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Wordsworth and the Odic Tradition

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Wordsworth and the Odic Tradition

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English from
The College of William and Mary

by

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“Best is water,” writes Pindar in the opening line of his First Olympian Ode, “but there is another—gold, shining fire-like”¹ (ll. 1-2, Loeb, p. 47). This line, written to commemorate the victory of Hieron of Syracuse at the Olympic horse-races in 476 B.C., demonstrates many of the Pindaric characteristics that would later influence the ode’s development. The poet introduces both the apparently self-evident conclusion that water is superior to all other things, and, in the next breath, he points to gold as a rival contender for this honor. Furthermore, Pindar chooses to link the two elements in a seemingly antithetical relationship which may mystify the modern reader—what, we are moved to ask, have water and gold to do with each other? The poet complicates the matter by moving, in the third line, to the sun, which he praises equally as an appropriate symbol—“if you wish to sing / of athletic games...look no further than the sun”² (ll. 3-5). These rapid changes in emphasis, long considered the hallmark of the Pindaric style in the evolving English ode, also serve to replicate within the first part of a single stanza the traditional sections of the ode—strophe, antistrophe, and epode. Ben Jonson, in his

¹ I am indebted to Basil Gildersleeve’s notes to an 1885 edition of Pindar, published by Harper and Brothers, for this interpretation of “ο δε χρυσοσ”; Race’s rendering in the Loeb edition, which I rely upon elsewhere, would seem to oversimplify the relationship between the two elements. The original reads: Αριστον μεν υδωρ, ο δε χρυσοσ αιθομενον πυρ, linking υδωρ (water) and χρυσοσ (gold) in an antithetical relationship with the connective particles μεν and δε. Πυρ further complicates the matter—Pindar references it on a par with the former two subjects, but chooses not to reveal its status as part of a simile until the following line. Rendering the first line in isolation leaves us with “Best is water, but there is another—gold shining fire” (as the “like” of “fire-like” in my translation above is enjambed to line two).

² William H. Race’s translation, though it neglects the ordering of the Greek: μηκετ’ αελιου σκοπει / αλλο θαλπνοτερον εν αμερα φαεννον, Pindar’s phrasing, places the negation first with μηκετ’. Line 5 would appear to read in the Greek “seek not of the sun” until the phrase is resolved by the introduction of the comparison in line 6.

attempt to translate the Pindaric structural terms to the English ode, would call these respective sections the “Turne,” “Counter-turne,” and “Stand,” as in his ode “To the Immortall Memorie, and Friendship of That Noble Paire, Sir Lucius Cary and Sir H. Morison.” The quick turns evident at the opening of Pindar’s First Olympian Ode would reverberate throughout the canon of later odes, both in the remnants of triadic structure sometimes employed by odists, and in the dyadic shifts of mood, time, or light perhaps most ably employed by Wordsworth. These shifts would seem to reflect the quality of contrast or antithesis embedded in the relationship of the connective particles $\mu\epsilon\nu$ and $\delta\epsilon$, often rendered in schoolboy texts as “on the one hand” and “on the other hand.” We might see the structure of the ode, then, as reminiscent of—or even modeled upon—one of the most basic grammatical ideas of the Greek language.

Pindar’s employment of elusive philosophical statements and his habit of linking apparently disparate concepts or elements, as well as the sheer grammatical complexity of his lyric poetry, earned him, even in the ancient world, a reputation for obscurity; that reputation has only grown with time. Furthermore, the relationship of the English ode to Pindar must necessarily be the story of poets and critics striving to comprehend the nuances of the Greek mind; many things about Pindar which seemed odd to Jonson or Cowley would have been obvious to a Greek audience at the time of composition. However, as John Hamilton notes in his book *Soliciting Darkness: Pindar, Obscurity, and the Classical Tradition*, Pindar’s victory odes, or *epinicia*, were by no means universally clear and comprehensible to a contemporary audience. Even a decade after Pindar’s death, the fifth-century Athenian poet Eupolis remarked that the new generation’s $\alpha\phi\iota\lambda\omicron\kappa\alpha\lambda\iota\alpha$, or incapacity to sufficiently appreciate beauty, damaged

Pindar's standing in the eyes of the Greeks.³ We must understand here that much of the beauty in Pindar to which a younger Athenian audience was averse consisted of obscurity, complexity, and gnomic philosophical truths. Pindar, it would seem, was himself aware of his own complexity: as he tells us in the Second Olympian ode, and as Thomas Gray would reiterate when he used these lines as the epigraph for "The Progress of Poesy,"

πολλα μοι υπ'
 αγκωνος ωκεα βελη
 ενδον εντι φαρετρας _____ ες δε το παν ερμανεων
 φωναεντα συνετοισιν
 χατιζει.⁴

Hamilton's translation is as follows:

"Many swift arrows
 are under my arm
 here in this quiver
 speaking to those who understand; but for the whole there is a need
 for interpreters."

While Hamilton's study contains some notable insights into Pindar's obscurity and its later impact upon English and German literature, however, it stops far short of discussing the Romantic ode. Hamilton describes the odes of eighteenth-century English poets William Collins and Thomas Gray as caught between the "hopelessly distant" glorious past and "the dull present," which these poets felt was "hopelessly incapable of ever achieving such glory again" (p. 190). "It is the poetry," Hamilton tells us, "of latecomers, of...the end of a tradition" (p. 190). This thesis, however, will examine the ways in which we can hardly consider Collins and Gray the "end of a tradition" of

³ Hamilton, John T. *Soliciting Darkness: Pindar, Obscurity, and the Classical Tradition*, p. 18.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 196; Second Olympian Ode, ll. 83-6.

English verse in the Pindaric tradition. In Wordsworth's great odes, the influence of Pindar is in fact very much alive; both "Tintern Abbey" and the Immortality Ode utilize important aspects of Pindar's style—his philosophical obscurity in particular—but add crucial innovations, especially in their exploration of the ideas of light and obscurity. Wordsworth intervenes in and innovates upon the ideas of space and time first established in Pindar's odes, and, importantly, he engages with Pindar's use of Greek particles, adapting English verse to a similar level of nuance and expressiveness. Wordsworth draws upon the Horatian ode, pushing a simple vocabulary reminiscent of Horace's to its interpretive limits through his use of semantic vagueness. He adapts Horatian pastoral imagery to his own purposes—especially the *locus amoenus*, which Wordsworth further personalizes—and, in places, he adopts the distinctively Horatian meditative tone. Lastly, Wordsworth fuses influences from the Psalms into his unique odic distillation, reinventing their embattled narrator as a man by turns despairing and joyful, struggling for communion with the divine inherent in the natural world.

i: The English Pindaric Ode

In analyzing the influence of those earlier odes in English upon Wordsworth, it is vital to keep in mind that misinterpretations of Pindar have themselves influenced the English ode very significantly. As Lionel Trilling notes in relation to Wordsworth's Immortality Ode, "a poem does not always exist only in itself: sometimes it has a very lively existence in false or partial appearances."⁵ Such is the case with Pindar's influence

⁵ Trilling, Lionel. "The Immortality Ode," p. 129.

upon the English odic tradition. Cowley and his contemporaries failed to perceive Pindar's complex metrical patterns: Cowley regarded the Pindaric meter as "various and irregular"⁶ and this misunderstanding earned Pindar the reputation for a kind of enthusiastic randomness, rather than the intense metrical discipline his highly varied stanzaic patterns represent. Misapprehensions like this one, coupled with the lack of accurate translations of Pindar into English, meant that English Pindaric odes must not be interpreted as the direct literary descendents of Pindar himself. Rather, we ought to regard them as their own peculiar vein in English poetry, often having more in common with English perception and interpretation than with their nominal Greek antecedents. For this reason, studies of the form often use the term "Pindarick" to refer to English poems, especially those of the eighteenth century, which borrow some elements of Pindar but ultimately represent a kind of separate genre within the ode—and, as such, Pindar himself cannot be relied upon as the sole context for the analysis of the Romantic ode. The story of the ode in English, particularly as we approach Wordsworth, is very much concerned with the distillation of disparate influences—Greco-Roman, Hebrew, English, and Continental—into a whole which is substantially different from, if not always greater than, the sum of its parts.

Much of Pindar's function in the English ode, in fact, was as a kind of figurehead—a founder of the ode and a central early figure in the broader canon of lyric poetry. Thomas Gray's 1768 ode "The Progress of Poesy," for example, lauds Pindar as a "Theban eagle...sailing with supreme dominion" (ll. 115-116) over his literary rivals and

⁶ Shuster, George. *The English Ode from Milton to Keats*, p. 109.

detractors.⁷ Furthermore, Gray views Pindar as the earliest in a chain of masters of the lyric form—the “Progress of Poesy,” indeed, begins with Pindar before shifting to Rome and then to Shakespeare, Milton, and finally Dryden and Gray himself. While the virtues of each of these masters is noted, Gray still maintains reservations about the ultimate quality of the work produced relative to that of Greek authors. He notes that his own verse, for example, remains “beneath the Good” (l. 123)—as though Gray and the other English poets he names are merely a part of the ravens “that croak and clamour in vain below” (ll. 115n, p. 51).

Oposing the dissonant sounds of those ravens, we might imagine the voice of Pindar as a pure and melodious sound, recalling the choral nature of Pindar’s odes. Like the choral odes of Athenian tragedy, which served as a substantial influence in the development of the form, music was intimately linked with the ode in Greek—as any survey of the odic form will point out, the Greek word ὠδή, from which the English term derives, means “song.” The notion that an ode was written to be sung was revived during the Elizabethan period, when the ode in English was, despite its reputation as an alternative form, virtually synonymous with that of the ballad, or with the various *canzone* and *chanson* forms of the Italian and French traditions. The notion of the ode as a choral or musical form would persist certainly into the seventeenth century, when Dryden completed monumental musical odes, particularly his “Alexander’s Feast” (1697), which was set to music, originally by Jeremiah Clarke and later by George Frideric Handel, and performed in honor of Saint Cecelia’s Day. As witnessed by Gray’s

⁷ The image is drawn from Pindar himself. See, for example, Pindar’s Third Nemean Ode: “Swift is the eagle among birds, / which suddenly seizes...the bloodied prey in its talons, / while the cawing jackdaws range down below” (ll. 80-3, Race’s translation).

“Ode for Music,” which was completed and performed in Cambridge in 1769, and Wordsworth’s own late ode “The Power of Sound” (1828), the relationship between the ode and music was one of the hallmarks of the form. In addition to its Pindaric roots, it also provided a link to the musical roots of biblical psalms.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, some influential English critics, notably Robert Lowth, Lord Bishop of London, began to examine the Old Testament in the light of pre-established poetic genres, both epic and lyric. In his *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, completed in 1754 but first translated into English from the original Latin in 1787, Lowth viewed the works of Old Testament prophets, and especially the Psalms, in light of Classical genre distinctions, coining the term “the Hebrew ode,” often also called the sacred ode, which excited poets and critics of the Enlightenment with its loftiness, spirituality, and philosophical expansiveness. Furthermore, Lowth saw the ode as having achieved a primacy among the different forms of Hebrew verse:⁸ discussing elegy, he notes that “no species of composition was more in use among the Hebrews...the ode perhaps only excepted.”⁹ Lowth conflates the Hebrew term *shir* with the Greek $\omega\delta\eta$, believing that the salient commonality between the two was that both “were intended for music, whether vocal alone, or accompanied with instruments” (p. 189). The connections evident to the eighteenth-century mind between Pindar and the psalmist becomes clearer when Lowth describes the odic form as “lively and unconstrained...impetuous, bold” (p. 196-7). Reflecting Cowley’s views of the Pindaric meter, Lowth adds that the ode “might almost deserve the epithet licentious as to

⁸ Paul Fry notes (*The Poet’s Calling in the English Ode*, p. 133) that this was not restricted to Lowth, but the view of a “lively minority” of eighteenth-century critics.

⁹ Lowth, Robert. *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*. 2: 241.

symmetry and method” (p. 197). Especially given the religious light in which many critics were inclined to view Pindar, significant connections between the Greek and Hebrew odic traditions were intuitive for Lowth, and as a result the Enlightenment tended to view the “sacred ode” and the Pindaric ode as two closely intertwined forms.

The Psalms’ quick turns from dejection to elation—from feelings of desertion by God to intense joy at God’s deliverance and favor—mirror the strophic turns of the Pindaric ode, and those in Wordsworth. The importance of the Hebrew ode for literary theorists, especially those examples found in the Psalms, has been neglected in relation to odes of the Romantic period. When the “sacred ode” is discussed at all, it is bracketed firmly within the Enlightenment era, ignoring significant connections to be made between Wordsworth and the Psalms, particularly with regard to imagery of light and optics.

ii: Wordsworth and Horace

Despite the consistent popularity of Horace as part of the Classical education in England—Milton, we will see, authored an influential translation of Horace’s Pyrrha Ode (Ode 1.5) into English in the early seventeenth century—critical surveys of the ode have written Horace off as a minor player, even in the Romantic period. For Wordsworth, however, Horace is a crucial influence upon the development of the Immortality Ode and “Tintern Abbey.” In Wordsworth’s (often deceptively) simple vocabulary, his meditative tone,¹⁰ and his thematic preference for images of nature and the rural life, we can see the

¹⁰ For a brief but useful summary of the differences between the Pindaric and Horatian tones, see Gilbert Highet, *The Classical Tradition*, pp. 226-7: “The Pindarics admire

influence of Horace's odes. Critics have often minimized the importance of Horace in the development of the ode, largely for the convenience of viewing Pindar as the sole father of English odic incarnations. George Shuster, in his book *The English Ode from Milton to Keats*, attributes the development of the ode to four poets in the ancient world: Pindar, Horace, the lesser Greek lyric poet Anacreon, and the psalmist David¹¹; he limits his discussion, however, to the first and last of these fathers of the odic tradition. While he acknowledges that "the influence of Horace...affected all lyric verse" in the period of his inquiry, he still chooses the narrow and limiting definition of the ode as "a lyric poem derived...from Pindaric models" (p. 6).

Stuart Curran offers a newer critical perspective in his book *Poetic Form and British Romanticism*: "almost from the first," he asserts, "a Horatian voice was invested in a Pindaric form" (p. 71). Curran makes an important revision to the previous critical dialogue, which held that Pindar was by far the most influential model in the formation of the English ode. His statement, though, while initially appealing as a solution to the dilemma of Wordsworth's influences, oversimplifies the role of other strains of the odic tradition in Wordsworth's major odes.

When Horace's influence is acknowledged by critics, he is generally remembered as the author of short amorous lyrics, like those of the French poet Ronsard, whose odes were popular in Elizabethan England, and who served as an important Romance-language link between the English ode and the Classical tradition.¹² While the ode "came to stand

passion, daring, and extravagance. Horace's followers prefer reflection, moderation, economy."

¹¹ Shuster, p. 6.

¹² See Shafer, Robert, *The English Ode to 1660*, p. 63.

for...verses more courtly and refined than the despised ballad,”¹³ the definition of Horace as a love poet fails to reflect the depth and substance of his odes. Likewise, critics have mentioned Horace as a father of the so-called “heroic ode.”¹⁴ These were generally hagiographic political odes like Andrew Marvell’s “Horatian Ode upon Cromwell’s return from Ireland” (1650)—notable in particular for its four-line stanza, crafted as an imitation of Horatian meters—which are reminiscent of the more patriotic strains in Horace’s odes for Augustus, especially the so-called Roman Odes, the six poems which open Book 3 with an overt political message about Roman ideals.

Horace’s meditative tone, especially his penchant for finding philosophical truths in subjects of apparent levity, is perhaps the most characteristic Horatian mode, and the one which Wordsworth engages and develops. A Horatian ode is rarely a simple poem about love, a heroic leader, or the enjoyment of wine in a comfortable grove—what unites these topics and makes them specifically Horatian, rather, is the tendency of these subjects to lead the poet to philosophical maxims about moderation and the brevity of life. In Milton’s rendering of the Pyrrha Ode, for example—which, in addition to being a translation of enduring popularity, is also generally faithful to the Latin—we begin with the description of a “slender youth” engaged in a love affair with a woman, Pyrrha (l. 1). We learn, however, that the poet himself also has prior intimate knowledge of this woman, whom he compares to a storm at sea. The youth currently enjoying her embraces, however, is ignorant of his inability to foresee rapid changes in her character and affections. Horace reminds us that this boy, by assuming that conditions will remain stable, opens himself to painful experiences. Like the sea, a woman’s temper is a

¹³ Shuster, George N., *The English Ode from Milton to Keats*, p. 31.

¹⁴ Safer, pp. 119-120.

changeable thing for Horace, and so the poem is easily sloughed off as an insignificant amorous poem. The important point here, though, is that Horace, even in this apparently simple love-poem, nudges us toward one of his favorite philosophic truths—that the wise man is the one who prepares himself for rapid changes in his situation.

The Horatian phrase “simplex munditiis,”¹⁵ something like “simple in your elegance,”¹⁶ originates in his Ode 1.5, where it refers to Pyrrha, a woman whose simple beauty stands in marked contrast to her tempestuous personality. This phrase, however, would come to stand for a much larger strain of the Horatian aesthetic. For Horace, the simple life is the best; that which is unadorned—complex, perhaps, but not excessively decorative—is what ought to be pursued. This extends to Horace’s preference for life in the country, where communion with nature is possible, and one has time to absorb the pleasure of a *locus amoenus*,¹⁷ a pleasant spot. These are sentiments which Wordsworth shares in his major odes, which focus thematically on the beauty of nature and the joy available to the man who allows himself to feel at home in the natural world.

Furthermore, the principle of simplicity in Horace extends to his language, a poetic tenet also exemplified by Wordsworth. Wordsworthian language, while often philosophically

¹⁵ See also the Ben Jonson ode of the same title, which draws considerable inspiration from the Horatian Pyrrha ode.

¹⁶ From ll. 4-5 of Horace’s Ode 1.5. The full sentence reads as a question to the poet’s love-interest, Pyrrha: “cui flavam religas comam, / simplex munditiis?”, or, in English, “for whom do you tie back [your] golden hair, simple in your elegance?”

¹⁷ A phrase which, according to the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, originates in Cicero’s *De Finibus* (Bk. 2, Ch. 107), but is first taken up by critics in regard to the Horatian aesthetic in the mid-twentieth century (see, for example, G. Schönbeck, *Der Locus Amoenus von Homer bis Horaz*, 1962).

complex, is notable for its simple vocabulary, which can often, perhaps paradoxically, complicate the analysis of many of his crucial passages.¹⁸

iii: “Tintern Abbey”

After pointing out that “I have not ventured to call this Poem an Ode,” Wordsworth nevertheless tells us of his “Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey” that “it was written with a hope that in the transitions, and the impassioned music of the versification, would be found the principal requisites of that species of composition.” This note, added in 1800 to the text of the *Lyrical Ballads*, is an immense boon to any discussion of Wordsworth’s employment of the ode. Yet while it would seem that Wordsworth has relieved us of a burden of proof about the status of “Tintern Abbey” as an ode, larger questions remain: why are we inclined to think of these “Lines” as an ode in the first place, and what form does that ode take?

In order to move further into an examination of Wordsworth’s specific Classical influences in “Tintern Abbey,” we must first place those antecedents in the context of Wordsworth’s own knowledge of Classical authors. As was usual for the day, Wordsworth was educated in Latin and Greek at Hawkshead School, whose curriculum under the Reverend William Taylor also included a substantial exposure to some English odists, notably Thomas Gray and other poets of the Graveyard School.¹⁹ At Cambridge, Wordsworth is believed to have pursued the Classical texts on the syllabus at the expense

¹⁸ See a further discussion of Wordsworth’s common vocabulary and its interpretive complexities below at p. 28.

¹⁹ Barker, Juliet R. V. *Wordsworth: A Life*, p. 31.

of all his other subjects. His devotion to Roman authors is attested by his surviving translations or imitations of at least three of Horace's odes—1.31, which Wordsworth calls "To Apollo"²⁰; 2.6 ("Septimi, Gades"); and 3.13, the famous "O fons Bandusiae" ode written by Horace in praise of a spring for which he had a deep affection. These odes all deal, in varying degrees, with the pastoral imagery which Wordsworth would develop and refine in "Tintern Abbey." Wordsworth is remembered to have remarked to his nephew, Christopher, that Horace was his "great favourite."²¹ His affection for Latin, however, extended beyond Horace into a stylistically varied corpus. His translation of the Catullus poem "Acme and Septimius" is extant, as are an imitation of Juvenal's satires and various attempts at rendering Virgil into English, particularly sections of the *Georgics*. He would draw the original epigraph to his Immortality Ode, "paulo maiora canamus," from Virgil's *Eclogues*.

Wordsworth's level of familiarity with the Greek ode is more difficult to ascertain, but we can nevertheless make several promising connections. His interest in lyric poetry is evident from an English translation he completed of a "Celebrated Greek Song" of Callistratus, which appeared in the *Morning Post* in 1798. An amusing if tangential tidbit is Wordsworth's use of the pseudonym "Axiologus" to sign one of his early published compositions.²² The pen-name is a compound of the Greek words αξιος and λογος, "worthy" and "word" respectively—an attempt at rendering "Wordsworth" in Greek.

²⁰ Wordsworth, William. *Early Poems and Fragments, 1785-1797*, p. 686.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 687.

²² Barker, p. 34.

As for Pindar, it is unclear whether Wordsworth read his victory odes extensively in the original. Several pieces of evidence, however, suggest that Wordsworth had some familiarity with Pindar, certainly in translation but also perhaps in Greek. Duncan Wu, in his comprehensive study *Wordsworth's Reading 1770-1799*, believes that Wordsworth probably read Pindar as early as his time at Hawkshead Grammar School, based on a comparison of syllabi from similar schools (p. 166). Wordsworth also recommended Pindar to his nephew, Christopher, among Classical authors with which a young man should be familiar.²³ He also appears to have had considerable exposure to Abraham Cowley, the English odist who largely popularized the “Pindarick” or “Pindarique” imitation ode, but who also translated several authentic Pindaric odes into English. Wordsworth, at the time of his death, owned two separate copies of Cowley’s works.²⁴ Wu makes a convincing case for Wordsworth’s early knowledge of Cowley, citing similarities between Wordsworth’s schoolboy translation of the Horatian “Acme and Septimius” ode and Cowley’s rendering. The “Rydal Mount Catalogue” also indicates that Wordsworth’s estate contained a full 1798 edition and commentary of Pindar’s odes.²⁵ How early Wordsworth became familiar with Pindar is, then, a matter of some speculation, but he certainly had knowledge of Pindar in English, likely very early, and evidence strongly suggests that he had some familiarity with Pindar in the original as well.

An 1819 sonnet of Wordsworth’s, addressed to the Derwent River, is rich with Pindaric allusion. In this sonnet, Wordsworth makes reference to an eagle—Pindar’s

²³ *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, p. 459.

²⁴ Knight, William, ed. “The Rydal Mount Catalogue,” p. 243. Wordsworth also had in his collection the works of early Pindarist Ben Jonson (p. 248).

²⁵ “Rydal Mount Catalogue,” Item 618, p. 282.

common epithet being “the Theban Eagle,” as in Gray’s odes—and to the “less vivid wreath” that “entwined / Nemean victor’s brow” (ll. 9-10), the parsley crown worn by victors at the Nemean games. These lines demonstrate both Wordsworth’s familiarity with Pindar, at least in English, and his invocation of the Theban poet as one of his poetic antecedents significant enough to be worth alluding to.

In an 1816 letter to R. P. Gillies, Wordsworth alludes to Pindar in a harsh critique of the poet Thomas Gray, a favorite of Wordsworth’s school days, but a favorite target of his more mature opinions. Wordsworth writes that Gray

wrote English Verses, as he and other Eton school-Boys wrote Latin; filching a phrase now from one author, and now from another....If I were to pluck out of Grays tail all the feathers which, I know, belong to other Birds he would be left very bare indeed.²⁶

These lines recall the image of Pindar as the Theban eagle, presumably one with all his tail-feathers intact, and view Gray as derivative and unoriginal, a ridiculous sight as a half-plucked bird. Wordsworth simultaneously invokes the splendor of the Pindaric eagle and makes remarks at Gray’s expense through Gray’s own invocation of Pindar.

Similarly, in a letter sent to Wordsworth in 1819 by Charles Lamb, Lamb bewails the failure of his pen in mid-sentence, joking that he feels like Pindar “set down to pen an Isthmian or Nemean panegyric in lines, alternate red and black”²⁷—the reference is not Wordsworth’s, of course, but it assumes Wordsworth’s understanding of Pindaric verse and attests Pindar as a topic discussed among Wordsworth’s circle of acquaintance. Also, I will argue that Wordsworth’s syntactic practice as a poet is indebted, perhaps even

²⁶ Wordsworth, William. *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, p. 301.

²⁷ Lamb, Charles. *The Letters of Charles Lamb, with a Sketch of his Life*, p. 17.

directly, to Pindar's use of the Greek particle to facilitate his quick shifts in time, space, and mood.

Time and space form the basis for the central tension and dialectic of Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey"; these two features are the axes around which the odic shifts occur, and they open the poem to a number of important contrasts. We see throughout the poem a continuity of place contrasted with frequent shifts in the time-perspective of the poem. While Pindar used a similar structure for many of his odes, Wordsworth redefines these characteristics as *personal* time and space, not the vague, expansive timeline of mythology and the wide-ranging geography of cities. In this, Wordsworth draws to some extent on the Horatian model of personalizing the *locus amoenus*. However, the poem also contrasts a specific, personal, local space with spiritual expansiveness, in which he draws to some extent on the Psalms. These contrasts between time and space, and the contrast between concrete place and abstract tone, lend Wordsworth the opportunity for a unique dialectical approach to the ode.

Walter Pater noted that one of Wordsworth's great lyrical strengths was his "habit of connecting the stones and trees of a particular spot of earth with the great events of life."²⁸ Pater's assertion is richly supported by the text of "Tintern Abbey," a poem in which a particular spot of ground plays a pivotal role. Indeed, the title places the formal qualities of the poem—questions about its status as an ode in particular—in a subordinate role to the poem's central, defining sense of place. The form of the ode has been largely characterized by quick changes of emphasis, particularly in the tradition of Pindar; in "Tintern Abbey," a strophic structure is evident both in the changes of the mood of the

²⁸ Pater, Walter. "Wordsworth," p. 132.

speaker and in the changes of time setting. Indeed, the poet balances opposing forces in a way much more Greek than has been acknowledged in previous criticism of “Tintern Abbey.”²⁹ As Wordsworth pivots between hope and dejection, and between past, present, and future, the constant place setting of the poem—the idea of revisiting a particular spot on the Wye—provides “Tintern Abbey” with a rich sense of continuity within change.

In the poem’s first two stanzas, the speaker of the poem tends to view the natural setting as providing a sense of continuity, harmony, and transcendence. Despite the passage of “five summers, with the length / of five long winters” (ll. 1-2), the language of the first stanza emphasizes the recurrence of the speaker’s feelings of connection with the natural world, the eternal recurrence of the seasons and the consistency of the rural landscape. The idea of return—and especially of return to a scene of pastoral beauty unchanged by the political turmoil abroad which had marked the intervening years—provides a sense of tranquility to the speaker. The sky is “quiet,” the waters speak in a “sweet inland murmur,” and the unity of the scene is underscored by the “green and simple hue” of the summer woods (ll. 8, 4, and 14); the word “again” occurs four times in the first stanza alone, impressing upon the reader the continuity of the scene with the previous visitation five years earlier.

The poem’s second stanza enlarges upon the first; not only does the place of the poem confer on the speaker a sense of tranquility and continuity, but it also serves as a gateway to a philosophically expansive mood. The peaceful beauty of the location, and of the speaker’s re-imagining of that location while elsewhere, holds “even the motion of

²⁹ Stuart Curran, in his assertion that “Tintern Abbey” “lies fully within the grounds of the Horatian ode” (*Poetic Form and British Romanticism*, p. 76), drastically underestimates the impact of Greek models on the poem, and overlooks the influence of the Psalms entirely.

our human blood / Almost suspended,” and “we are laid asleep / In body, and become a living soul” (ll. 45-7). However, the third stanza offers a strophic turn with its hint of doubt: “if this / be but a vain belief”: in following lines, the emphasis shifts to the “fretful stir / unprofitable” (ll. 50-51, 53-4) from which the speaker seeks refuge, rather than the success of his search for relief, as in the second stanza. This shift also provides an occasion for Wordsworth to employ a memorable anacoluthon, slipping after the exclamatory “yet, oh! How oft—” of line 51 into a long parenthetical:

If this
 Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft,
 In darkness, and amid the many shapes
 Of joyless day-light; when the fretful air
 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!

--ll. 40-57

By using this rhetorical flourish—appearing overcome with emotion, breaking off his grammatical sentence—first of all, creating suspense in the monologue as to when the speaker will return to his main point. However, Wordsworth never really fulfils the conditional nature of “if this be but a vain belief.” By repeating “how oft—” five lines later, he gives the illusion of having returned to his original meaning, but in reality he has glossed over the difficult emotion which prompted him to break off his syntax in the first place. We never learn the potential result of that “vain belief,” because the poet subtly returns to a positive outlook, sidestepping the doubt at the opening of the stanza. He again uses thoughts of the Wye to comfort himself from the disturbing thoughts of the “vain belief” and the years away, just as he had during those five years of separation.

These lines refer to the narrator's five unsatisfying years in the "fever of the world" (l. 54) not only in their content, but also structurally in their use of anacoluthon: the rhetorical separation and repetition of "how oft" reflects the temporal distance between his two experiences in the setting of the poem. Indeed, the second "how oft" occurs five lines after the first, mirroring elegantly the "five summers, with the length / of five long winters."

The passage also carries shades of aposiopesis, literally a falling off from speech ($\alpha\pi\omicron$) into silence ($\sigma\iota\omega\pi\eta$), a related rhetorical figure of interruption. In aposiopesis, the speaker stops himself mid-sentence for rhetorical effect, usually due to an onslaught of strong emotion, which Wordsworth's "yet, oh!" of line 51 would seem to support. Scholars have noted Pindaric aposiopesis, as in his "famous aposiopesis" of Olympian Ode 13, where he abruptly declines to discuss the details of Bellerophon's death after beginning to describe the hero's final battle with the Amazons.³⁰ Richmond Lattimore renders the lines:

On his fate at the last I will keep silence.
But to Pegasos were given on Olympos
The ancient mangers of Zeus.³¹

This is an aposiopesis which is actually stated in the words "I will keep silence," rather than reflected in the syntax, but nevertheless relates to Wordsworth's usage. The poet's refusal to express an uncomfortable idea lends him a dignified air of reserve, a sense that he is taking a moment to gather himself before continuing. In Greek fashion, he introduces both an idea and its antithesis—the possibility that the belief might be vain,

³⁰ Hubbard, Thomas K. "Pegasus' Bridle and the Poetics of Pindar's Thirteenth Olympian," p. 41.

³¹ Richmond Lattimore, trans. *The Odes of Pindar*, p. 43, ll. 91-93.

and that its sustaining power might in fact be real and present—referring to both at once, even as he purports to be unable to speak. Similarly, Wordsworth’s pauses and his long aside serve to separate himself from the uncomfortable idea that his feeling might be a “vain belief” as well as from the present physical and temporal setting, so that he can more vividly recall his five years away from the Wye.

The fourth stanza of “Tintern Abbey” serves as a vehicle for Wordsworth’s employment of a series of elegant temporal shifts reminiscent of the Pindaric ode. The first three lines echo the doubt of the previous stanza with their “sad perplexity” (l. 61) before “the picture of the mind revives again” in the following line. Lines 64-7, however, feature what may be the most dizzying sequence of temporal shifts in the Wordsworthian canon, easily worthy of Pindar himself:

While here I stand, not only with the sense
Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts
That in this moment there is life and food
For future years. And so I dare to hope,
Though changed, no doubt, from what I was, when first
I came among these hills...
—ll. 63-8

The narrator begins these lines in the present tense before turning to the “future years” in line 66, shifting back to the present tense to express hope for his “changed” self, as distinguished from “what I was when first / I came among these hills.” The sense of place provides the only sense of continuity and stability in this otherwise disorienting set of lines. The speaker’s location on the Wye is the present “here I stand,” the “food / for future years,” and the place where “first / I came among these hills.” Wordsworth may have found in these lines something of an antidote to the problem of Pindaric obscurity—at least that obscurity produced by rapid and sometimes confusing changes of emphasis.

We are not moved to ask the connection between the elements named, as we may have been with water, gold, and fire in the opening of Pindar's First Olympian Ode. Rather, the common location is the factor that quite literally grounds the quick movement of the narrator's memory throughout time.

Place and time—specifically, shifts in time, and the lack thereof in location—are vital tools for the odic structure of “Tintern Abbey,” in which we see Wordsworth drawing upon, and further developing, similar shifts in Greek models. Pindar also takes much of his inspiration, of course, from the cities of his odes—the place-settings—and their development over time. Drew Griffith's observation that Pindar, like other Greek authors of his day, perceived time not as a linear progression but rather “a collection of crucial moments, or *kairoi*”³² helps to explain the logic of Pindaric temporal shifts. Griffith also notes Pindar's technique of beginning an ode with a recent event—“sometimes,” as is the case with “Tintern Abbey,” “even on the very day of the performance.”³³ He then chooses a moment in the distant past and moves forward, working his way toward the event at the beginning of the poem—a version of the Homeric device *hysteron proteron*, or “later thing first.” The similarities to Wordsworth's method in “Tintern Abbey” are evident, though it is worth noting, in questions of Pindaric time and space, that much of his obscurity is derived from the broad swath of historical and mythological time encapsulated by his odes. Wordsworth grounds the reader in “Tintern Abbey” by focusing instead on a personal time and place, and the consciousness of an individual rather than the shared cultural and mythological consciousness of an entire community. Wordsworth chooses to reduce the amount of

³² Griffith, R. Drew. “In the Dark Backward: Time in Pindaric Narrative,” p. 611.

³³ *Ibid*, 612.

space and time he allows himself: he specifies a five-year period between the beginning of his story and the end, and the grove of “Tintern Abbey” is an intensely personal location for the poet, unlike the more archetypal Greek cities used by Pindar.

Wordsworth’s use of conjunctions can also be seen to mimic the effect of the particles—the tiny, fundamentally important words in Greek that serve to connect, limit, and emphasize ideas. The polysyndeton, or plethora of conjunctions, in lines 63-8 of “Tintern Abbey” serves to replicate much of the feeling of a Greek stanza. The following lines, chosen from Pindar’s First Nemean Ode, in which Herakles’ foster-father Amphytrion discovers that his newborn son has not been killed by snakes, but rather that the infant has killed the serpents, show the way in which particles can guide the emphasis of a stanza:

And he stood there, he was amazed,
Mingled with painful confusion and also joy. For he saw
The marvelous strength and also
The ability of his son. Contradictory, then, the gods had
Rendered the messengers’ speech.³⁴

The particles guide the reader through the father’s terror, shock, incomprehension, and wonder, highlighting the contradictory feelings that coincide in his emotional state.

J.D. Denniston notes in the introduction to his exhaustive study *The Greek Particles* that “their effect must be suggested by inflexions of the voice in speaking” or

³⁴ Nemean Ode 1, ll. 55-9. My translation. The Greek is as follows (taken from the Loeb Classical Library edition: *Pindar: Nemean Odes, Isthmian Odes, Fragments*, p. 10):

εστα δε θαμβει δυσφορω
τερπνω τε μιχθεις. ειδε γαρ εκνομιον
λημα τε και δυναμιν
υιου. παλιγγλωσσον δε οι αθανατοι
αγγελων ρησιν θεσαν.

Note that δε, τε, γαρ, and και are the particles in the sentence.

“the marks of expression in a musical score, which suggest interpretation rather than dictate it.”³⁵ Denniston’s comparison of particles to directions for spoken or musical inflection is an extremely perceptive one—applied to Wordsworth’s English particles, it connects “Tintern Abbey” more closely with the dramatic monologue. To give the lines under discussion again:

While here I stand, not only with the sense
Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts
That in this moment there is life and food
For future years. And so I dare to hope,
Though changed, no doubt, from what I was when first
I came among these hills...

For Wordsworth, phrases like “but with,” “and so,” or “no doubt” guide the reader from one idea to the next, an effect reminiscent of the stacking of Greek particles in nearly innumerable combinations. “While” (line 63) may not give the reader as much concrete information as the “here I stand” that follows it, but it adds nuance and tone to the sentence, akin to the philosophical nuance Christopher Ricks, in his book *The Force of Poetry*, has discussed as arising from Wordsworth’s unusual—or “busy”—preposition usage.³⁶ Wordsworth’s prepositions, Ricks notes, are often employed in rich and counterintuitive ways, but thereby lend philosophical weight to seemingly insignificant words.

Extending that notion to Wordsworth’s English particles in these lines, “while” emphasizes the temporal present of the speaker as well as the simultaneous multiplicity of other temporal locations about to be discussed. Two present ideas follow—the “sense of present pleasure” and the “pleasing thoughts” that the present contains future

³⁵ Denniston, J.D. *The Greek Particles*, p. xxxix.

³⁶ John Jones, quoted in Ricks, Christopher. *The Force of Poetry*, p. 118.

sustenance. A contrast between the “sense” and “thoughts” is perhaps implied by “not only” and “but with”—one is an immediate sensation, while the latter is the more rational consideration of the thoughts’ later utility to the speaker. “And so” introduces the notion of causality and also the simultaneous return to the present and progression of the argument being made. “No doubt” is affirmative, though it refers to the notion of doubt even as it denies it; and “when first,” of course, takes the reader into past time—the temporal location shifts back five years, but, significantly, the location is the same, the stabilizing force of this incredibly mobile passage.

Viewing the numerous conjunctions of “Tintern Abbey” as akin to Greek particles also gives the reader greater insight into the “impassioned music of versification” that Wordsworth believed elevated the poem to the level of the ode. These particles, it is worth noting, often come at a point of stress in the line, lending them greater emphasis and musicality. In these lines alone, the particles “but” (l. 64), “so” (l. 66), “doubt” (l. 67), and the first syllable of “only” (l. 63) are emphasized, all falling right after the caesura in the line. While this level of metrical emphasis seems counterintuitive at first, as particles are small words, generally overlooked in analysis, the particles ultimately serve to describe the relationship between different ideas, their relative importance, and the speaker’s feelings about them—all crucial for the interpretation of a poem. While we must avoid over-equating English metrical stress with long and short vowels of Greek meter, it is worth noting that many of the most common Greek particles—*ἀλλὰ*, meaning “but,” *καί*, “and,” *μη*, “not,” *οὖν*, “therefore,” to name a few—and even some compound particles like *τοιγαροῦτοι* (“so then,” “therefore”) are naturally long (always metrically stressed) due to their diphthongs or “long” vowels. Pindar also sometimes

chooses to place particles in points of stress in the metrical line, as in the opening of Olympian Ode 1—the δε, “but,” is stressed, giving us something of the effect of “best is water, *but* gold...”. These tiny words, then, receive a level of stress in the Greek language in proportion to the richness of meaning they bring to the text, and Wordsworth brings something of that “impassioned music” to his own English particles.

The debt to Pindar in these lines is extremely heavy, but there are also important connections to be made to the Horatian ode; the tranquil landscape of “Tintern Abbey” is a natural extension of Horace’s idea of the *locus amoenus*.³⁷ Both authors retire to these spots for a sense of relief from the day-to-day concerns of city life, and for a connection with the divine, especially as a source of poetic inspiration. Whereas the location for Pindar is generally the loftiness of one of Greece’s ancient cities, Horace tells us in Ode 1.1 that “the cool grove and the light bands of nymphs with their satyrs”³⁸—the poet’s grove—separate him from the mass of men. His poetic talent is derived from his relationship to the grove wherein he receives not only relaxation but also the gifts of the muses—indeed, the poet is very much defined, for Horace, as one who is disposed to leisure and the enjoyment of nature. Moreover, we must note, a nature which is rural and

³⁷ Oliver Elton noted (*Survey of English Literature, 1780-1880*, p. 261, quoting Henry Francis Cary’s 1833 translation of Pindar) a possible reflection in Pindar of the *locus amoenus* idea in Nemean Ode 8, which includes the line “the simple path of life be mine.” However—difficulties of accepting any Pindaric claim of simplicity aside—the traditional Pindaric geography is that of the city, and indeed Nemean 8 states “I would live out my days...in mine own *city*” (Italics mine), undermining any link to rural localities.

³⁸ Horace 1.1, lines 30-32, my translation. The Latin (taken from the Loeb Classical Library, *Horace, Odes and Epodes*, p. 24) reads:

me gelidum nemus
Nympharumque leves cum Satyris chori
secernunt populo

humble, in contrast with the lofty philosophical thought that springs from reflection. Horace localizes the *locus amoenus*: in his “O fons Bandusiae” ode, translated by Wordsworth, Horace is discussing a very specific stream near his home, not unlike Wordsworth’s use of the Wye in “Tintern Abbey.”

A distinction must be drawn, however, between the two authors’ *loci amoeni*. Horace’s conception of the pleasant spot is generally tinged with eroticism: it is a place to bring a favorite wine and one’s current lover as well as the catalyst for poetry. For Wordsworth, on the other hand, the sexual element of the Horatian grove is replaced by “a sort of biblical depth and solemnity,” in Pater’s words (p. 133). The philosophical expansiveness of “Tintern Abbey” is a pleasure in itself for the Wordsworthian narrator, but we must take care to distinguish this distinctly cerebral and quasi-religious pleasure from the somewhat hedonistic elements of the Horatian *locus*.³⁹ The philosophical reflection of the narrator of “Tintern Abbey,” however, must also be observed in contrast with his image of himself as a more hedonistic youth five years earlier, whose love for nature “had no need of a remoter charm / By thought supplied.”

Wordsworth, like Horace, is experimenting with an act of translation: in “Tintern Abbey,” a meter more generally used for verse drama and English epic is adapted to the needs of a lyric poem. Horace generally adapted his meters from Greek lyric models, particularly those of Sappho and Alcaeus, while blank verse was a favorite metrical tool of some of the greatest English poets, particularly Shakespeare and Milton. “Tintern

³⁹ To condemn Horace’s version of the *locus amoenus* as irreligious would oversimplify the matter; both poets are concerned with pleasure and spirituality, but a loose distinction might assert that Horace finds—via his engagement with Epicurean values—spirituality in pleasures of the flesh, while Wordsworth finds pleasure in his spiritual connection with nature.

Abbey,” happily, retains some of the generic mixing implied by the history of its meter. Certainly there are aspects of the dramatic monologue in the speaker’s self-meditation, and yet Wordsworth also retains something of the epic spiritual expansiveness of *Paradise Lost*, while still fulfilling a lyric focus on imagery throughout the poem. This complex mix of resonances from different English generic conventions is integral to the “impassioned music of versification” that indicates the odic inclination of the poem. Furthermore, blank verse also implies a kind of “passionate sincerity,” which Pater asserts as the desired effect of Wordsworthian choices in favor of simplicity (p. 132).

The quick odic turns we observed in Pindar are also to some extent evident in Horace, although in Horatian odes these turns are most evident as thematic shifts, driven by the content of the poems rather than the syntactic use of particles. Horace opens his first book of odes with a long priamel addressed to his patron, Maecenas, reviewing the careers of charioteers, sailors, farmers, and others, turning stanza-by-stanza from one profession to the next, but ultimately negating all of these in favor of his profession as poet. Several of Horace’s early odes—notably Ode 1.4—involve the turning from winter to spring, and the reversals that the change of seasons entails—reminiscent, in many places, of the more exuberant pastoral imagery in Wordsworth’s great odes. Also relevant to Horace’s odic shifts are his poems related to quick turns of fate, and the need for the wise man to be prepared for them in advance. This category would include 1.11, in which Horace advises Leuconoe to “carpe diem,” since all mortals are unsure of what fate will mete out in the coming days, and 2.10, in which Horace urges his friend to obey the golden mean, or “auream...mediocritatem,” to avoid being destroyed by the tempestuous nature of the gods’ will. “Jupiter,” he says, “brings round the ugly winters; he also

removes them. If things are bad now, they will not always be so.”⁴⁰ These thematic turns, while not entirely akin to Pindar’s odic shifts facilitated by particles, are nevertheless indicative of the thread of antithesis throughout the odic form.

The psychological intensity of the Wordsworthian narrator as he turns from elation to despair, the embattled state in which he searches for transcendence, suggests clear parallels with the speaker of the Psalms. We might note those lines in particular when Wordsworth concludes that “neither evil tongues, / Rash judgments, nor he sneers of selfish men...Shall e’er prevail against us” (ll. 129-133). These words—in terms of their phrasing and the extreme conviction with which the speaker places himself in opposition to the evil person—strongly resemble the language of Psalm 50, for example, in which the psalmist says of an enemy, “Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit” (50:19). We see the same language employed by Milton, with a lovely chiasmus, in Book 7 of *Paradise Lost*: “though fallen on evil days, / on evil days though fallen, and evil tongues” (ll. 25-6). These words demonstrate something of the feeling of opposition of the Wordsworthian narrator, who, like the author of the Psalms, is alone in his attempts for communion with a higher moral power.

In comparing Wordsworth to the overtly religious authors of the Psalms and *Paradise Lost*, however, we must keep in mind the qualifier that for Wordsworth it is Nature, not God, which “ne’er did betray / The heart that loved her” (ll. 123-4), and to which he extends his “prayer” (l. 122). Wordsworth’s view of a uniting force, common to the earth and its creatures—“something far more deeply interfused,” which “rolls through all things” (ll. 97, 103)—would seem to be responsible for much of his characteristic

⁴⁰ Rudd (trans.), ll. 15-18.

vagueness, his own brand of obscurity. For while the psalmist can turn to the person of God in times of joy and sorrow, Wordsworth gives us the sense that his narrators are reaching toward something vague and unspecified.

While the Psalms might occasionally depict God as one who “shall come down like rain upon the mown grass” (72: 6)—recalling Pindar’s assessment that water is best of all things—the simile is a crucial division between the psalmist’s view and Wordsworth’s. The Psalms look to God as creator, protector, and judge, but, in any case, as a divine *personage*. For Wordsworth, one is unable to look heavenward or even at any one thing for a source of divinity, salvation, or punishment. What the Wordsworthian narrator seeks a connection with, rather, is something distilled throughout all of creation, the “round ocean and the living air, / And the blue sky, and in the mind of man” (“Tintern Abbey,” ll. 99-100). The polysyndeton of the lines lends them an expansiveness, a feeling of comprehensiveness, and the final element of the list features one of the busiest prepositions observed by Ricks, who noted that the dwelling of the spirit *in* the mind made the human mind seem “the darkest and deepest of continents.”⁴¹ For Wordsworth, this power is invested not in a personage, but rather as a kind of decentralized force, “a motion and a spirit” (l. 101). Much of Wordsworth’s vagueness, then, stems from this quality of interrelatedness of “things,” a word whose vagueness is, as Pater has pointed out, the product of “the unconscious mysticism of the Old English language itself” (p. 137)⁴²—though in Wordsworth’s case the hint of mysticism in his usage is certainly not unconscious. The force or spirit with which the Wordsworthian narrator seeks communion is so essential, so basic, and yet so all-encompassing, that it requires the very

⁴¹ Ibid, 122.

⁴² See Adam Potkay, “Wordsworth and the Ethics of Things,” p. 133.

simplest words in the English language to invoke, and therefore defies exact description, resulting in Wordsworth's semantic vagueness. He knows what he seeks, but his attempts to translate his feelings into words acquire obscurity because, in order to describe the force he means, he must encompass "all thinking things, all objects of all thought" ("Tintern Abbey," l. 102)—the Horatian simplicity of his words, we might say, breeds philosophical complexity or even confusion.

iv: The Immortality Ode

Although Wordsworth's great "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," first published in 1807 simply as "Ode," is explicitly called an ode, critics have been less sure about its generic status than "Tintern Abbey." M.H. Abrams' seminal 1965 essay "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric" sought to reconcile the generic origins of the Immortality Ode and "Tintern Abbey" with other significant Romantic lyric poems, especially those by Samuel Taylor Coleridge.⁴³ Other scholars have associated the Immortality Ode with the generic conventions of tragedy,⁴⁴ rhetoric,⁴⁵ and georgic;⁴⁶ Sitterson has

⁴³ Abrams, M.H. "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric." In "Structure and Style," Abrams argues that "Tintern Abbey," the Immortality Ode, and many significant long poems by the likes of Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats were not odes or ode-like lyric poems but rather exemplars of an independent genre, the Greater Romantic Lyric, which is, for Abrams, a poem in which "the speaker begins with a description of the landscape...[which] evokes a varied but integral process of memory....In the course of this meditation the lyric speaker achieves an insight" (pp. 527-8).

⁴⁴ Milstead, John. "Tragedy in the Intimations Ode." The generally optimistic tone of the Ode's final lines (especially ll. 193-4, "I love the Brooks which down their channels fret, / Even more than when I tripped lightly as they") serves to significantly undermine Milstead's thesis.

credited Wordsworth's great Ode with "generic comprehensiveness"⁴⁷—a fusion of the modes of elegy, pastoral, epic, song, and other influences. Something about the Ode, then—which Wordsworth called his "grand ode"⁴⁸—inspires scholars perennially to comment on its generic complexity and myriad influences. Wordsworth himself, we should note, while he clearly viewed the poem as an ode, and recognized its centrality among his poetic works, still had difficulty classifying it, "consistently placing the work at the end of his collected poetry, usually unsubsumed by any category."⁴⁹ I will argue, however, that the Ode constitutes not so much a break from the odic form into other generic influences as a culmination of the odic form due to its mixture of, and expansion on, earlier odic precedents.

Here, in contrast to the blank verse of "Tintern Abbey," Wordsworth utilizes the irregular stanzas, with highly variable line lengths, of some earlier Pindaric imitators, especially Cowley, who used a similar structure for his translations from the Greek. Wordsworth himself attributed the choice of irregular stanzas to "an aspiration after a state of freedom beyond what a succession of regular Stanzas will allow."⁵⁰ Vestiges of a strophic structure are also evident, as Curran observes. He asserts that

⁴⁵ Chayes, Irene H. "Rhetoric as Drama: An Approach to the Romantic Ode." She seems to mean, specifically, the dramatic monologue.

⁴⁶ Manning, Peter J. "Wordsworth's Intimations Ode and Its Epigraphs."

⁴⁷ Sitterson, Joseph C., Jr., "The Genre and Place of the Intimations Ode."

⁴⁸ Wordsworth, William. *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, Vol. II*, p. 334.

⁴⁹ Sitterson, p. 27. N.B. also Frances Ferguson's statement that "My Heart Leaps Up," from which the Ode's final epigraph is drawn, was "the first poem in Wordsworth's collections," and that the lines from that poem used as the Ode's epigraph from 1815 onwards, "link that 'first' with this 'last,' the 'Immortality Ode,' as if to make explicit the poetic attempt to turn the mind back and around upon itself" (*Wordsworth: Language as Counter-Spirit*, p. 98).

⁵⁰ Wordsworth, *Letters*, Vol. V, p. 284 (quoted in Sitterson, p. 27).

the strophe is to be found in stanzas 1-4,⁵¹ the antistrophe in 5-9, and the epode in the final two stanzas (p. 78).⁵² In this way, Curran outlines a structure in which the first portion poses a question—“whither has it fled, the visionary gleam?”—which is answered by the second section, where we learn that the gleam fled with the onset of adulthood; the third section moves toward an ultimately optimistic conclusion—that the period of idealized childhood is still accessible to us in memory, and in fact we have gained new and multifaceted insights into the world in the process of growing up.

Like “Tintern Abbey,” the Immortality Ode is also a poem that gives a central place to issues of time and remembrance, particularly separation from an earlier time. The greater scope of the Immortality Ode, however, is immediately apparent. “Tintern Abbey” looks back upon a period five years earlier, which is—in some degree, at least—recoverable by the common location shared by the two instances; when the narrator returns to the banks of the Wye, for example, “the picture of the mind revives again” (l. 62). Though “that time is past” (l. 84), and cannot be recovered, it is possible for him to eliminate the physical distance between himself and the place of his inspiration, and the poem that results is proof of the potency of this solution to the

⁵¹ Although note, as Magnuson’s study *Coleridge and Wordsworth: A Lyrical Dialogue* demonstrates in detail, the temporal lag between the composition of the first four stanzas of Wordsworth’s Ode, and his highly influential reading of Coleridge’s “Dejection: An Ode,” which helps Wordsworth to formulate his answer to the question posed by the initial stanzas of the Ode.

⁵² While the opening of Stanza 10 has a kind of resonant finality to it, we should also note the much greater tonal shift between Stanzas 8 and 9—from “Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!” to “O joy!”.

problem of separation from the earlier and in many ways simpler time which serves as the motivating force of the poem.

In the Immortality Ode, however, the gulf has broadened between the narrator and the period in the past which he is trying, through the poem, to recover—here, a time when he lived in an inspired state, as the appellations “Mighty prophet! Seer blest!” (l. 115) make clear. In fact, the gap has increased from five years to nearly three decades, if we consider the distance between “a six years’ Darling of a pigmy size” (l. 87), and the 34-year-old Wordsworth of the first completed manuscript of the poem.⁵³ Because this distance is essentially temporal, not physical, it is also impossible for the poet to bridge this gap by returning to a specific place, as he did in “Tintern Abbey.”⁵⁴ The poet does, however, hint at a sort of metaphysical distance between the narrator of the present and his enlightened childhood state, sometimes envisioned as a “shore” which adults “have sight of” (l. 164), and can “in a moment travel thither” (l. 166), but not, presumably, “sport upon the shore” with the children there, only “see” them (l. 167).⁵⁵

⁵³ Magnuson, Paul. *Coleridge and Wordsworth: A Lyrical Dialogue*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988, p. 279.

⁵⁴ Also, we should note the absence of a social connection in the Immortality Ode: whereas in “Tintern Abbey” Dorothy, of whom the poem says “in thy voice I catch / The language of my former heart,” served to alleviate his lack of connection to his former state, and promised a method of return in the future through their shared experience. In the early stanzas of the Immortality Ode, on the other hand, Wordsworth is surrounded by a festival of the natural world, but oddly isolated from the “joyous song” of the birds, the “blessed creatures” and “the call / Ye to *each other* make” (emphasis mine), but unable to fully join in, absorbed by his “thought of grief.”

⁵⁵ At first glance, we might note the similarities between the Immortality Ode and Thomas Gray’s 1747 “Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College.” Gray also places youth on a pedestal, looking longingly back from the altered world of adulthood. But, while both poems reflect the different ways of seeing experienced by young people and by adults, important differences must be noted between the two poems. The youths in

The Ode, indeed, fixates on the idea of location, on trying to physically breach the gap between the speaker and the metaphysical, or celestial, home. In Stanza I, for example, Wordsworth tells us, “turn wheresoe’er I may... The things which I have seen I now can see no more” (ll. 7-9). Stanza II echoes the sentiment: “where’er I go... there hath past away a glory from the earth” (ll. 17-18). The quick turns of the odic form, indeed, manifest themselves in the proliferation of directional language employed in the Ode to locate the self in relation to the celestial home from which the narrator has proceeded—almost to provide a grounding of the metaphysical journey detailed here. The narrator of the poem knows only that his soul “hath had elsewhere its setting, / And cometh from afar”—the vagueness of “elsewhere” and “afar” stand in marked contrast to the child who “beholds the light, and whence it flows” and then, with geographical exactness, “journeys eastward” as he ages. Whereas “Tintern Abbey” coped with the distance between past and present by grounding the poem in the individual’s personal time and space, the Ode re-problematizes space, attempting to plot temporal personal development in terms of physical space.

question are, first of all, radically different: Gray’s are youths in earnest, pubescent young men in preparatory school. Wordsworth, on the other hand, when he asserts in his epigraph to the Immortality Ode that “the child is the father of the man,” is talking about young children, not youths.

Gray’s poem also draws heavily on the Classical adulation of the clean, unspoiled beauty of the pubescent male form. Wordsworth, in the end, makes a much more radical statement in his assertion that a small child has advantages over a full-grown man; this idea would become one of the hallmarks of Romantic thought, and, unlike Gray’s ode, in which we detect an echo of Pindar’s praise of the beauty and focus of young athletes, Wordsworth has no obvious antecedents for this aspect of his ode—except within Wordsworth’s own poems, some of which (such as “The Idiot Boy” or “We Are Seven”) hint at this philosophy. We should also note the marked shift in tone from Wordsworth’s own views in “Tintern Abbey,” where, for example, he mentions “the coarser pleasures of my boyish days” (l. 73). The Immortality Ode would tend to see the child not as “coarser,” but quite the opposite: rather, “thou best Philosopher” (l. 111)

Erik Gray would have us believe that this distance is in some sense imaginary—that Wordsworth is in fact experiencing nostalgia as “the pleasurable impression that something one has never known is in fact merely forgotten.”⁵⁶ However, the poem suggests that this sensation is far from pleasurable, since it prompts the wrenching realization of the narrator’s separation from his earlier state, and Wordsworth himself denied that the Immortality Ode is, as Gray suggests, based on imagined, not real memories. “A Reader,” Wordsworth tells us, “who has not a vivid recollection of these feelings having existed in his mind in childhood cannot understand that poem.”⁵⁷ He has not *forgotten* the sensations, as Gray suggests, but rather retains a “vivid recollection” of them, while being painfully aware that they are no longer present.⁵⁸

This feeling of irreconcilable distance between oneself and an idealized period in the past has significant roots in Pindar and the Neoclassical Ode. In *Agonistic Poetry*, William Fitzgerald notes that “in the mid-eighteenth century the Pindaric comes to be associated with...the period’s anxiety about the relation between the glorious poetic past and a present perceived to be incapable of matching that achievement.”⁵⁹ For Pindar, this period was the “golden, mythical past”⁶⁰ of heroes. In the eighteenth century, Thomas

⁵⁶ Gray, Erik. “Nostalgia, the Classics, and the Intimations Ode: Wordsworth’s Forgotten Education,” p. 187.

⁵⁷ Wordsworth, *Letters*, vol. III: *The Middle Years, Part II, 1812-1820*, p. 189.

⁵⁸ We should also note, though, the idea of generalization here: Wordsworth begins with an individual dilemma about his own life and generalizes both the dilemma and its solution to all men. Carol Maddison expresses a similar idea as a central tenet of the odic form. “The ode,” she says, “has always had something of the priest-prophet about it. When a poet has chosen to write an ode he has always been to some extent conscious that he is addressing the group... and that he has insight into the meaning of individual events that form part of a universal continuum” (*Apollo and the Nine*, p. 4).

⁵⁹ Fitzgerald, William. *Agonistic Poetry: The Pindaric Mode in Pindar, Horace, Holderlin, and the English Ode*, p. 73.

⁶⁰ Fitzgerald, p. 75.

Gray looks back upon Pindar himself with a similar emotion when he asserts in “The Progress of Poesy” that his own poetic works will be forever “beneath the Good” of the “Theban eagle” who sails with “supreme dominion” over the meager works of the eighteenth century (ll. 123, 115-16). Wordsworth, however, personalizes time in the Immortality Ode as he personalized location in Tintern Abbey: the idealized, inspired, and godlike time observed by Wordsworth is in fact his narrator’s own childhood, and in the process of his meditation, he comes to the conclusion that “another race hath been, and other palms are won,” mirroring the heroic language of Pindar and his English imitators.⁶¹

He resolves the discontinuity between past inspiration and the present by concluding that, in fact, the nuanced inspirational rewards of mature existence—the “sober colouring from an eye / That hath kept watch o’er man’s mortality” (ll. 198-9)—which seemed at first to have fallen off from earlier perfection, are greater than the previous, idealized state. This bold claim—which G.W. Knight sums up as the notion that “in some sense the pilgrimage into mortality is necessary and just”—serves as an important resolution to the problem of an intimidating past for Pindar and later English odists. Wordsworth ultimately concludes that there are benefits to life after the golden age of the past—which may, indeed, have a depth and richness unavailable to the child; an idea that Pindar or Hesiod, for example, writing about the decay of man from the semi-divine Golden Age, or even Gray looking back upon the Greeks, could not have espoused. Wordsworth chooses, instead, to see this falling-off from a pure and unalloyed

⁶¹ In particular, this image is reminiscent of Pindar’s frequent comparison of his poetic feats to the athletes his odes celebrate, as, for example, in his Second Isthmian Ode: “May I make a long throw with the discus and cast the / javelin as far as / Xenokrates surpassed all men” (ll. 35-7).

period of life as an experience which does have benefits and even advantages over the earlier period upon which he reflects.

Wordsworth's understanding of mortal life as having benefits of nuanced understanding over the idealized past also manifests itself in the language and grammatical thinking of the Ode. As Wordsworth's use of particles in "Tintern Abbey" to limit, link, and transition between ideas mirrored the men/de structure of Greek syntax, the Immortality Ode utilizes limiting adverbs to express the more nuanced world-view achieved by the narrator at the end of the poem. I would argue, with Peter Manning, that the poem's original epigraph, "paulo maiora canamus," aptly captures the philosophical complexity of Wordsworth's Ode.⁶² The word "paulo" strikes the reader oddly in this three-word phrase—not "let us sing of loftier things," "maiora canamus," but "*paulo* maiora canamus," "let us sing of things *a little* better." The "paulo" limits and specifies an otherwise boundless and idealistic phrase—it draws it into the realm of the realistic and achievable. A similar process occurs throughout the Immortality Ode—the narrator, who has left a boundless and idealized state, gradually comes to the realization that his seemingly mundane earthly existence actually provides fodder for a more nuanced view of the world.

The role of "paulo" in the poem's original epigraph mirrors a number of similarly limiting adverbs that occur at significant places in the Ode. The speaker addresses the natural world, saying that "I only have relinquished one delight / To live beneath your

⁶² Peter Manning has observed in his article "Wordsworth's Intimations Ode and its Epigraphs" that the "child is the father of the man" epigraph of 1815 onwards attempts to neutralize the family and philosophical tensions evident the Ode. Manning asserts the same about the longer version of the title, which, he believes, offers clarity at the cost of the more Wordsworthian vagueness implied by calling the poem simply "Ode."

more habitual sway” (Italics mine)—the sway here is not wholly, but rather *more*, habitual. At the poem’s conclusion, “the meanest flower that blows can give / Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears”; not merely “thoughts that lie too deep for tears,” but the qualifying language “often.” He describes the weight of custom in Stanza VIII as “heavy as frost, and deep almost as life”—again, the poet feels the need to offer a qualifying adverb in what would otherwise be a strong declarative statement. This insertion of qualifying or complexifying words, I would argue, reflects the more complex view of the narrator at the end of the poem, who has realized the benefits of his mortality on his richness of perception—the “sober colouring” with which he is able to view the world, allowing him a less idealized but more multifaceted view of the world. And, likewise, in the language of the poem, the unqualified declarative statements so memorable in the early part of the poem—“I again am strong,” “There was a time,” “The things which I have seen I now can see no more”—give way to these nuanced, qualified statements in the poem’s final stanzas, reflecting the transition of the narrator’s worldview dramatized by the Ode. We might read these limiting adverbs in relation to the “obstinate questionings / Of sense and outward things” Wordsworth praises in the Ode—the narrator finds himself more open to complex, non-absolute statements.

The philosophical truths found in the Immortality Ode are, like those of Pindar, often fundamentally obscure. As we might be prompted to ask why Pindar should link water and gold in an apparently antithetical relationship, we might also ask why Wordsworth should offer benediction to things which are not most worthy to be blest. Curran’s statement, then, that the Romantic ode is based upon a Horatian voice in a Pindaric form cannot be more than partially true. While Wordsworth lacks

the highly allusive mythological references found in Pindar, there is a notable obscurity in some of the philosophical ideas Wordsworth conveys in his major odes. We could even say that in many ways the Immortality Ode is largely a history of partial understandings; indeed, Wordsworth calls the Ode his

song of thanks and praise;
for those obstinate questionings...
Fallings from us, vanishings,
Blank misgivings...
Those shadowy recollections
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain-light of all our day.
--ll. 141-152

When Wordsworth tells us that his narrator in the Immortality Ode has “perpetual benediction,” though “not indeed / For that which is most worthy to be blest” (ll. 135-6), he conjures images of the puzzling truisms sometimes employed by Pindar.⁶³ It is these “blank misgivings,” then, which are in some sense at the heart of the poem—indeed, they are positioned in these lines as a kind of addressee for the Ode. The situation becomes even more blurred when we learn that the source of “perpetual benediction” for Wordsworth’s narrator is actually “those obstinate questionings,” “fallings from us, vanishings; / Blank misgivings” (ll. 142-5). At the beginning of the poem we might find this praise paradoxical or even ironic, given the poem’s concern with the “visionary gleam”—with light, with perfect or celestial vision—it strikes us as a grim and perhaps contradictory thought that “shadowy recollections” should function as “the fountain-light of all our day.” By the end of the poem, though, the paradox elegantly

⁶³ For examples of Pindar’s gnomic style, see such examples as Pythian Ode 4, ll. 107-8: “σμικρος εν σμικροις, μεγας εν μεγαλοις / εσσομαι,” “I will be small in small things, great among great” (Lattimore’s translation, p. 60).

resolves itself: the speaker comes to the conclusion that his awareness of mortality, of “the clouds that gather round the setting sun” (l. 197), of partial or obscured light, is itself an illumination that allows him to perceive an added complexity to the things he sees, rendering even “the meanest flower that blows” profoundly moving.⁶⁴ The juxtaposition of light and obscurity, as in the image of the setting sun surrounded by clouds, add richer, if more somber, layers of meaning than were available to the speaker earlier in his life.

The irony associated with this kind of paradoxical idea about light—for example, that obscurity can itself be illuminating—is a rich vein in the works of earlier odists. Dryden, for example, says of God in his long poem *The Hind and the Panther* (ll. 66-8) that

Thy throne is darkness in the abyss of light,
A blaze of glory that forbids the sight.
O teach me to believe thee thus concealed.

Here, light is itself an obscuring force, and furthermore a method of concealment for the divine. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton’s God lives “in unapproached light” (l. 4), which suggests the idea of *unapproachable* light because of its brilliance.⁶⁵ However, other texts express a similarly paradoxical but opposite viewpoint: that, as Psalm 36 tells us, “in thy

⁶⁴ Another Pindaric paradox is evident in Wordsworth’s handling of light here. As Simon Jarvis points out (*Wordsworth’s Philosophic Song*, p. 204), the line in which the light of childhood “fades into the light of common day” “feels surprising, because the expected completion of the gradual darkening....does not occur. Instead light fades into light.”

⁶⁵ Images of light figure significantly throughout other Miltonic works as well: “On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity” (1629), a hallmark of the ode’s formation in English, for example, reiterates the Christian narrative of Christ’s triumph in terms of light and obscurity. Milton here suggests that Christ’s triumph is not so much over the blackness of evil as an almost Pindaric dimness: the “shady gloom” (l. 77), the “twilight” of Classical paganism (l. 88), the “temples dim” of false gods (l. 198), and the “dusky eyn” (l. 223) of the overpowered Osiris. The ode does not imply that the world lived in complete darkness without Christ, but rather that humans saw things indistinctly. The coming of the Christ child is a perfection of ways of seeing, and Christ a being of perfect clarity in a world which would otherwise be half-lit, clouded, vague.

light shall we see light” (36:9)—that light somehow renders *itself* visible, that light can itself be not only the source of illumination, but the thing illuminated by light.

Lionel Trilling observed in his pivotal 1942 essay that Wordsworth’s Immortality Ode is “incidentally a poem about optics and then, inevitably, about epistemology; it is concerned with ways of seeing, and then with ways of knowing.”⁶⁶ While Trilling sees the Ode’s connections with optics as incidental, however, images of light and seeing are central features in the Pindaric and “Hebrew,” or psalmic, ode, and offer a crucial link between Wordsworth and these antecedents. In Pindar, we are bombarded with images of light and of brightness, which are often the poet’s highest praise. In the First Olympian Ode, quoted above, we might note that the delicate link between the water, gold, and the sun is that all three are sparkling, bright. Likewise, Wordsworth values highly those things which are bright—the Immortality Ode is largely a search to recover the “glory” which has “pass’d away...from the earth” (l. 18).

The Psalms, often cited as a major influence in the formation of the eighteenth century ode, are generally overlooked in relation to the Romantic ode, and Wordsworth’s odes in particular. However, the psalmist mirrors the Immortality Ode’s search for vision and truth in significant ways. The author of Psalm 13 expresses doubt about how long God will “hide thy face from me” (13:1), expressing the fear, also evident in Wordsworth, that the crucial truth is being masked or obscured from the narrator. Likewise, the psalmist tells us elsewhere that “mine eyes fail while I wait for my God” (69:3), echoing the feeling of blindness in Wordsworth’s Immortality Ode. “Mine eye,” he says, “mourneth by reason of affliction: LORD, I have called daily upon thee” (88:9).

⁶⁶ Trilling, p. 51.

He also tells us in Psalm 6 that his eye “is consumed because of grief; it waxeth old” (6: 7). At points, the psalmist wishes that God would bring punishment on enemies and unrighteous people by making them as blind as he sometimes feels—“Let their eyes be darkened,” he writes, “that they see not” (69: 23)—to be unable to see God is one of the most severe punishments evident in these verses. This sense of searching doubt, and of trying to penetrate that which is invisible or (like God) unknowable for the narrator, closely resembles the feelings of uncertainty felt by the Wordsworthian narrator at the loss of the “visionary gleam” of his true sight. The attempts of both characters to penetrate the fog of blindness, to see what is obscured, result in alternating periods of disappointment and exultation.

The psalmist also voices similar feelings of praise and joy to Wordsworth’s when he experiences the clarity of sight that comes with the nearness and favor of God. He expresses confidence in Psalm 18 that God “wilt light my candle: the LORD my God will enlighten my darkness” (18: 28); “with thee,” he says, “is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light” (36:9). Here in particular, Wordsworth echoes the phrasing of the psalmist: “those first affections,” the divine echoes apparent to the young child, are, for Wordsworth, “the fountain light of all our day” (“Immortality Ode,” ll. 149-152). In a period of faith in the salvation of God, the psalmist tells us that “my eyes are ever toward the LORD” (25: 15). We also catch a glimpse of Wordsworthian optimism when the psalmist writes with confidence that “weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning” (30: 5). “Joy” and “glory,” it is worth noting, are key words in the Psalms that would see further employment and development in Wordsworth’s major odes. “Glory” in particular carries the meaning of splendor or majesty, and, therefore,

connotations of light; the Oxford English Dictionary notes that “glory” may also refer to a corona or halo of light—a sense, in fact, utilized by Dryden in his translation of Virgil’s *Georgics*.⁶⁷

C.S. Lewis, in his essay “The Weight of Glory,” sees two possible meanings of the word glory: the first, fame or renown, he finds sinful, and the second, “luminosity,” he finds “ridiculous”: “Who,” he asks, “wishes to become a kind of living electric light bulb?”⁶⁸ Glory in its biblical sense, however, is a term deeply rooted in connotations of light, being most often a rendering of the Hebrew word *kabowd*, meaning most nearly splendor or radiance—specifically, the radiance of God’s majesty when he manifests himself on Earth.⁶⁹ In the wake of “the glory and the dream,” the Wordsworthian narrator remains obsessed by the “dim and faint” reflections, which are all that remain of his temporary enlightenment. The latter word is not used lightly, for the Wordsworthian narrator is always preoccupied with his attempts to see beyond what is apparent, “the fever of the world,” as he says in “Tintern Abbey” (l. 54), conjuring images of delirious visions that prevent his narrator from seeing the truth. And knowing the truth for Wordsworth is usually couched in terms of light, of clarity of seeing—that “visionary gleam,” as he terms it in the *Immortality Ode* (l. 56.).

⁶⁷ The seeming stars fall headlong from the skies,
And, shooting through the darkness, gild the night
With sweeping glories, and long trails of light.
--*Georgics I*, ll. 502-4.

From Virgil, *Works*. Trans. John Dryden, p. 111.

⁶⁸ Lewis, C.S. *The Weight of Glory*, p. 36.

⁶⁹ Clines, David J.A., ed. *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew, Vol. IV.*, p. 353. See especially Exodus 33:18-22, in which Moses begs for God to “shew me thy glory” (Ex. 33:18).

So, while Wordsworth himself equates birth to “a sleep and a forgetting” (l. 58), we might connect Wordsworth’s sentiments more closely with dimming of the sight. Growing up is, for Wordsworth, the descent into blindness, recalling Milton’s Samson, who, blinded and locked in a dark prison, bemoans his lost sight as “to live a life half dead, a living death” (l. 100). The acknowledgement that the narrator of the Immortality Ode is blind to the “celestial light” (“Immortality Ode,” l. 4) which used to be apparent to him, then, leads to a dilemma about what is known, or knowable. Here, we approach the dimness of the famed Pindaric obscurity. “Those obstinate questionings / Of sense and outward things” (l. 142-3) are the narrator’s only remnant of sight now that the clarity of his childhood visions has departed. The Wordsworthian narrator experiences moments of sublime oneness with the universe and nature, but he is plagued by doubts at many points in the odes, fumbling in the dark for an ultimate meaning which he senses but cannot fully grasp, reach, or see. This lends a semblance of meaning to the paradox of almost Pindaric complexity that lies in the assertion that “those shadowy recollections...are yet a master light of all our seeing” (l. 150-3). The grown man is impaired by both the dimness of memory and the frailty of his own failing sight, his growing inability to “see into the life of things.”⁷⁰

Nicola Zoe Trott, in her piece on “Wordsworth, Milton, and the Inward Light,” asserts that “the larger movement of [the Ode]...is from outer ‘glory’ to inner ‘light.’”⁷¹ Furthermore, she sees this transition in terms of the failed revolutionary ideals of the

⁷⁰ Jacques Derrida, in his essay “The White Mythology,” asserts that “natural light, and all the axioms it brings into our field of vision, is never subjected to the most radical doubt. The latter unfolds *in* doubt” (p. 267). Wordsworth’s statement is in many ways the opposite of this assertion—doubt is itself a guide, a light, in a sightless world.

⁷¹ Nicola Zoe Trott, “Wordsworth, Milton, and the Inward Light,” p. 117.

Romantic era: “the Immortality Ode,” she asserts, “marks out [Wordsworth’s] path towards a dingy status quo.”⁷² Harold Bloom agrees: “Wordsworth’s movement to the interior...ended in defeat, with the light of imagination dying into the light of another day”⁷³ I would argue, however, that the Immortality Ode is not fundamentally a poem that moves from the outward to the inward spheres. Rather, the poem’s narrator moves from isolated introspection about his personal life, from gazing inward—“to me alone there came a thought of grief” (l. 22)—*outward*, to the choral “we” that dominates Stanza V and, in three final stanzas, alternates with the first person. In other words, I believe Wordsworth introduces the poem with a personal problem in one man’s life, but ends with a universal solution to that problem, affirming the value of “the human heart by which we live” (l. 201). Certainly Wordsworth’s narrator never recovers the glory that “hath passed away,”⁷⁴ which Bloom and Trott see as grounds to assess his mission a failure. Simon Jarvis, too, ultimately concludes that at the end of the Ode, with the narrator “longing for bliss,” “no progress has been made.”⁷⁵ Rather than viewing the poem as a failed quest to recover that glory, however, I would say that the poem opens with a problem—the narrator’s “thought of grief”—which, over the course of the poem, Wordsworth resolves for himself and for the human community at large, concluding that man’s mortality adds richness and depth of feeling to our experience of the world, that, furthermore, the present has real and definite advantages over the idealized past—and that, in these terms, Wordsworth’s quest in the Immortality Ode is a successful one, and

⁷² Trott, p. 118.

⁷³ Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company*, p. 2.

⁷⁴ Although N.B. Wordsworth’s 1818 “Composed Upon an Evening of Extraordinary Splendour and Beauty,” in which “the light / full early lost” shines again for a moment, “by miracle restored” before the “visionary splendour fades” once again.

⁷⁵ Jarvis, p. 213.

its result hardly a “dingy status quo.” Rather, he leaves behind the pure light of his childhood understanding and learns to appreciate both light and obscurity in their odic alternation—the beauty of the world is heightened by the “sober coloring” his eye allows him to perceive in juxtaposition to the “light of common day.”

v. Conclusions

It has become obligatory, in studies of the ode, to acknowledge the inadequacy of existing definitions of the odic form and, immediately afterwards, to hazard one’s own definition, however vague or excessively reductive⁷⁶ it may be. Such attempts at definition and simultaneous admissions of the difficulty of defining the ode usually open these critical studies. Exploration of potential definitions generally yields the result that the ode is a genre that—particularly when we consider English examples as well as their classical antecedents—has been practiced in different forms more often than it has followed specific guidelines. John Jump quotes a definition from an older edition of the OED: “a rimed (rarely unrimed) lyric, often in the form of an address; generally dignified or exalted in subject, feeling, style, but sometimes...simple and familiar.”⁷⁷ Compare the OED’s current definition:

a lyric poem, typically one in the form of an address to a particular subject, written in varied or irregular metre. Traditionally, an ode...rarely exceeded 150 lines and could be much shorter. The metre in longer odes is usually irregular (e.g. Dryden Alexander’s Feast, Wordsworth Intimations of Immortality), or

⁷⁶ See Shuster, George, *The English Ode from Milton to Keats*, p. 12: “A lyric poem derived, either directly or indirectly, from Pindaric models.”

⁷⁷ Jump, John D. *The Ode*, p. 4.

consists of stanzas regularly varied (e.g. Gray's Pindaric Odes), but some shorter odes consist of uniform stanzas (e.g. Gray's shorter odes).⁷⁸

The first definition, we see, is heavily dependent on the qualifying adverbs “rarely,” “often,” “generally,” and “sometimes.” The newer definition is marginally more specific, but its attempt to narrow the definition is met with renewed exceptions—it asserts that the ode “rarely [exceeds] 150 lines,” but proceeds to cite the Immortality Ode and “Alexander’s Feast,” both of which are well over the 150-line mark.

The ode is, much like any genre—though perhaps more so because of its lack of obvious formal commonalities—an accumulated tradition of poets who draw on influences and, in some cases, innovate upon them, and so I have chosen to proceed with my analysis of the poems themselves, reserving little space, until now, to reflect at all upon the ode as genre. When Abraham Cowley published his collection of Pindarick odes (1656), his preface notes that he does not aim “to let the reader know precisely what [Pindar] spoke,” but rather “what was his way and manner of speaking.”⁷⁹ Even in this, one of the earliest attempts to bring Pindar into English verse, there is something of gut feeling about one’s conception of the ode—we agree that it has a certain “way and manner of speaking,” but hesitate to further qualify that statement.

In furthering the as-yet problematic definition of the form, however, I would assert that the ode is characterized by its complex use of antithesis. The ode functions largely by introducing one idea and turning to an opposite, contradictory, or paradoxical image or statement—I see this use of antithesis both in the original triadic structure of the

⁷⁸ Compare, for example, the relatively cut-and-dry definition of the sonnet: “A piece of verse (properly expressive of one main idea) consisting of fourteen decasyllabic lines, with rimes arranged according to one or other of certain definite schemes.”

⁷⁹ Cowley, Abraham. *The Works of Mr. A. Cowley*, p. 121.

Pindaric ode, and in the quick turns of mood, tone, time, and other factors (such as light and obscurity), which have been employed by classical and English odists, The ode is characterized by these (often rapid) shifts in emphasis more significantly than has been generally recognized by existing definitions of the form. Wordsworth, I believe, was responsible for employing this element of the odic form—which had seen considerable emphasis in Classical examples of the ode—more so than his English predecessors, a strain of his influence which has yet to be examined at length.

Wordsworth's odes, I believe, take much of their power and significance from the poet's ability to fuse elements of the Greek, Latin, and Hebrew odic traditions in novel ways while also incorporating and considerably expanding upon English examples that preceded him. He engages with Pindaric models in his use of quick turns in time, his frequent use of philosophically paradoxical and obscure phrases, his adaptation of English particles to mirror the $\mu\epsilon\nu / \delta\epsilon$ idea of Greek grammar, and his often paradoxical employment of the ideas of light and darkness. From Horace, he takes pastoral imagery, particularly the idea of the *locus amoenus*, which he personalizes, as well as a deceptively simple vocabulary that invites complexity of interpretation. He also adapts the Psalms' focus on an embattled narrator searching for transcendence and communion with the divine throughout alternating periods of elation and despair—and, of course, a great deal of light imagery, much of it dealing with light as a metaphor for truth, and an experience of God based on optical imagery.

Wordsworth's great odes are, of course, more than a mere patchwork of influences. He is not content to simply import imagery and motifs from other poets—rather, he combines these influences in a distillation unique to himself, and, as I have

tried to show throughout this piece, he constantly innovates upon those influences to forge new sentiments that would be, in many cases, the hallmarks of Romantic thought. He brings the mythic time and space of Classical antiquity into the personal timeline and resonant locations of his own life. He opens the Immortality Ode with the bold claim that “the child is the father of the man,” but ultimately resolves the loss of his earlier visionary state by acknowledging—and even celebrating—the more nuanced vision of the world he is now able to experience. He suggests that our earthly vision is blindness, but concludes that the dim, partial sight of adulthood is itself a kind of enlightenment—affirming the power of the juxtaposition of light and obscurity which he has been developing throughout his major odes.

As may have had no trivial influence
 On that best portion of a good man's life;
 His little, nameless, unremembered acts 35
 Of kindness and of love. Nor less, I trust,
 To them I may have owed another gift,
 Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
 In which the burthen of the mystery,
 In which the heavy and the weary weight 40
 Of all this unintelligible world
 Is lighten'd:—that serene and blessed mood,
 In which the affections gently lead us on,
 Until, the breath of this corporeal frame,
 And even the motion of our human blood 45
 Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
 In body, and become a living soul:
 While with an eye made quiet by the power
 Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
 We see into the life of things.

If this 50

Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft,
 In darkness, and amid the many shapes
 Of joyless day-light; when the fretful stir
 Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,
 Have hung upon the beatings of my heart, 55
 How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee
 O sylvan Wye! Thou wanderer through the woods,
 How often has my spirit turned to thee!

And now, with gleams of half-extinguish'd thought,
 With many recognitions dim and faint, 60
 And somewhat of a sad perplexity,
 The picture of the mind revives again:
 While here I stand, not only with the sense
 Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts
 That in this moment there is life and food 65
 For future years. And so I dare to hope,
 Though changed, no doubt, from what I was, when first
 I came among these hills; when like a roe
 I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides
 Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams, 70
 Wherever nature led; more like a man
 Flying from something that he dreads, than one
 Who sought the thing he loved. For nature then
 (The coarser pleasures of my boyish days,
 And their glad animal movements all gone by,) 75
 To me was all in all.—I cannot paint

What then I was. The sounding cataract
 Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
 The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
 Their colours and their forms, were then to me 80
 An appetite: a feeling and a love,
 That had no need of a remoter charm,
 By thought supplied, or any interest
 Unborrowed from the eye.—That time is past,
 And all its aching joys are now no more, 85
 And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
 Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur: other gifts
 Have followed, for such loss, I would believe,
 Abundant recompense. For I have learned
 To look on nature, not as in the hours 90
 Of thoughtless youth, but hearing oftentimes
 The still, sad music of humanity,
 Not harsh nor grating, though of ample power
 To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
 A presence that disturbs me with the joy 95
 Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
 Of something far more deeply interfused,
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
 And the round ocean, and the living air,
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man, 100
 A motion and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
 A lover of the meadows and the woods,
 And mountains; and of all that we behold 105
 From this green earth; of all the mighty world
 Of eye and ear, both what they half-create,
 And what perceive; well pleased to recognize
 In nature and the language of the sense,
 The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse, 110
 The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
 Of all my moral being.

Nor, perchance,
 If I were not thus taught, should I the more
 Suffer my genial spirits to decay:
 For thou art with me, here, upon the banks 115
 Of this fair river; thou, my dearest Friend,
 My dear, dear Friend, and in thy voice I catch
 The language of my former heart, and read
 My former pleasures in the shooting lights
 Of thy wild eyes. Oh! yet a little while 120

May I behold in thee what I was once,
 My dear, dear Sister! And this prayer I make,
 Knowing that Nature never did betray
 The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,
 Through all the years of this our life, to lead 125
 From joy to joy: for she can so inform
 The mind that is within us, so impress
 With quietness and beauty, and so feed
 With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
 Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men, 130
 Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
 The dreary intercourse of daily life,
 Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
 Our cheerful faith that all which we behold
 Is full of blessings. Therefore let the moon 135
 Shine on thee in thy solitary walk;
 And let the misty mountain winds be free
 To blow against thee: and in after years,
 When these wild ecstasies shall be matured
 Into a sober pleasure, when thy mind 140
 Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,
 Thy memory be as a dwelling-place
 For all sweet sounds and harmonies; Oh! then,
 If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,
 Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts 145
 Of tender joy wilt thou remember me,
 And these my exhortations! Nor, perchance,
 If I should be, where I no more can hear
 Thy voice, nor catch from thy wild eyes these gleams
 Of past existence, wilt thou then forget 150
 That on the banks of this delightful stream
 We stood together; and that I, so long
 A worshipper of Nature, hither came,
 Unwearied in that service: rather say
 With warmer love, oh! with far deeper zeal 155
 Of holier love. Nor wilt thou then forget,
 That after many wanderings, many years
 Of absence, these steep woods and lofty cliffs,
 And this green pastoral landscape, were to me
 More dear, both for themselves, and for thy sake. 160

END.

Doth every Beast keep holiday;—
 Thou Child of Joy,
 Shout round me, let me hear thy shouts, thou happy
 Shepherd-boy! 35

IV

Ye blessed Creatures, I have heard the call
 Ye to each other make; I see
 The heavens laugh with you in your jubilee;
 My heart is at your festival,
 My head hath its coronal, 40
 The fullness of your bliss, I feel—I feel it all.
 Oh evil day! if I were sullen
 While Earth herself is adorning,
 This sweet May-morning,
 And the Children are culling 45
 On every side,
 In a thousand valleys far and wide,
 Fresh flowers; while the sun shines warm,
 And the Babe leaps up on his Mother's arm:—
 I hear, I hear, with joy I hear! 50
 —But there's a Tree, of many, one,
 A single Field which I have looked upon,
 Both of them speak of something that is gone:
 The Pansy at my feet
 Doth the same tale repeat: 55
 Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
 Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

V

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
 The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
 Hath had elsewhere its setting, 60
 And cometh from afar:
 Not in entire forgetfulness,
 And nor in utter nakedness,
 But trailing clouds of glory do we come
 From God, who is our home: 65
 Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
 Shades of the prison-house begin to close
 Upon the growing Boy,
 But He
 Beholds the light, and whence it flows, 70
 He sees it in his joy;
 The Youth, who daily farther from the east
 Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,

And by the vision splendid
 Is on his way attended; 75
 At length the Man perceives it die away,
 And fade into the light of common day.

VI

Earth fills her lap with pleasures of her own;
 Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,
 And, even with something of a Mother's mind, 80
 And no unworthy aim,
 The homely Nurse doth all she can
 To make her Foster-child, her Inmate Man,
 Forget the glories he hath known,
 And that imperial palace whence he came. 85

VII

Behold the Child among his new-born blisses,
 A six years' Darling of a pigmy size!
 See, where 'mid the work of his own hand he lies,
 Fretted by sallies of his mother's kisses,
 With light upon him from his father's eyes! 90
 See, at his feet, some little plan or chart,
 Some fragment from his dream of human life,
 Shaped by himself with newly-learned art;
 A wedding or a festival,
 A mourning or a funeral; 95
 And this hath now his heart,
 And unto this he frames his song:
 Then will he fit his tongue
 To dialogues of business, love, or strife;
 But it will not be long 100
 Ere this be thrown aside,
 And with new joy and pride
 The little Actor cons another part;
 Filling from time to time his 'humorous stage'
 With all the Persons, down to palsied Age, 105
 That Life brings with her in her equipage;
 As if his whole vocation
 Were endless imitation.

VIII

Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie
 Thy Soul's immensity; 110
 Thou best Philosopher, who yet dost keep
 Thy heritage, thou Eye among the blind,
 That, dead and silent, read'st the eternal deep,

Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,
 Nor Man nor Boy,
 Nor all that is at enmity with joy, 160
 Can utterly abolish or destroy!
 Hence in a season of calm weather
 Though inland far we be,
 Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea
 Which brought us hither, 165
 Can in a moment travel thither,
 And see the Children sport upon the shore,
 And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

X

Then sing, ye Birds, sing, sing a joyous song!
 And let the young Lambs bound 170
 As to the tabor's sound!
 We in thought will join your throng,
 Ye that pipe and ye that play,
 Ye that through your hearts today
 Feel the gladness of the May! 175
 What though the radiance which was once so bright
 Be now for ever taken from my sight,
 Though nothing can bring back the hour
 Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;
 We will grieve not, rather find 180
 Strength in what remains behind;
 In the primal sympathy
 Which having been must ever be;
 In the soothing thoughts that spring
 Out of human suffering; 185
 In the faith that looks through death,
 In years that bring the philosophic mind.

XI

And O, ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves,
 Forebode not any severing of our loves!
 Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might; 190
 I only have relinquished one delight
 To live beneath your more habitual sway.
 I love the Brooks which down their channels fret,
 Even more than when I tripped lightly as they;
 The innocent brightness of a new-born Day 195
 Is lovely yet;
 The Clouds that gather round the setting sun
 Do take a sober colouring from an eye
 That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality;

Another race hath been, and other palms are won. 200
Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

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