII.367; XIII.372–XIII.373; XIII.386 [1805 edition]; emphases mine) – Wordsworth draws directly from the final paragraph of Pope's “Design,” only to internalize and historicize them as with so much else he borrowed to transform. This longer sequence contains one further direct allusion, still more obvious, that measures the revolutionary distance Wordsworth has travelled since embarking as a poet at Hawkshead. In the final epistle of *An Essay on Man*, Pope piously (not to say presumptuously) answers the most consternating of all philosophical rubs:

What makes all physical and moral ill?
 There deviates Nature, and here wanders Will.
 God sends not ill, if rightly understood [...] (1950, IV.111–IV.113)

Having rethought and transvalued the developmental relation of physical nature to moral will as mediated through feeling, Wordsworth adapts the most famous of these lines in a way that foregrounds the passionate difference he has contrived throughout *The Prelude* to make: “All gratulant if rightly understood” (1979, XIII.385 [1805 edition]). Wordsworth's substitution of “gratulant” – meaning expressive of pleasure, joy, or satisfaction – for Pope's “God” is daring but also pointed and exact. For Wordsworth, these primary natural feelings are not contrary but foundational to “The feeling of life endless, the one thought / By which we live, infinity and God” (1979, XIII.183–XIII.184 [1805 edition]).

This is the developmental lesson of the boat-stealing and other of spots of time – natural experience “guides” the growing child to “a dim and undetermined sense / Of unknown modes of being” – which Wordsworth teaches through a variety of newly historicized poetic means designed to cultivate an analogous “sense” in his reader. The points I have made at some length concerning Wordsworth's naturalization, internalization, and temporalization of Pope's river metaphor and chiasmic structures

can be generalized to his treatment of the many other inherited forms from which he fashioned a distinctively Romantic idiom that doesn't merely declaim but also movingly enacts its psycho-moral themes.

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