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"COME NOW YE GOLDEN TIMES"
CELESTIAL IMAGERY IN WORDSWORTH'S PRELUDE

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by

Sheila McGrory

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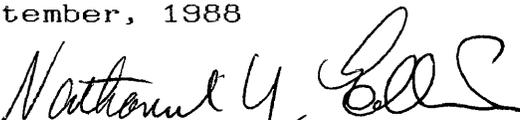
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Terry L. Meyers

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to expose how Wordsworth uses celestial imagery, imagery of the sun, the moon, and the stars, in The Prelude to reflect his philosophical growth as a poet.

The Prelude spans Wordsworth's lifetime and traces the development of his poetic mind. Nature has a great deal of influence on the maturing poet. During the most important visionary experiences of the poet's life, celestial imagery is present and, in this study, its significance is explored.

Emphasis is placed, in this study, on the spiritual consciousness of Nature passing through Wordsworth's senses to his mind and on the significance of merging sensuous experience with rational thought. Wordsworth's connection between the spirituality of Nature, most apparent in the celestial bodies, and the Soul of the poet is also analyzed.

This study concludes by stating that, in the final book of The Prelude, Wordsworth proclaims that the human mind, because of its imaginative capacity and its power to love, is more closely linked to the Eternal Spirit than are any of God's other creations.

"COME NOW YE GOLDEN TIMES"

CELESTIAL IMAGERY IN WORDSWORTH'S PRELUDE

The Prelude, William Wordsworth's monumental thirteen-book poem,¹ traces the development of the poet's mind. From the very beginning of the poem, it is clear that Nature plays an important role in his philosophical development. Nature is a powerful presence behind which resides a spirit that stimulates both poetic inspiration and fear in the young poet. Consequently, the Nature imagery that Wordsworth employs is one of the poem's major strengths and the vehicle by which the poet communicates the powers of poetry and of the imagination.

In The Prelude, Wordsworth incorporates Nature only to reach beyond it into the realm of the transcendental. His fusing the literal level of the natural world with its larger symbolic meaning represents much more than rhetorical strategy; it is, in fact, central to the essence of his poetry.² For example, in his essay "The Correspondent Breeze: A Romantic Metaphor," M. H. Abrams extols Wordsworth's use of the metaphor of the wind as a vehicle for changes in the poet's mind.³ Likewise, the coursing Derwent river flowing through the entire poem is symbolic of the flowing progress of the long work.⁴

Similar to these metaphors, celestial imagery, imagery pertaining to the sun, the moon, and the stars, is present throughout and provides important symbolic

meaning. Internal changes in the poet are reflected in Wordsworth's varying descriptions of the sun, the moon, and the stars. Representing the spiritual elements in Nature that provide imaginative inspiration, celestial imagery offers insight into Wordsworth's complex theory concerning the poetic mind.

In The Prelude, the core of experience is an intense spiritual consciousness of Nature passing through Wordsworth's senses to his mind. And the growth of that consciousness, its action and reaction upon the poet's inner being, is a central theme of the Prelude.⁵ Thus, the poet's capacity to sense or to feel is essential, as is his mind's ability to translate the feelings into thoughts. By the end of The Prelude, Wordsworth, the great Nature poet, comes to view the mind of man as being even greater and more God-like than Nature.

Wordsworth structured The Prelude in a highly organized fashion. Books One and Two introduce the poem and recount the poet's childhood experiences. The ideas developed in these books regarding the poetic imagination and the Soul are consequential to the entire work. Books Three through Ten discuss various topics as the poet recalls his university days, his residence in London, and his travels through the Alps and through France, all of which play a large part in his

development as a poet. The final three books bring the poem full circle and examine in more detail the poetic imagination and the Soul of the poet.

The Prelude commences in Book One by contrasting the peaceful, liberating atmosphere of Nature with the harsh confines of the city from which the poet recently has been released. Wordsworth welcomes with exhilaration the feelings of freedom and potential that he experiences in Nature: "The earth is all before me: with a heart/ Joyous, nor scared at its own liberty."⁶ However, while enjoying his new-found freedom, the poet seeks a direction, "prowess in an honorable field" (I.52); he realizes that inspiration must be directed lest it wreak havoc on its own creation. Wordsworth employs a description of the sun declining in the west to suggest the importance of destiny, of controlled occurrence. This connection between the poet and heaven and the bodies that reside there introduces the metaphor to which Wordsworth shall return repeatedly. Unlike the breeze that wanders aimlessly across the land, the sun provides a metaphor for the inspired poet who pursues a directed path: "So like a Peasant I pursued my road/ Beneath the evening sun" (I.110-111). The "road," of course, is the endeavor he has decided to undertake, that of applying his genius toward recounting the development of his poetic mind. In this decision he

has found the synthesis of freedom and purpose that he has been seeking.

Wordsworth again refers to the connection between the sun and poetic inspiration when he recalls the frustration he encounters when he is unable to create poetry out of the tantalizing flashes of inspiration he receives: "...Gleams of light /Flash often from the East, then disappear/ And mock me with a sky that ripens not/ Into a steady morning" (I.134-137). Undeniably, there is a direct correlation here between light and inspiration, albeit a dissatisfying experience for the poet since the light comes in "flashes" instead of in a steady stream.

Having introduced the subject of his poetic endeavor, Wordsworth delves into his memory and begins to recount his childhood. Later in the book, he describes his infancy as a "visible scene, on which the sun is shining" (I.663), and he clearly supports this image in his reminiscences of this innocent time. As a five-year-old boy, the child-poet is one with Nature, "A naked Savage" (I.304) who joyously but unconsciously revels in his unbridled freedom and potential. He describes this state as his "dawn of being," and, appropriately, the sun plays an important role as an ever-present protectorate and witness to his childhood pleasures. Frolicking in the stream like a young

animal, the child is in complete communion with Nature. He and everything around him are "bronzed with a deep radiance" (I.300), a description suggesting close contact with the sun, much as a small child would have close contact with his mother.

Wordsworth continues by describing a child of "nine summers," slightly more mature, more conscious of his world. Childhood innocence and compatibility with Nature have been replaced by an anxious, hurried purposefulness. Interestingly, instead of the warm sun above, the boy is now described in the context of night: "...Moon and stars/ Were shining o'er my head; I was alone,/ And seemed to be a trouble to the peace/ That was among them" (I.321-324). Aloneness and tranquility in association with the moon and stars are recurring images in the poem. Their presence, in comparison to that of the sun, is more mysterious and evokes a more contemplative, often fearful mood in the poet. The power that the moon and the stars exude is no weaker than that of the sun; however, it is of a different character. In the above lines, the young poet feels that he is a disruptive intruder to the serenity of the evening. He recalls stealing chickens, "...And the bird,/ Which was the captive of another's toils/ Became my prey" (I.326-328), and feeling that Nature disapproves of his actions. Like a reprimanding parent, Nature evokes

guilt in the young Wordsworth.

Illustrating more dramatically the moon's mysterious power is the well-known boating episode of the poem. In this scene, night and moonlight combine to bring about an alteration in natural perspective.⁷ Again, the boy is alone under the evening sky as he rows out onto the lake in a "borrowed" rowboat. He "fixes a steady view" upon the top of the mountain ridge that bounds his horizon, but, as he rows farther out, a more distant peak rises up from behind the ridge. If it had been daylight, he would have been able to discern the dividing line between ridge and peak, but the moonlight obscures this detail. He sees only the ominous silhouetted shape of the cliff suddenly increasing dramatically in bulk as he rows away from it. The fact that it grows larger instead of smaller causes him great fear; Nature seems, again, to be reprimanding him for stealing: "...The huge Cliff/ Rose up between me and the stars, and still,/ With measured motion, like a living thing,/ Strode after me"(I.409-412). Trembling from guilt and fear, Wordsworth hastily rows back to the shore to return the boat.

This experience has a profound effect on the young poet. He recognizes in Nature an uncontrollable force that is too powerful to be restrained by man. The massive cliff, eerily illuminated in the moonlight,

seems almost demonic, and its force reveals a potential dark side of Nature that is unfathomable to the human mind. This dark side of Nature, however, suggests a dark side of the human personality, particularly since Wordsworth comes to view Nature as mirroring man.

Perhaps the poet's guilt on this occasion arises not so much from the admonishment of the cliff and the night sky, but from his recognizing in himself an incomprehensible dark side that compels him to steal. And his imagination channels this guilt into creativity so that he recalls, "Huge and mighty Forms that do not live/ Like living men moved slowly through my mind/ By day and were the trouble of my dreams" (I.425-427).

Following this experience, the poet recalls, "...In my thoughts/ There was a darkness, call it solitude" (I.420-421). In this state, the poet realizes a new sense of the mind as its own place, of the imagination's ability to create.⁸ Thus, the poet himself, like the sun, the moon, and the stars, has become a source of power; he recognizes the creative ability that he possesses. The power is God-like, and, had it not been for the presence of the giant, glowing orb that brought the cliff to life and, in congruence with his imagination, produced the boating experience, he may never have come to realize his potential.

From his initial experiences with the spiritual

powers in Nature, Wordsworth links the "Spirit of the universe" with the Soul of the poet. Moreover, he associates the Soul with eternity, a state unknown to man but commonly accepted in regard to the sun, the moon and the stars. Interestingly, the Soul seems more closely linked to these bodies than to the human body. Immediately following his enlightening experience on the lake, Wordsworth, full of emotion, expresses his feelings on this topic of Spirit and Soul:

Wisdom and Spirit of the universe!
 Thou Soul that art the Eternity of Thought!
 That giv'st to forms and images a breath
 And everlasting motion! not in vain,
 By day or star-light thus from my first dawn
 Of Childhood didst Thou intertwine for me
 The passions that build up our human Soul
(I.428-434).

It is important to note the presence of day or star-light in this impassioned response. As spiritual and poetic luminaries, in addition to being literal luminaries, celestial bodies clearly represent in this passage a linkage with God, the ultimate creator. The light originates not in the sun, the moon, or the stars, but in God whose power lies beyond Nature. He is not merely a great life-force, but an intelligence, "the eternal mind."

These same ideas are echoed, perhaps even more clearly, in "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" which Wordsworth completed in 1804 while he was simultaneously

working on The Prelude. In the "Immortality Ode"

Wordsworth says:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!⁹

Thus, man clearly originates from God, and it is in his infancy that he is most closely akin to his creator.

Wordsworth refers to man's Soul as "our life's Star," thereby choosing to represent the God-like, eternal aspect of man with a celestial body.

Wordsworth expresses the power of the Soul not only in terms of knowledge and creativity, but as a form of heat, a sensation perceived by one of the five senses, as well: "How the immortal Soul with God-like power/
Informs, creates, and thaws the deepest sleep/
That time can lay upon her" (IV.156-158). Wordsworth recalls another memory in Book One of the moon shining on water that is significant to this discourse. In line 591, he relates that he derives a "pure organic pleasure" from the experience, and these words indicate a sensuous reaction to Nature uncomplicated by any conscious intellectualizing. As Ted Holt and John Gilroy note in A Commentary on Wordsworth's Prelude, Books I-V, Wordsworth watches the sea "throw off his evening shade"

and "send sweet notice of the rising moon"; the poet is content to stand incorporated fully within the "intellectual charm" that he has identified as part of primal sense experience. That the light on the sea seems to offer "sweet notice of the rising moon" to the shepherds's huts is the notion of a mature poet, but "to fancies such as these" Wordsworth was a "stranger." His primitive function of simple sensation is to "drink" the beauty he sees, and so, too, his eye gathers light--the most primitive of impressions. The landscape dissolves into light: the "three long leagues/ Of shining water"--a "field of light."

This portrayal is almost Turnerian in its effect, and it suggests, according to Holt and Gilroy, no obstacles but rather limitless vistas, such as those with which Book One begins. Light was the first creation ("let there be light"), pre-dating shape and form, and Wordsworth intends to show that the young child's experiences were very basic ones--sensory, primitive, and unrestricted. His eye moves over the shining water taking minute pleasure in every "hair-breath" of light like a bee sips nectar as it moves from flower to flower.¹⁰

Sensuous experiences such as these are foundational to the poetic imagination. Confinement, be it in the form of a city or a steadfast theory, is to be avoided.

What the poet seeks is unbridled intuition and the ability to sense, qualities that are possessed by the child. While the inevitable maturation process brings changes, this is one quality which the poet does not wish to change. He seeks only to enhance it by acquiring a "God-like" mind.

In Book Two, the poet links childhood with adulthood as he continues to trace the progression into maturity. Night imagery is prevalent in this section, suggesting, again, a more contemplative tone than that of the sun-filled days of his younger, innocent years. The opening stanzas contain two examples of star imagery, and the section concludes appropriately with the following lines: "And I was taught to feel, perhaps too much,/ The self-sufficing power of solitude" (II.77-78). Here again, power is found in solitude, for it is in solitude that one usually best creates. Also, power is a quality which the poet "feels"; thus, he employs his child-like ability to sense.

That the poet is still not an adult is clear; he possesses a "wantonness of heart" which urges him to scamper and frolic in the open air. Fittingly, Nature's power is ever-present in the midst of this revelry in the form of the moon's reflection on the water: "That still Spirit of the evening air!/ Even in this joyous time I sometimes felt /Your presence...Lighted by gleams

of moonlight from the sea,/ We beat with thundering
hoofs the level sand" (II.139-144).

In Book Two, one finds a powerful passage in which the poet verbalizes the feelings of love that he has for the sun and for the moon. This love is different from the more rational reassurance that he feels as an adult in regard to these celestial bodies. Wordsworth equates his youthful love to that of patriotic and domestic love, perhaps the love one feels for a father and a mother. Corresponding to this notion and also utilizing classical topoi, Wordsworth addresses the sun as "he" and the moon as "she":

And thus the common range of visible things
Grew dear to me: already I began
To love the sun, a Boy I loved the sun,
Not as I since have loved him, as a pledge
And surety of our earthly life, a light
Which while we view we feel we are alive,
But for this cause, that I had seen him lay
His beauty on the morning hills, had seen
The western mountain touch his setting orb
In many a thoughtless hour, when, from excess
Of happiness, my blood appeared to flow
With its own pleasure, and I breathed with joy.
And from like feelings, humble though intense,
To patriotic and domestic love
Analogous, the moon to me was dear;
For I would dream away my purposes,
Standing to look upon her while she hung
Midway between the hills, as if she knew
No other region but belonged to thee,
Yea, appertained by a peculiar right
To thee and thy grey huts, my darling Vale!
(II.182-202).

The boy feels an undeniable closeness to the sun and the moon. His world is complete as is a young child's when

he has the full attention of his parents. Of interest, too, is the fact that, despite the great power of both celestial bodies, there exists an undeniable humility in their relationship to the earthly vale. Neither the sun nor the moon looms in an overbearing superior position above the land. Instead, they both gently touch the hills and seem to belong in close commingling there. The bond between the boy and the celestial bodies seems very natural; it is not rational but "thoughtless"--again, something felt rather than pondered--and it is felt so intensely that one doubts that an intellectualizing adult who has lost touch with his feelings would be capable of such a closeness. Likewise, imagination, a product of the unconscious, is felt and not pondered.

Extending this metaphor of a parent/ child relationship, Wordsworth describes an infant who "Nursed in his Mother's arms, the Babe who sleeps/ Upon his Mother's breast, who, when his soul/ Claims manifest kindred with and earthly soul,/ Doth gather passion from his Mother's eye!" (II.240-243). These words imply the idea, which is similarly expressed in the "Immortality Ode," that the babe's beginning is not "earthly," with its mother, but celestial, with God. But, in The Prelude, Wordsworth quickly qualifies this by saying that the soul is not isolated and spiritual because it

feeds upon sensation (the mother's touch) and feeling, "passion."¹¹ And it is precisely through these human capacities that the babe will be able to achieve a connection to his place of origin. This commingling of the spiritual and the natural in human beings can be regarded as much the same quality as is found in the sun, the moon, and the stars.

In the previously described relationship, the babe's inspiration is its mother. Through interaction with her, the child's mind acquires its unique unifying power, its elementary but vital ability to make visual shapes out of the chaotic, blurry light that it first sees (recalling light's pre-dating shape and form). The unifying power of imagination begins with this elementary leap in perception, inspired by the mother, with love being the prime impulse enabling the senses (i.e. sight) to create coherent shapes out of the chaos. From this perspective, love and perception are inextricably bound together.¹² This relationship bears many similarities to the loving relationships that Wordsworth recounted as having shared with the sun and the moon. This pattern of a loving relationship--an exchange of giving and taking--is to become the pattern of all real imaginative experience.¹³ The poet exists within the universe, "An inmate of this active universe;/ From nature largely he receives; nor so/ Is

satisfied, but largely gives again" (II.266-268). Thus, as in "Tintern Abbey," he is both "creator and receiver" with imagination being innately connected to both processes. To put it in poetic terms, the "poetic spirit of our human life" (II.276) is born.

In Book Eight, in which Wordsworth looks back on his childhood innocence and joy, the poet describes the great change that he experienced when he first felt the powerful effects of love. Clearly, love is instinctual rather than pondered. This passage recalls his early relationship with his mother when he was an infant:

The pulse of Being everywhere was felt,
 When all the several frames of things, like stars
 Through every magnitude distinguishable,
 Were half confounded in each other's blaze,
 One galaxy of life and joy. Then rose
 Man, inwardly contemplated, and present
 In my own being, to a loftier height;
 As of all visible natures crown; and first
 In capability of feeling what
 Was to be felt; in being rapt away
 By the divine effect of power and love,
 As, more than anything we know, instinct
 With Godhead, and by reason and by will
 Acknowledging dependency sublime (VIII.627-640).

Man, because of his supreme power to feel and to love, is able to rise to star-like heights and to join in the "one galaxy of life and joy." Man instinctively strives to connect with the "Godhead," as an infant does with its mother, and he recognizes, through his mental capacities, his dependency upon his ultimate creator.

Finally, the poet, who has up until the end of Book Two received inspiration from the sun and the moon, performs his first creative act. Having lived for seventeen years, he recognizes that "From Nature and her overflowing soul/ I had received so much that all my thoughts/ Were steeped in feeling" (II.416-418). Gone is the unconscious innocence of earlier years, but vestiges of it remain in the fledgling poet, evidenced in the fact that "feeling" governs his thoughts. Fittingly, he describes his creative act in terms of a light which his mind emits, much as would a celestial body. Says Wordsworth, "...An auxiliar light/ Came from my mind which on the setting sun/ Bestowed new splendor" (II.387-389). This "auxiliar light" of creative imagination seems to outshine even the source of all light. The poet has received a power, and he fulfills his part of the bargain by giving of his own creative capacity. This illustrates the idea that M. H. Abrams presents in The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition--that, for the Romantic writers, a favored analogy for the activity of the perceiving mind is a lamp projecting light,¹⁴ and that the communication of his self, his feelings, and his attitudes (i.e. the light) is primary to the poet's existence. Since the celestial bodies constitute the ultimate source of physical light, the metaphoric

connection between them and the human mind is significant.

The "dreary" tone with which Wordsworth begins Book Three characterizes the poet's attitude toward Cambridge. To Wordsworth, this supposed bastion of "higher" learning is a haven for trivialities and artifice. Wordsworth realizes that he does not belong in such a place, and it is at Cambridge that he comes to learn that his role in life requires not involvement but detachment.¹⁵ The following lines express Wordsworth's feelings toward his time spent at Cambridge:

Caverns there were within my mind, which sun
 Could never penetrate, yet did there not
 Want store of leafy arbours where the light
 Might enter in at will. Companionships,
 Friendships, acquaintances, were welcome all;
 We sauntered, played, we rioted, we talked
 Unprofitable talk at morning hours,
 Drifted about along the streets and walks,
 Read lazily in lazy books, went forth
 To gallop through the country in blind zeal
 Of senseless horsemanship, or on the breast
 Of Cam sailed boisterously, and let the stars
 Come out, perhaps without one quiet thought
(III.246-258).

He admits that the sun's light partially is obscured from his mind and that he is not allowing his mind's full potential to be fostered and developed. However, he expresses a desire for the "light to enter in at will," for the obstacles to be lifted. His mention of the stars at the end of this stanza indicates his neglect of higher thoughts at this time. He recognizes

that he has fallen prey to the superficial and idle temptations of Cambridge and that those values that are truly important to his development as a poet, he has disregarded. In recalling a similar experience, Wordsworth refers to this period as "unripe years." Because he placed trivialities before Nature in his life, his existence was, not unlike fruit, bitter, lacking full potential. This phrasing also implies an inevitable "ripening"--a process that is propagated by the light of the sun.

Wordsworth seems to be conscious, even in this early period of his development, of two levels of experience--the surface level to which he belongs with the rest of the world, and another life beyond this in which he joins the inner life of the whole universe: "I was a chosen Son" (III.82). He and other true poets, "higher minds," differ from the rest of mankind in their power not only to see and hear images but to feel and think them as well. They are "Connected in a mighty scheme of truth,/ Have each for his particular dower, a sense/ By which he is enabled to perceive/ Something unseen before" (X.302-305). Therefore, a breeze or a river is not merely a symbol for spiritual life--it actually becomes it.¹⁶ Likewise, a celestial body is the spiritual power which exists beyond it. Wordsworth does, however, acknowledge that all men share this

potential. Every person possesses, because of the presence of a Soul, the power to perceive and to unite with this Spirituality, although the degree of ability differs in each individual. Says Wordsworth: "Points have we all of us within our souls,/ Where all stand single; this I feel, and make/ Breathings for incommunicable powers./ ...for there's not a man/ That lives who hath not had his godlike hours,/ And knows not what majestic sway we have,/ As natural beings in the strength of Nature" (III.186-88, 191-94).

Wordsworth describes his return to the country from the superficial world of Cambridge in Book Four. The poet uses imagery which depicts almost a rebirth; he is back in his preferred environment, and one feels that here his mind will be expanded in a way that it never was at Cambridge.

The cock had crowed, the sky was bright with day.
 Two miles I had to walk along the fields
 Before I reached my home. Magnificent
 The morning was, a memorable pomp,
 More glorious than I ever had beheld.
 The Sea was laughing at a distance; all
 The solid Mountains were as bright as clouds,
 Grain-tinctured, drenched in empyrean light;
 And, in the meadows and the lower grounds,
 Was all the sweetness of a common dawn,
 Dews, vapours, and the melody of birds,
 And Labourers going forth into the fields
 (IV.328-339).

Holt and Gilroy aptly point out that the cock's crowing heralds a momentous event, and the dawn's glory signifies a new beginning on which the book centers. The

words used to describe the dawn--"magnificent," "memorable pomp"--suggest almost a hero's welcome, and the scene is something like a celestial vision as it is "drenched in empyrean light." The solid mountains seem to acquire the lightness of clouds so that the landscape appears to be on the brink of dissolving into pure light.¹⁷

Holt and Gilroy continue by noting that below the great "pomp" of the mountain-dawn, there is one on a smaller scale in the valleys. The poem descends from magnificence to "sweetness" and finally to the humble existences of the labourers.¹⁸ In incorporating the vast and the small, the celestial and the humble, this scene recalls the scene in Book Two in which Wordsworth praises the sun and the moon as a father and a mother. It also looks forward to Book Eight, "Retrospect.--Love of Nature Leading to Love of Mankind," in which the poet thinks back to his innocent childhood and remembers a beautiful day in the country. The descriptive imagery in this passage is noteworthy: "...Rocks and seams of turf with liquid gold/ Irradiate, that deep farewell light by which/ The setting sun proclaims the love he bears/ To mountain regions" (VIII.116-118). The sun, in all his divine and glorified presence, not only graces the humble mountainside with his presence, but he "proclaims the love he bears." And man, though capable

of possessing a God-like mind, is among the humble inhabitants of the mountains: "...The sun and sky,/ The elements and seasons in their change/ Do find their dearest Fellow-labourer there,/ The heart of Man"

(VIII.147-150). It is of interest to note that Wordsworth here refers to the "heart" of Man as opposed to the mind. This fittingly implies that man's sensuous and sentimental aspects are more humble and "earthly" than his spiritual mind.

In Book Four, Wordsworth describes a slow and arduous journey up the side of a mountain. The passage is significant in that it both foreshadows the climactic climb up Mount Snowdon in Book Thirteen and contains interesting celestial imagery:

I slowly mounted up a steep ascent
Where the road's wat'ry surface, to the ridge
Of that sharp rising, glittered in the moon
And seemed before my eyes another stream
Creeping with silent lapse to join the brook
That murmured in the valley. On I went
Tranquil...
...And all unworthy of the deeper joy
Which waits on distant prospect, cliff, of sea,
The dark blue vault, and universe of stars
(IV.370-76, 382-84).

The description of the moon's reflection on the water is reminiscent of the path of liquid light in the rowboat incident of Book One that led to an apparition as it does, too, in this instance. The poet finds tranquility in the moonlit night. Of interest, also, is the element of anticipation in the last three lines. Wordsworth

speaks of a "deeper joy," of the "universe of stars," both of which imply eternity and heaven. Wordsworth's "maturer vision" grows nearer to him as he progresses toward understanding in this book; however, at this point, he still has a distance to travel.

In Book Five, entitled "Books," Wordsworth demonstrates how books often impart false knowledge, while true knowledge is derived only from Nature. An analogy can be drawn between false knowledge and false light. Earlier, in Book Three, Wordsworth refers to great scholars, "lovers of truth," such as Erasmus or Melancthon, who read by moonshine as opposed to artificial light, and, in Book Eight, he uses this metaphor again in referring to the miner who works underground: "...Melancholy Man!/ That works by taper light, while all the hills/ Are shining with the glory of the day" (VIII.508-510). Likewise, in Book Twelve, he describes a light that is not emitted from a natural source. It is, instead, artificial and is indicative of false knowledge and delusion:

Yes, in those wanderings deeply did I feel
 How we mislead each other, above all
 How Books mislead us, looking for their fame
 To judgements of the wealthy Few, who see
 By artificial lights, how they debase
 The Many for the pleasure of those few,
 Effeminately level down the truth
 To certain general notions for the sake
 Of being understood at once, or else
 Through want of better knowledge in the men
 Who frame them, flattering thus our self-conceit
 With pictures that ambitiously set forth

The differences, the outside marks by which
Society has parted man from man,
Neglectful of the universal heart (XII.205-219).

Throughout Book Five, Wordsworth supports his credence that true knowledge is gained through observing Nature and not through reading books: "...My mind hath looked/ Upon the speaking face of earth and heaven/ As her prime Teacher" (V.11-13). Seemingly being inconsistent with this contention, he not only, in this same book, admits to, but extols the power of words "for their own sakes." He comes to discover a pleasure derived from the sheer power of words to evoke feelings; thus, it is one's feelings and not one's knowledge which are affected by words. Interestingly, he and his friend make this discovery while strolling along the banks of a "misty lake" in the "morning light." As Holt and Gilroy note, Wordsworth employs here terms that were used earlier to describe Nature in order to describe the function of words.¹⁹ Noteworthy, too, is the fact that Wordsworth employs imagery of divine light to describe the function of words thereby linking them to God-like power and, hence, linking the man who works with words to God:

Visionary Power

Attends upon the motions of the winds
Embodied in the mystery of words;
There darkness makes abode, and all the host
Of shadowy things do work their changes there,
As in a mansion like their proper home;
Even forms and substances are circumfused
By that transparent veil with light divine;

And through the turnings intricate of Verse,
 Present themselves as objects recognised,
 In flashes, and with a glory scarce their own
 (V. 619-629).

In this passage, "shadowy" and "darkness" suggest the need for illumination that is found in the powers of verse and the imagination; this connection is reminiscent of Abrams's metaphor of the Romantic poet as lamp. Illumination comes in "flashes" much like the "flashes of inspiration" found in Book One. The flashes are accompanied by a "glory scarce their own" or seemingly otherworldly. Wordsworth, thus, successfully reconciles the Nature-culture controversy through the achieved harmony in the relationship between words and natural objects. And it is the connection with divine light that forms the basis for this reconciliation.

In Book Six, Wordsworth recounts his experiences crossing the Alps. During this journey, the poet is in very immediate contact with the powerful forces of Nature. Travelling through a narrow chasm, he remarks:

The immeasurable height
 Of woods decaying, never to be decayed,
 The stationary blasts of waterfalls,
 And in the narrow rent at every turn
 Winds thwarting winds, bewildered and forlorn,
 The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky,
 The rocks that muttered close upon our ears,
 Black drizzling crags that spake by the way-side
 As if a voice were in them, the sick sight
 And giddy prospect of the raving stream,
 The unfettered clouds and region of the Heavens,
 Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light--
 Were all like workings of one mind, the features
 Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree;
 Characters of the great Apocalypse,

The types and symbols of Eternity,
 Of first, and last, and midst, and without end
 (VI.556-572).

During this illumination, Nature reveals to him the unity between its unchanging outer appearances and the its ultimate eternity. While the woods are in a process of decay, this process will never cease. Likewise, the waterfalls descend but they appear to be stationed where they are and not to move. And above, the heavens contrast their peace to the "tumult" and disorder below. Their light contrasts to the darkness of the earth.²⁰ They, too, appear to be in a constant state of change--from the movement of the sun across the sky to the ever-waxing and -waning moon. Regardless of this seeming mutability, their presence, like that of God's, is eternal.

In recounting in Book Six a time in his life that was marked by melancholy, Wordsworth says that he loved "twilight more than dawn" (VI.195)--a fitting metaphor to communicate his feelings of hopelessness at this time. The poet speaks of an "internal light" upon which one can rely when one finds oneself oppressed by the city and in need of Nature's soothing pleasures. Implicit in this description is the idea that man possesses within himself the source of power found in the heavens, the power possessed by the sun, the moon, and the stars, to emit light. Addressing Samuel Taylor

Coleridge, to whom the poem is dedicated, Wordsworth says:

I speak to thee, my Friend; to thee,
Who, yet a leveried School-Boy, in the depths
Of the huge City, on the leaded Roof
Of that wide Edifice, thy home and School,
Wast used to lie and gaze upon the clouds
Moving in Heaven; or haply, tired of this,
To shut thine eyes, and by internal light
See trees, and meadows, and thy native Stream
Far distant, thus beheld from year to year
Of thy long exile (VI.275-284).

Thus, the poet can use the powers of his internal "lamp" to benefit himself as well as his audience.

As we have seen, The Prelude is, in a sense, a private poem in that it traces the growth of an individual poet's mind. It can be viewed, however, as a public and representative poem which expresses the hopes and fears of all who mature and must leave the comfortable world of childhood for the outside world. This progress out of the innocence and joy of childhood into the realities of adulthood is inevitable. In Wordsworth's own case, the poet is forced to leave his childhood home of the Lake District to face the outside world of London and the French Revolution.²¹

Interestingly, in the book which recounts Wordsworth's time of residence in London, Book Seven, celestial imagery of any significance conspicuously is absent. This absence indicates perhaps that, at this particularly low period in the poet's life, poetic

inspiration was greatly lacking. The information offered by Wordsworth in this section of The Prelude supports this supposition.

Another book which recounts a particularly difficult period in the poet's life is Book Ten which presents Wordsworth's thoughts on the French Revolution. Wordsworth employs the metaphor of the setting sun, as opposed to the hopefulness of the rising sun, to communicate his melancholy feelings toward the fate of the human race:

...there I heard
 Each evening, walking by the still seashore,
 A monitory sound that never failed,
 ...The sunset cannon. While the Orb went down
 In the tranquillity of Nature, came
 that voice, ill requiem! seldom heard by me
 Without a spirit overcast, a deep
 Imagination, thought of woes to come,
 And sorrow for mankind, and pain of heart
 (X. 298-306).

The poet speaks of a "spirit overcast," or a spirit whose internal light has been obscured. Wordsworth recognizes that Man is weakened through his "mistrust and want of hope," and he laments the despair, tyranny, and senseless deaths which marked the period of the French Revolution. In his own soul, Wordsworth remembers that he felt a sense of "treachery and desertion."

Indeed, Book Ten portrays a low point in the poet's life; however, he does rise from the depths of his

despair. In recounting the pronouncement that Robespierre and his tribunal have been overthrown, Wordsworth's mood changes entirely. He describes his overwhelming happiness with these words:

...beneath a genial sun;
 With distant prospect among gleams of sky
 And clouds, and intermingled mountain tops,
 In one inseparable glory clad,
 Creatures of one ethereal substance, met
 In Consistory, like a diadem
 Or crown of burning Seraphs, as they sit
 In the Emyrean (X. 476-483).

The emphasis on heavenly glory in these lines is as strong as are his feelings of bliss on the day that Wordsworth hears the joyous news. A sky which yesterday was filled with melancholy now is ablaze with heavenly glory. A group of angels looks down upon the poet from that ultimate heavenly paradise--the Emyrean. Employing the same metaphor, he continues to express his great happiness:

Great was my glee of spirit, great my joy
 In vengeance, and eternal justice, thus
 Made manifest. 'Come now ye golden times,'
 Said I, forth-breathing on those open Sands
 A Hymn of triumph, 'as the morning comes
 Out of the bosom of the night, come Ye:
 (X. 539-544).

Hope has been restored to the land; the times shall be "golden," as the dawn breaks through the darkness of unrest. An even greater joy than that felt prior to the war has settled in the poet's heart. Because of his suffering, he is able to feel his happiness all the

more: "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,/ But to be young was very heaven!" (X.692-3).

Although peace is not to reign after the death of Robespierre, Wordsworth does not lose heart. He realizes that greed can turn virtuous men into oppressors, and, while disappointed in the French people, he does not become disillusioned with mankind in general. He recognizes the strength and power in one independent mind:

How glorious! in self-knowledge and self-rule,
To look through all the frailties of the world,
And, with a resolute mastery shaking off
The accidents of nature, time, and place,
That make up the weak being of the past,
Build social freedom on its only basis:
The freedom of the individual mind,
Which, to the blind restraint of general laws
Superior, magisterially adopts
One guide, the light of circumstances, flashed
Upon an independent intellect (X.819-829).

It is no accident that this independent mind upon which the world can place its hope has as its source of inspiration an illuminating presence directing it: "One guide, the light of circumstances."

Thus, Wordsworth passes successfully through this period of hopelessness and shame and recounts that he "was no further changed/ Than as a clouded, not a waning moon" (X.916-7). His inner light still burned as strongly at the source, although it temporarily was "overcast," or obscured by external conditions.

It is apparent in the final three books that

Wordsworth has undergone a change. The mature poet speaks in this section as a man who has learned and benefited from his previous experiences. Wordsworth begins Book Eleven, entitled "Imagination, How Impaired and Restored," by paralleling Milton's description of his epic journey back from hell to the realms of light.²² It is important to remember that to Milton, as well as to Wordsworth, "God is Light."²³ Wordsworth ponders his passage through sorrow, disappointment, confusion, and hopelessness to a rebirth. Appropriately, he employs images of morning and of springtime to illustrate his feelings of rejuvenation: "...The morning shines,/...Spring returns" (XI.22-23). He speaks of having been in "eclipse," of having had the light of truth obscured in his youth. Yet, having once experienced the awesome feeling of god-like power, he states that it can never die "howe'er impaired or damped" (XI.106).

In the concluding book, Wordsworth sums up the philosophical conclusions at which he has arrived. He begins the book by returning to the metaphor of the westward setting sun that signifies the direction he has established in his life as a poet: "I left Bethkelet's huts at couching-time,/ And westward took my way to see the sun/ Rise from the top of Snowdon" (XIII.3-6).

Accompanied by Robert Jones, a "youthful friend," Wordsworth sets out to climb Mount Snowdon on this summer night--a climb that becomes the culminating symbolic act of the poem. The mist surrounding the two as they set out recalls the mist referred to at the end of Book Eleven. In this previous instance, the poet remembers a Christmas season during his childhood when he climbed a craggy eminence to watch for the horses that would bear him and his brother home. On this occasion, the mist obscured his eyesight; he had to strain his eyes intensely in order to see. At this point in his life, he was not completely aware of the powers of imagination and the importance therein. He was a traveler in "dim uncertain ways" (XI.568). In Book Thirteen, however, the travellers ultimately rise above the mist and there encounter a brilliant shining moon:

When at my feet the ground began to brighten,
 And with a step or two seemed brighter still;
 Nor had I time to ask the cause of this,
 For instantly a Light upon the turf
 Fell like a flash: I looked about, and lo!
 The Moon stood naked in the Heavens, at height
 Immense above my head, and on the shore
 I found myself of a huge sea of mist,
 Which, meek and silent, rested at my feet
(XIII.36-44).

Thus, in the clear light of the moon, knowledge and power are theirs--rewards for both the literal struggle up the mountain and the laborious maturation process

that the poet has endured. And looking out from the side of the mountain into the abyss before them, the poet recognizes that for which he has been searching--"The Soul, the Imagination of the whole" (XIII.65).

The chasm into which Wordsworth looks from atop Mount Snowdon is symbolic of the profound grandeur and sublimity of the human mind. On this evening, Wordsworth has a vision of an ideal mind that can apprehend a deity and can, thus, elevate itself almost to that level: "The perfect image of a mighty Mind,/ Of one that feeds upon infinity,/ That is exalted by an underpresence,/ The sense of God" (XIII.69-72). He recognizes a power that is beyond himself and yet within him--the power of God made manifest in the moon and within his own "mighty mind." In the second generation of Romantic poets, both John Keats, in "Ode to a Nightingale," and Percy Bysshe Shelley, in "Ode to a Skylark," continue this idea of man's eternal struggle to attain affinity with God on earth.

One ought to remember that Wordsworth's bestowing natural attributes on the human mind is not merely a self-conscious, literary example of the pathetic fallacy; instead, he goes far beyond this phenomenon. His artistic technique is a continuous process, an authentic communion of mind and Nature.²⁴ Wordsworth

uses Nature as a springboard from which he can delve into the realm of the transcendental.

Coleridge suggests merging rhetoric and metaphysics in this statement derived from a letter to William Sotheby in 1802:

Nature has her proper interest; & he will know what it is, who believes & feels, that every Thing has a Life of it's (sic) own, & that we are all one Life. A Poet's Heart & Intellect should be combined, intimately combined & unified, with the great appearances in Nature--& not merely held in solution & loose mixture with them, in the shape of formal Similies.²⁵

Man and Nature interact to form one presence, one power, and, in his poetry, Wordsworth fuses this inner and outer world to such a degree and with such adeptness that he successfully is able to speak of both realms simultaneously and interchangeably. Thus, the poet's mind becomes one with Nature; poetic imagination is the "main essential power" not because it outshines God's universal power in Nature, but because it partakes of this power. This process is an illustration of what Coleridge described as the "primary imagination"--an unconscious act through which man comes to know and understand himself and his world.

Wordsworth's final words affirm the unbounded capacity of the "mind of man." He proclaims that the human mind is far more "beautiful" than any of God's other earthly creations: "...It is itself/ Of substance

and of fabric more divine" (XIII.451-452). This statement indicates that the human mind is more closely linked to the Eternal Spirit than are the sun, the moon, and the stars which generally are considered to be eternal also. Because of man's imagination and his power to love, he possesses the capability to elevate himself higher even than these celestial bodies. He is of the actual "God-stuff"--more so than the sun, the moon, or the stars--and, therefore, possesses the power, through his ability to create, to approach immortality.

Wordsworth brilliantly arrives at this philosophical conclusion, and the strength of his presentation is increased greatly by his use, throughout The Prelude, of celestial imagery. Aside from the mind of man, celestial bodies represent the closest connection to God in the natural world. And their presence, during the most significant visionary experiences of the poet's life, is not to be overlooked. Teacher, inspiration, comfort, intimidator--their roles are many in the development of the young poet, as are their phases that change to reflect the internal state of the poet. If Wordsworth had been able to recount the occasion of his own departure from this earth, one can be certain that the presence of a natural luminary would have been emphasized. Yet, precisely which celestial body would have heralded the event is not so certain.

The setting sun? A rising moon? A shooting star? One cannot begin to conjecture. Wordsworth would have wanted us to use our imaginations.

NOTES

¹ William Wordsworth, The Prelude (1805 edition), In William Wordsworth, Ed. Stephen Gill, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1984.

² Herbert Lindenberger, On Wordsworth's Prelude, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1963, p. 89.

³ M. H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and Critical Interpretations, New York, Oxford University Press, 1953.

⁴ Ted Holt and John Gilroy, A Commentary on Wordsworth's Prelude, Books I-V, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983, p. 7.

⁵ Helen Darbishire, "Wordsworth's Prelude," In Wordsworth: The Prelude, Eds. W. J. Harvey and Richard Gravil, London, The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1972, pp.80-81.

⁶ Wordsworth, p. 375, lines 15-16. All subsequent quotations from The Prelude are derived from this edition and henceforth will be followed by the corresponding line numbers.

⁷ Holt, p. 15.

⁸ Ibid., p. 16.

⁹ Wordsworth, p. 299, lines 58-66.

¹⁰ Holt, p. 25.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 44.

¹² Ibid., p. 45.

¹³ Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁴ Abrams, p. 60.

¹⁵ M. H. Abrams, "Wordsworth's Long Journey Home," In Modern Critical Interpretations, The Prelude, Ed. Harold Bloom, New York, Chelsea House Publishers, 1986, p. 93.

¹⁶ Darbishire, p. 85.

¹⁷ Holt, p. 92.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 92

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 121.

²⁰ Harold Bloom, "Introduction," In Modern Critical Interpretations, The Prelude, Ed. Harold Bloom, New York, Chelsea House Publishers, 1986, p. 14.

²¹ J.R. Watson, English Poetry of the Romantic Period, 1789-1830, England, Longman Group Limited, 1985, p.133.

²² Abrams, "Long Journey," p. 102.

²³ John A. Hodgson, Wordsworth's Philosophical Poetry, 1797-1814, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1980, p. 106.

²⁴ W. J. Harvey, "Vision and Medium in The Prelude," In Wordsworth: The Prelude, Eds. W. J. Harvey and Richard Gravil, London, The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1972, p. 202.

²⁵ Lindenberger, p. 90, as quoted from Letters, Ed. E. L. Griggs, Oxford, 1956, II, 864. Original emphasis supplied.

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