

## Aesthetics of Nature and Environmental Consciousness in Wordsworth

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# Aesthetics of Nature and Environmental Consciousness in Wordsworth

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**Abstract:** Already in the first half of the nineteenth century William Wordsworth held an ecological outlook on nature. His awareness of the necessity of conserving the natural environment of his native district is clearly pronounced in such prose writings of his later years as *A Guide through the District of the Lakes* and *Kendal and Windermere Railway*. The aim of the current paper is to define the poet's position on conservation by surveying the development of his attitude towards nature through his literary career.

Born in Cockermouth, Cumberland, and growing up in Hawkshead in the midst of the Lake District, Wordsworth in his boyhood days had plenty of opportunity to experience relatively untouched nature. Then, in the late 1790s, under the influence of the pantheist doctrine of S. T. Coleridge, Wordsworth's love of nature was raised to a more profound philosophy which assumed the immanent presence of deity in the natural world. The genuine birth of Wordsworth's environmental awareness can be traced in this philosophical allegiance.

As Coleridge's dominant hold of his intellect waned, however, Wordsworth became less convinced of his friend's pantheist religion. This shift of attitude, in fact, marks the second beginning of his environmental thinking. The poet claims that even if there were not such religious principle found in the universe, nature should still remain a worthy object of his worship. This new position includes the idea of creative partnership between nature and the human mind, where intervention from transcendent divinity is not immediately relevant. Wordsworth, in other words, began appreciating nature as itself, not as the medium through which one intuits the presence of the divine.

This new formulation of Wordsworth's nature worship emphasizes the protective function of nature for humanity. The poet expects that nature's aesthetic aspect, or "beauty," guards the human mind against the intrusion of external social reality and the internal threat from excessive self-consciousness. In this framework the mind inevitably assumes a potential vulnerability; it will be damaged if the aesthetic appearance of nature is impaired. In the poem *The Tuft of Primroses* and in the prose guidebook *A Guide through the District of the Lakes*, this precariousness of the poet's psychology is revealed among physical changes occurring in his home village, Grasmere. Importantly, in the latter prose writing Wordsworth not only deplors the loss of the long-maintained condition of the Lake District but speaks up as an activist working for the conservation of the natural environment. For this purpose *A Guide* attempts to conduct the education of aesthetic sensibility by instructing settlers to "let the images of nature be your guide."

*Kendal and Windermere Railway*, written towards the end of his life, is still more explicitly activist. While employing the education of taste in order to protect natural scenery, however, he openly approves of the merit of technology, in particular, of its beneficial potentiality for human progress. Thus, the poet's environmentalist outlook is not merely a backward-looking nostalgia, but a development of his long-held conviction of the progressive partnership of nature and humanity.

## I

In *A Guide through the District of the Lakes*, first published in 1810, William Wordsworth exhibits an awareness of the necessity of conserving nature in his native country. In the first two sections of the book's main part, the poet depicts the rich natural landscape of the Lake District coexisting with human activities

through the long history of settling and partial cultivation. Then in the third section, "Changes, and Rules of Taste for Preventing Their Bad Effects," Wordsworth turns his attention to the damage done to the area's nature in the past sixty years. After citing Thomas Gray's earlier praise of Grasmere, "this little unsuspected paradise" (208), he regretfully admits that "the change was soon to take place" (208) referring to the recent unfortunate felling of centuries-old wood

on a lake island and the disappearance of a cottage with its surrounding sycamores. The poet is wary of the intrusion of settlers and tourists into the Lake District and of the disturbance those newcomers are causing to the area's harmonious condition. Behind the growing popularity of the Lakes is the newly-discovered taste for natural scenery accompanying the fashion of landscape gardening.

Wordsworth's concern became keener as the growth of urban industry and commerce of the mid nineteenth century began to invade the district. The most threatening of these intrusions was the project in 1844 of extending the railway to Windermere through Kendal, the south entry way to the Lake District. As this plan was intended to connect such industrial areas as Lancaster and Carlisle to the heart of the Lake District, the scale of resultant influx of tourists was easily estimated. Wordsworth was quick to respond to this potential danger to the Lake country by writing a couple of protest letters to *The Morning Post*. These open letters were later republished as the independent pamphlet *Kendal and Windermere Railway*. Here the poet is opposed to the railway project more strongly than he was to the incursion of settlers in *A Guide*. Even more explicitly than before Wordsworth in these letters declares himself as an activist publicly working for the area's conservation.

Curiously, the claims for conservation that Wordsworth puts forward in *A Guide* and *Kendal Windermere Railway* are couched in terms of taste. The former document attributes the cause of the wrongs done to the scenery to the settlers' inadequacy in appreciating natural landscape and attempts to correct the on-going damage by educating their aesthetic perception of nature. Although in a more urgent note, the poet's principal argument in *Kendal and Windermere Railway* is fundamentally the same. The poet believes in this later writing that only the gradual inculcation of a better taste can enhance people's aesthetic appreciation of landscape. Hence transporting

a mass of people speedily into the middle of the Lake District, he contends, will do nothing but impairing its natural scenery.

This conservationist argument based on aesthetic taste may seem biased from today's vantage point. It sounds as if the poet were merely defending the right of enjoying nature reserved for limited members of privileged class including the Wordsworths and their friends. This accusation may have a certain degree of validity. Yet, it will miss the mark if we judge the poet's environmental awareness merely from this viewpoint. In fact, his concern for the condition of the Lake area runs deep in his poetics, and the aestheticism in the poet's claims for conservation serves as an essential part of his view on the creative working of the human mind. This personal framework, furthermore, has a broader significance for human society in Wordsworth's thinking, who was once a political activist in a radical vein. Involving both the private and social, those of Wordsworth's texts written for the purpose of protecting the Lake country can be regarded as a landmark for the ecological movements of today. Therefore Wordsworth's concern for the environment, articulated as early as the first part of the nineteenth century, is worth a systematic reading. His view of nature, then, already a much discussed topic in British Romantic studies, needs to be re-examined from this perspective.

Recent critical discussion on Romanticism has turned to emerging ecological thinking among Romantics. In 1974 Karl Kroeber in "'Home at Grasmere': Ecological Holiness" undertakes a positive evaluation of the poem's presentation of Grasmere Vale as a self-sufficient ecosystem where nature and humanity are interdependent on and indispensable for each other. More recently Jonathan Bate's ground-breaking study, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition*, explores the possibility of ecological reading that transcends both the visionary-idealist criticism of Yale School and New Historicism's indict-

ment of Romantic ideology. Partly stimulated by Bate, Kroeber advances the concept of "ecological literary criticism" in his book-length study of 1994, which has been followed by the appearance of a large number of journal articles experimenting ecological reading of Romantic texts. A notable method of interpretation is focusing on the blending of the subjective and objective in a given text modelling on the biological idea of symbiotic interdependence of organic and inorganic elements in a bioregion. Along this line of approach, Bate again performed a fine reading of "Tintern Abbey lines" in his recent *Song of the Earth* placing an emphasis on the subtle interfusion of subjectivity and objectivity.

The current paper is not meant to produce another of such ecological readings as done by Kroeber, Bate and their followers. My aim is simply to trace the development of environmental awareness in Wordsworth's poetry and prose writings. In light of the limited scope of my inquiry, I do not enter into precise definition of the terms descriptive of different positions of eco-criticism. As Wordsworth's environmental context is mostly half-cultivated land or secondary forest, I deem such dichotomic distinctions as preservationism and conservationism, or deep and shallow ecology, not directly relevant to my discussion. When necessary, I employ conservationism or environmentalism, the terms usually signifying moderate schools of ecology, in a rather non-restrictive sense to describe the protective awareness of the natural environment in general. In the course of discussion I point out some crucial moments in the poet's literary career where he realizes the significance of nature to humanity and, through this recognition, acquires an early-nineteenth-century version of conservationism. My discussion, though, may at times touch on the emerging sense of subject-object, or nature-humanity interdependence in Wordsworth's poetic thought, as a formulation comparable to an aspect of "deep ecology" defined in recent theoretical

discussion.

As nature and its relation to humanity continue to be principal themes for Wordsworth through his literary career, the scope of the current paper spans from an early stage of his poetic development to the late years of the old poet laureate in Victorian Britain. First, I examine the poet's interest in nature shown in his early descriptive poetry, and in epistolary and other prose remarks. This survey will clarify the character of his early love of nature. Then, I look into the role of One Life, the pantheist philosophy brought to him by S. T. Coleridge, in the development of the nature worship of the mature Wordsworth. A subtle turn away from this religion-based nature worship and a new attitude to nature which this turn gives rise to are the topics of discussion in the next section. I would argue that in the change of the objects of worship from the divine pervasive principle behind nature to the aesthetic appearance of nature lies the foundation of Wordsworth's environmental consciousness. The forth section discusses the full formation of Wordsworth's conservationist attitude manifested in two works from his middle years, *The Tuft of Primroses* and *A Guide through the District of the Lakes*. I, then, conclude my discussion with *Kendal and Windermere Railway*, the poet's protest against a railway project into the Lake District. While Wordsworth's environmentalist position is most clearly pronounced in this writing of his very late years, it still reveals the poet's unchanged position established half a century before in the height of his poetic creativity.

## II

Wordsworth's concern for nature no doubt goes back to his boyhood days. He was born in Cockermouth, Cumberland, a small town not far from the heart of the Lake District. Nine years later, he was sent to Hawkshead Grammar School, where he studied in the natural surroundings of the Lake country

until 1787 when he turned seventeen. It must have been almost predictable that he turned back to those familiar scenes when he began his first poetic attempts of significance, *The Vale of Esthwaite* and *An Evening Walk*. Being loco-descriptive poems focusing on the scenery of the poet's formative years, it is obvious that both poems, composed in the late 1780s at Cambridge, are products of the poet's boyhood attachment to nature. Quoting a couplet from *An Evening Walk*, Wordsworth in his later years specifically picks out this early period as the time when he first determined to be a poet of nature:

The moment was important in my poetical history; for I date from it my consciousness of the infinite variety of natural appearances which had been unnoticed by the poets of any age or country, so far as I was acquainted with them: and I made a resolution to supply in some degree the deficiency. (*Fenwick Notes* 6-7)

Love of nature thus nurtured in these early days, then, led Wordsworth to go on a Continental tour in his last year at university. Among his destinations were the Alps, which had already been a popular site for late-eighteenth-century tourists. In a letter to his sister Dorothy, Wordsworth declares his love of nature more enthusiastically than ever:

I am a perfect Enthusiast in my admiration of Nature in all her various forms; and I have looked upon and as it were conversed with the objects which this country [Switzerland] has presented to my view so long, and with such encreasing pleasure, that the idea of parting from them oppresses me with a sadness similar to what I have always felt in quitting a beloved friend.

(*Letters, Early Years* 35)

Two years later in revolutionary France, Wordsworth was writing a blank-verse poem full of the natural imagery taken from this 1790 Alpine tour, *Descriptive Sketches*. Together with the two earlier descriptive poems, *Descriptive Sketches* represents Wordsworth's early love of nature which can occasionally rise to the height of enthusiasm. That Wordsworth published *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*

in one volume in 1793 explicitly shows the poetic category with which he wanted to identify himself.

However, in spite of these passages that tend to depict Wordsworth as a fully committed nature poet, there is also counter evidence. His interest in nature might not have been so deep-rooted in his mind as these early descriptive pieces might suggest. From his residence in France onwards, his chief concern was with contemporary politics; Wordsworth's significant writings in the mid 1790s are mostly those of political messages, such as *A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff*, *Salisbury Plain*, *The Borderers* and the aborted project of a political journal to be titled *the Philanthropist*. Descriptive poetry was largely left aside. Indeed in 1794, staying in Keswick, he was clearly tired of being immersed in nature:

I begin to wish much to be in town; cataracts and mountains, are good occasional society, but they will not do for constant companions. (*Letters, Early Years* 136)

This is a curious remark for the poet whose deep attachment to the Lake country eventually led him to live there for the most of his long lifetime. Mary Jacobus goes as far as to assert that Wordsworth at this stage still worked within traditional literary framework and even *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches* were not ground-breaking, being almost entirely indebted to loco-descriptive convention (7). Intimate relationship of mind and nature, as well as a resultant urge to protect the natural environment, are not found in his writings of this period.

Even in *The Ruined Cottage* of mid 1797, a narrative poem with an abundance of beautiful natural imagery, there is no indication of nature's spiritual influence on the human mind (Jonathan Wordsworth, *Music of Humanity* 188). On the contrary, uncontrolled wildness of nature is an index of the decline of the life of Margaret, the poem's main character. *The Ruined Cottage* does not assign positive significance to nature. According to Jonathan Wordsworth, to be

worthy in this poem is to fit into the total scheme of things, or to be orderly ("Introduction" to *The Ruined Cottage, The Brothers, Michael* 10). The harmoniousness of the cottage garden, having been kept by human hand, is intruded by wild nature, characterized exclusively by negative implications:

. . . a chain of straw  
Which had been twisted round the tender stem  
Of a young apple-tree, lay at its root;  
The bark was nibbled round by truant sheep.  
(*Ruined Cottage*, MS. B 458-61)

As Margaret dies, her garden, along with the cottage, is reduced to the state of sheer wildness, "a plot / Of garden-ground, now wild" (116-17). Obviously for Wordsworth in the mid 1790s, there is not much positive value in wild nature. Although inscribing *The Ruined Cottage* with abounding natural imagery, the distance of the Wordsworth of this time and the later environmentalist Wordsworth of *A Guide through the District of the Lakes* and *Kendal and Windermere Railway* is not as near as it appears at first glance.

From this brief sketch of the poet's early attitude towards nature it is evident that he has not yet reached to the stage of thought that appreciates nature as essential for his poetic creativity and for humanity in general. He still lacks a stable system of thought, or world-view, that would supply him a sufficient confidence to be a poet of nature. To become a full-fledged nature poet, and then to attain a conservationist perspective, requires an intellectual leap in thinking about nature and its relation to humanity. This lacuna of systematic thought was to be filled in the late 1790s by Samuel Taylor Coleridge's pantheist doctrine.

### III

As well-recognized, Wordsworth began to write truly innovative poetry in February 1798 with the composition of *The Pedlar*. It is indisputable too that this new beginning was largely made possible in the ac-

tive intellectual exchange with his friend and mentor, S. T. Coleridge. Indeed, Coleridge's pantheist philosophy, called One Life, supplied Wordsworth a new framework of thought by which his new attitude towards nature was rapidly nurtured. Wordsworth as a poet of nature has his intellectual origin in the young Coleridge's religious doctrine.

One Life assumes the pervasive presence of divine life-force in the universe. The source of this thought is found in Coleridge's allegiance to Unitarianism in the mid to late 1790s. Since this Christian doctrine denies the orthodox idea of Trinity and consequently the divinity of Jesus Christ, the adoption of a pantheist view is inevitable for Unitarianism in order to claim God's historical presence in the created world. Coleridge was particularly fascinated by the doctrine of the influential Unitarian priest Joseph Priestley that God is present throughout the universe by extending his energy to every existing thing, living or inanimate. In the second edition of *Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit*, Priestley asserts that "the Divine Being, and his energy, are absolutely necessary to that of every other being. His power is the very *life and soul* of everything that exists . . ." (42, original emphasis). Interestingly, pantheist thinking can be regarded as opposite to that anthropocentric view, derived from Orthodox Christianity, which credits human superiority over the other physical creation (White 9-10). In Priestley's pantheist view, all existing things in the world are unified by being indiscriminately imbued with God's life-force. Even the distinction of matter and spirit, therefore, does not hold: "If they say that, on my hypothesis, there is no such thing as matter, and that everything is spirit, I have no objection . . ." (*Disquisitions* 353). In other words, theoretically one cannot distinguish between living and non-living, or organic and inorganic. A logical extension of this belief is the denial of the supposed human superiority over inanimate things and those living creatures traditionally ranked lower in the scale of being.

Once a self-acknowledged “Josephidite” (E. H. Coleridge 147), Coleridge faithfully follows Priestley’s theory. In 1796 this young poet speculates on the pervasive presence of Priestleyan God:

Glory to thee, Father of Earth and Heaven!  
All-conscious Presence of the Universe!  
Nature’s vast ever-acting Energy!  
(*Destiny of Nations* 459-61)

In Coleridge’s system, this divine presence, elsewhere described as “God / Diffused through all, that doth make all one whole” (*Religious Musings* 139-40), is recognized by humans through natural scenery. In this conception Coleridge is following George Berkeley’s theory of nature as symbolic language of God: “the proper objects of vision constitute an universal language of the Author of Nature” (Berkeley, “New Theory of Vision” 61-62). Rephrasing Berkeley’s statement Coleridge writes: “all that meets the bodily sense I deem / Symbolical, one Almighty alphabet” (*Destiny of Nations* 18-19); “We see our God everywhere—the Universe in the most literal Sense is his written Language” (“Theological Lectures” 339). “Frost at Midnight” of 1797 is a fine poetic expression of the idea of nature as divine language, or “The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible / Of that eternal language, which thy God / Utters” (59-61) merged with the pantheist conception of God, “who from eternity doth teach / Himself in all, and all things in himself” (61-62).

Delving deep into the relationship of nature and humanity, Coleridge also remarks on nature’s benevolent influence upon human consciousness. By reading the divine messages inscribed in natural landscape, he maintains, human minds will be morally ameliorated. *Religious Musings* advances the idea that if a human being fully recognizes his position in the order of the universe, this recognition “fraternises man, this constitutes / Our charities and bearings” (138-39). Elsewhere Coleridge specifically attributes this ame-

liorative function to the pleasures derived from beautiful scenery of nature:

The pleasures, which we receive from rural beauties, are of little Consequence compared with the Moral Effect of these pleasures—beholding constantly the Best possible we at last become ourselves the best possible.  
(*Letters* 1. 154)

In short, the aesthetic appeal of rural landscape is not merely beautiful and pleasurable; it has a more profound significance for human consciousness. It was the Coleridge of this doctrinal conviction with whom Wordsworth made friends in the late 1790s. Wordsworth’s poetry and attitude towards nature were given a new direction in the literary-philosophical exchange with this metaphysically-minded friend.

Wordsworth’s allegiance to Coleridge’s pantheist doctrine appears most typically in *The Pedlar*, originally written as the introduction to *The Ruined Cottage*. The central character of this poem, the Pedlar, a surrogate figure of Wordsworth’s boyhood self, perceives the One Life divine principle permeating the mountain scenery of northern England:

. . . in all things  
He saw one life, and felt that it was joy.  
One song they sang, and it was audible—  
Most audible then when the fleshly ear,  
O’ercome by grosser prelude of that strain,  
Forgot its functions, and slept undisturbed. (217-22)

The Coleridgean pantheist belief emerges in the explicit reference to “one life” and in nature’s intermediary role in the recognition of this divine principle. Indeed, nature elsewhere in the poem is explicitly referred to as “the writing” (123). That each element of Coleridge’s thought is faithfully retained in Wordsworth’s passage testifies the dominant influence of this philosopher friend. Yet, Wordsworth’s individuality is quietly asserted in subtle revisions made to the original doctrine of Coleridge. In spite of its divine nature, Wordsworth’s “one life” is perceived as the human emotion of joy. Similarly, although “one

song," a related form of "one life," is principally a spiritual being best perceived by the non-fleshly, spiritual ear, the concept of "song" itself has an affinity with the physical world rather than with the purely abstract order where Coleridgean One Life belongs. For this auditory image stationed in the northern mountains cannot but be associated with sounds of nature, those of mountain creatures, winds, streams, etc. This passage, then, evinces that Wordsworth adopts One Life in a more human and naturalized form than Coleridge's original concept. By the early spring of 1798, One Life has become Wordsworth's own philosophy, not merely an alien principle imposed from a superior intellect.

Closely following the composition of *The Pedlar*, Wordsworth wrote a couple more blank-verse fragments pronouncing that pantheist creed. In one of the two fragments, beginning with the line "There is an active principle," the pantheist divine presence unifies the universe by extending life-force, or "spirit that knows no insulated spot, / No chasm, no solitude" (9-10). All existing things in the world are indiscriminately united by this divine principle that "circulates" in the form of "the soul of all the worlds" (11). The moral effect of the pantheist order, again descended from Coleridge, is asserted in the statement that under the "laws in which there is a generating soul" (28), human "active powers . . . become / Subversive of our noxious qualities, / And . . . suppress / All evil" (32-36). The other fragment, "Not useless do I deem," chiefly concerns the human mind in communion with natural objects and the moral effect of this communion. The divine presence is here replaced by "necessity" (94), one of the highest principles in Priestley and Coleridge's pantheist universe. Under this divine necessity, if man is in communion with nature, he feels "The joy of that pure principle of love / So deeply that . . . he cannot choose / But seek for objects of a kindred love" (7-10) in fellow human beings. This claim corresponds to Coleridge's view in *Religious*

*Musings* that true recognition of human situation in the universal order "fraternises man, this constitutes / Our charities and bearings" (138-39). Consequently, moral flaws in individual human minds are corrected by this process, for the man immersed in this world-order "by degrees perceives / His feelings of aversion softened down, / A holy tenderness pervade his frame" ("Not useless do I deem" 12-14). Thus the individual "seeks for good and finds the good he seeks; / Till execration and contempt are things / He only knows by name" (18-20).

Another version of Coleridgean pantheism emerges in "Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey" of July 1798, a few months later than *The Pedlar* and those two verse-fragments. Wordsworth first reaffirms the morally ameliorative power of nature in the statement that the "forms of beauty" (24) perceived by the mind from the Wye landscape positively influence "that best portion of a good man's life; / His little, nameless, unremembered acts / Of kindness and of love" (34-36). Then, he goes on to claim that the human soul, transcending its physical limitation in meditation, sees a naturalized variant of One Life, "the life of things" (50). Later in the same poem, the poet unfolds the fully pantheist character of this "life" partaking in nature, the spiritual order and the human mind:

And I have felt  
A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
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,  
A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things. (94-103)

Following the logic of Coleridgean One Life, this pantheist presence motivates Wordsworth's love of nature:

Therefore am I still  
A lover of the meadows and the woods,

And mountains; and all that we behold  
From this green earth. . . . (103-6)

In the line of argument proceeding from the natural order of the Wye landscape to the spiritual realm of “life” and the “sense sublime of something,” then back to the re-affirmation of the love of nature, Wordsworth as a pantheist nature poet is firmly established.

As my discussion so far has made it clear, Wordsworth before the arrival of Coleridge cannot properly be called a nature poet. Nature was not an exclusive concern for him, and his attachment to nature, nourished by his childhood environment of the Lake District, lacked a philosophical backing necessary to develop into systematic poetics. Yet, with philosophical thinking of Coleridge becoming available, Wordsworth is convinced of the organic interdependence among all existing things, between nature and humanity, in particular, under the unifying principle of pantheism. In this development are the roots of the poet’s conservationist attitude seen in his later writings.

#### IV

The emergence of pantheist nature poetry in 1798, however, does not immediately signify that Wordsworth at this stage acquired the fully-developed environmental consciousness of his later years. The poet’s philosophical outlook begins to undergo another subtle change as early as late 1798 and 1799, and I would argue that it is in this further shift of attitude that his conservationist concern for nature has its second, perhaps more genuine origin. To be a full-fledged environmentalist requires one more step forward, comparable in importance to the encounter with Coleridge’s pantheism.

Wordsworth’s total commitment to the Coleridgean pantheist world-view was actually quite short-lived. Extreme pantheist claims are observed only during Wordsworth’s stay at Alfoxden in 1797 and 1798

while Coleridge was available at hand at Nether Stowey. In the latter half of 1798 the poet went to live in Goslar, Germany out of touch with the immediate influence of his mentor friend. In this new intellectual circumstance Wordsworth began to write a different kind of poetry, much of it indicating his new outlook on nature and its relationship with the human mind. Jonathan Wordsworth in “The Two-Part *Prelude* of 1799” performs a chronological demonstration of the shift of the poet’s attitude away from Coleridgean pantheism in reference to the compositional process of a poetic fragment. In this fragment, written in February 1799 for *The Two-Part Prelude*, Wordsworth at first shows a typically pantheist position in the lines, “the one interior life . . . / In which all beings live with God, themselves / Are God, existing in one mighty whole”; yet, probably becoming suspicious that he might have gone too far, in the revision of late 1799 the poet modified these lines into a less extreme view: “In which all beings live with God, are lost / In God and Nature, in one mighty whole”; and finally in the fair copy, this sequence is cut altogether (Jonathan Wordsworth, “Two-Part *Prelude*” 574).

This move away from pure pantheism may have already been foreshadowed in “Tintern Abbey lines” of 1798. The central lines of this poem, discussed in my previous section, are followed by intimations of misgivings about the reality of the pantheist presence: the first climactic part, “We see into the life of things” (50), is followed by “If this / Be but a vain belief” (50-51); and the second climax describing the interfusion of that sublime “something” (97) is accompanied by a yet another doubt, “perchance / If I were not thus taught” (112-13). This second misgiving is compensated by the reassuring presence of the poet’s sister Dorothy. The suspicion in the lines 50-51, however, is followed by a poignantly wishful expectation of nature’s beneficent effects:

If this  
 Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft,  
 .....  
 How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee  
 O sylvan Wye! Thou wanderer through the woods,  
 How oft has my spirit turned to thee! (50-58)

This passage is no longer a reaffirmation of Coleridgean One Life; a new attitude towards nature is quietly implied. Wordsworth in these lines states that even if he were not able to feel the presence of pantheist deity among natural imagery, he nevertheless would continue to seek for spiritual nourishment from nature. Before, nature was a mediating agent, or symbolic language, of One Life; but in "Tintern Abbey lines" the possibility is hinted that nature is relied upon, or worshipped, for the sake of its own benevolent effects, not for that otherworldly principle supposed to exist beyond it.

This new development is still more obvious in *The Two-Part Prelude* completed in 1799. In the second part of this autobiographical poem, Wordsworth incorporates the passage on "one life" from *The Pedlar*. In this new context the claim of these pantheist lines is modified by the immediately following lines, which express the poet's uncertainty about that "one life" pantheist presence: "If this be error, and another faith / Find easier access to the pious mind" (2. 465-66). In the next passage Wordsworth reveals his new vision of nature worship more explicitly than in "Tintern Abbey lines":

Yet were I grossly destitute of all  
 Those human sentiments which make this earth  
 So dear, if I should fail with grateful voice  
 To speak of you, ye mountains! and ye lakes  
 And sounding cataracts! ye mists and winds  
 That dwell among the hills where I was born.  
 (2. 467-72)

Wordsworth is admonishing himself never to be ungrateful for the blessings that the natural surroundings of the Lake District have given him even if he should no longer be able to feel the presence of "one

life." By implication, therefore, he admits that the blessings that nature brings to him are not necessarily based on the pantheist principle existing behind the appearance of nature. He is evidently shifting towards a position in which he can appreciate natural scenery as itself, not as the medium for some higher principle. Nature is felt meaningful without referring to the religious doctrine that has supplied the theoretical grounds for the poet's love of nature. Wordsworth in *The Two-Part Prelude* does not worship through nature, but he worships nature as the immediate object of his faith.

This emergent naturalistic attitude has its rationale in the passage beginning with "Bless'd the infant babe" (2. 267) in *The Two-Part Prelude*. In this passage the pantheist life-force as the unifying principle of the world is replaced by a more human principle, maternal love. In "Tintern Abbey lines" of 1798 the divine life-force is described as "A motion and a spirit, that impels / All thinking things, all objects of all thought" (101-2), whereas in "The Infant Babe" the love that the baby receives from its mother works as a similarly unifying principle: "In one beloved presence [the mother] . . . there exists / A virtue which irradiates and exalts / All objects through all intercourse of sense" (2. 285-90). A reference to the old pantheist position is implied in the metaphor of interfusion similar to that of "Tintern Abbey lines":

Along his [the baby's] infant veins are interfused  
 The gravitation and the filial bond  
 Of nature that connect him with the world. (2. 292-94)

In this new interpretation of the universe being unified by the human emotion of love, the human mind is in an interactive relation of giving and receiving with nature:

From Nature largely he receives, nor so  
 Is satisfied, but largely gives again. (2. 297-98)

In the former pantheist world, the mind and nature

were united by being immersed in pervasive divine energy; but now those two parties are independent of each other while still interacting mutually through the mediation of maternal love. In only a year after the active collaboration with Coleridge, Wordsworth in "The Infant Babe" is establishing his own post-pantheist position concerning nature and humanity. Furthermore, this passage hints at the theory of artistic creation which is later to be elaborated into the theory of Romantic imagination by Coleridge and Wordsworth:

... his [the baby's] mind,  
Even as an agent of the one great mind,  
Creates, creator and receiver both,  
Working but in alliance with the works  
Which it beholds. (2. 301-5)

Clearly deity is no longer immanent, but transcendent. Human consciousness is not imbued with God's pervasive power, but acts as its imitator in artistic creation. Without that immanent deity, however, the human mind is still in equal terms with nature, for the mind can behave only in alliance with nature.

*Home at Grasmere*, begun in late 1799, is written principally in this post-pantheist conviction. In this poem the natural environment of Grasmere Vale is regarded as valuable in itself and in relation with humanity, but not as a symbolic revelation of divinity. There is no hint of immanent One Life in either of the two parts of the poem, the first nine-hundred-odd lines describing Wordsworth's settling in Grasmere and the last 200 lines, later to be separately published as "The Prospectus to *The Recluse*," declaring his project of writing a philosophical poem. The focus is exclusively on the relationship of Grasmere and its new resident Wordsworth.

Wordsworth assumes a double role in this beautiful vale: its possessor and a protectee guarded by the village's natural environment. First of all, he is the proprietor of the blessings of the vale's nature: "The unappropriated bliss hath found / An owner, and that

owner I am he" (85-86). What he is in possession of is the moderately cultivated condition of nature in which the wild exists harmoniously with the human:

What want we? Have we not perpetual streams,  
Warm woods and sunny hills, and fresh green fields,  
And mountains not less green, and flocks and herds,  
And thickets full of songsters, and the voice  
Of lordly birds. . . . (145-49)

The poet's character as one protected by the vale is still more conspicuous:

Embrace me then, ye Hills, and close me in;  
Now in the clear and open day I feel  
Your guardianship; I take it to my heart;  
'Tis like the solemn shelter of the night. (129-32)

The village's geography as perceived by the poet is that of a "Concave" (42) comfortably enclosing the dwellers in its protective lap. Indeed, Grasmere is a privileged place providing a physical protection to its dwellers and a spiritual one to the human mind:

And as these lofty barriers break the force  
Of winds—this deep vale as it doth in part  
Conceal us from the storm—so here there is  
A Power and a protection for the mind. (455-58)

Without the aid of *One Life*, Wordsworth thus successfully establishes the vision of a unified world in this protected space. Towards the end of the first part of the poem, moreover, Grasmere attains an almost mythical status:

Society is here:  
The true community, the noblest Frame  
Of many into one incorporate;  
That must be looked for here; paternal sway,  
One Household under God for high and low,  
One family and one mansion; to themselves  
Appropriate and divided from the world  
As if it were a cave, a multitude  
Human and brute, possessors undisturbed  
Of this recess, their legislative Hall,  
Their Temple, and their glorious dwelling-place.  
(818-28)

Grasmere is not only the home for the poet; it is a dwelling-place shared by other humans and animals as well. An ideal interdependence of nature and humanity is realized in a limited scale in the poet's vision of Grasmere.

In the second part of the poem, the last 200 lines, this symbiosis of nature and humanity is given a theoretical backing. These lines present the fundamental poetics for Wordsworth's ambitious project to write a philosophical poem, *The Recluse*. Although *The Recluse* itself is doomed to be an abortive effort after all, the theoretical discussion in this "Prospectus" section is worth critical attention. "The Prospectus" is especially important for our argument because this part of the poem elaborates further upon the poetic theory of "The Infant Babe" that concerns the joint working of nature and the human mind. In fact, still more boldly than the earlier poetic passage, "The Prospectus" advances the idea of the marriage between the mind and nature engendering a higher reality:

. . . minds  
Once wedded to this outward frame of things  
In love, find these [paradisiacal places] the growth of  
common day. (999-1001)

Wordsworth is confident in proclaiming "the spousal verse / Of this great consummation" (1003-4), since he believes that nature and humanity share an essential affinity:

How exquisitely the individual Mind  
. . . to the external world  
Is fitted; and how exquisitely too . . .  
The external world is fitted to the mind;  
And the creation . . .  
. . . which they with blended might  
Accomplish. (1006-14)

Being fit to each other, between nature and the mind there is no hierarchical order. By logical extension it is implied here that, as nature and humanity are interdependent, injury given to one of the two is harm for

the whole system.

In addition to this reciprocal bond, the "Prospectus" section of *Home at Grasmere* has another important claim for the poet's emerging awareness of the environment. While declaring "the mind of man" as the locus of his poetic theme, or "My haunt, and the main region of my song" (990), Wordsworth betrays a strong anxiety of facing the abysmal depth of human consciousness. A self-conscious exploration of his own mind, one of the themes of his philosophical poem project, actually engenders a terrifying fear:

The darkest Pit  
Of the profoundest Hell, chaos, night,  
Nor aught of [ ] vacancy scooped out  
By help of dreams can breed such fear and awe  
As fall upon us often when we look  
Into our minds, into the mind of Man. (984-89)

In this psychological predicament the aesthetic side of nature has an important meaning, for what can save the poet from this fearful abyss is beautiful forms of external nature:

Beauty, whose living home is the green earth,  
Surpassing the most fair ideal Forms  
The craft of delicate spirits hath composed  
From earth's materials, waits upon my steps,  
Pitches her tents before me when I move,  
An hourly Neighbour. (991-96)

As foreshadowed in an earlier part of *Home at Grasmere*, where the natural surroundings of Grasmere are described to protect the poet's mind, here the aesthetic beauty of nature plays the role of protector for the poet's psychological stability. By pitching tents, so as to supply shelter to the naked consciousness of the poet, beauty of nature guards the poet's mind from the fear of extreme self-consciousness. In *The Fenwick Notes*, commenting his "Ode, Intimations of Immortality," Wordsworth famously remarks:

. . . I was often unable to think of external things as

having external existence and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from but inherent in my own immaterial nature. Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality. (61)

If we read the above quoted passages from “The Prospectus” along with this note, we recognize that the poet in that 1799 poem is experiencing the “abyss of idealism” in which he loses touch with external reality during an excessively self-reflexive state of consciousness. Then, beauty pitching her tents should be regarded as tangible reality supplied by external nature that can support his internal self from falling into the abyss of self-consciousness. Nature in *Home at Grasmere* is doubly protective; it safeguards the poet from the intrusion of outside social reality, while at the same time nature’s beautiful appearances protect the poet’s psychological state from the threat coming from his own mind. As a protective home, the vale of Grasmere carries such a momentous meaning.

It is significant that Wordsworth uses the word “beauty” in reference to nature’s protective aspect. Beauty has already been a well-defined term of aesthetics by Wordsworth’s time. The word refers to a category of objects which are small, gentle, sleek and positively pleasing to the taste, in contrast to the sublime that gives rise to the feeling of terror and in some cases causes a negative kind of pleasure, i.e., delight accompanied by fear. In the face of sublime threat from within his mind Wordsworth needs beauty, or gently pleasing objects of external nature, for the stability of his mind. Conserving beautiful nature, or the greenery in landscape is, therefore, no mere superficial satisfaction of one’s taste; the aesthetic appearance of landscape is fundamental both for the poet’s artistic creativity and for the healthy equilibrium of his psychology. Hence this importance attached to beauty can be considered as another motivation for conservation. Mere damage to natural scenery is enough to harm the poet’s psychology and creativity. In this point of view, without even considering eco-

logical repercussions, one can claim that visual impairment to nature alone can be devastating for the poet’s sensibility. Here revealed is the poet’s potential vulnerability in the face of environmental deterioration. It is indicated in my reading of *Home at Grasmere* that, although environmental concern is not an immediate focus of this blank-verse poem, conservation has already become a potentially important theme underlying Wordsworth’s poetry at the turn of the nineteenth century.

## V

Concern for the environment latent in Wordsworth’s mind gradually became manifest after his settling in Grasmere. Already at the end of 1799, a disruption to the Lake District’s condition drew the poet’s attention. Tomoya Oda points out several pieces of evidence that in his return visit to the Lake country in late 1799 Wordsworth’s mind was disturbed by some new houses built during his long absence (32). In a letter to Dorothy he complains about some unfortunate changes occurring on his native soil, writing that he was “much disgusted with the New Erections and objects about Windermere” (*Letters, Early Years* 271). Oda conjectures that Wordsworth might have seen buildings designed and situated in accordance with William Cockin’s recommendations appended to Thomas West’s popular guidebook, *A Guide to the Lakes in Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire* (33). Cockin’s advice is to build “elegant works of art” decorated with “columns, obelisks, temples, etc.” on top of an eminence so as to have “the most grand and characteristic effect” (West 283-84, original emphasis). As Oda claims, Cockin’s method of improving nature by the power of art is alien to Wordsworth, who is totally opposed to the practice of transferring “rules of mimic art” (*Prelude 1805* 11. 154) to nature (Oda 33). If Oda’s conjecture is correct, Wordsworth’s annoyed remark about the new buildings can be seen

to be highlighting a conflict between two contradictory attitudes in the aesthetic perception of nature. In the first recorded evidence of Wordsworth's environmental concern, aesthetics of nature has a central place of importance.

Wordsworth's continuing awareness of the condition of the Lake District is seen in several of his letters written in the 1800s. His distress about the partial loss of the long-kept condition of Grasmere is, then, expressed in *The Tuft of Primroses*, a blank-verse poem written in 1808. In a sense this work of his middle years is a negative picture of *Home at Grasmere*, where the village was given the status of a second paradise. In contrast to the ideal home depicted in this 1799 poem, in *The Tuft of Primroses* beauty of nature is keenly missed.

The village of Grasmere has been conceived by Wordsworth as a place removed from time and vicissitude. In addition to the idealized picture in *Home at Grasmere*, in the sonnet "Composed by the side of Grasmere" of 1807, this village is imaginatively exempt from disruption from social reality: "if unholy deeds / Ravages the world, tranquillity is here" (13-14). Yet Grasmere as a physical entity is subject to time and change. On a personal level there were deaths of friends and residents in the poet's neighbourhood, most torturing of which was the death of his brother John Wordsworth. Such losses are scattered in the depiction of the village scenery in *The Tuft of Primroses*. Along with these personal losses, moreover, parts of the natural condition of the vale have gone. In the following discussion I focus on this aspect of this blank-verse poem on Grasmere.

As pointed out by Laurence Goldstein, from about the year 1805 Grasmere clearly began to undergo physical change (365). Particularly distressing to Wordsworth were ugly new buildings, so-called horticultural "improvement" alien to the area's scenery and inconsiderate felling of trees which often happened concurrently with the practice of improvement.

In a letter of February 1805, he laments the newly-completed house at Allan Bank as "a temple of abomination" (*Letters, Early Years* 534). Again in November of the same year, he distressfully refers to several instances of impairment to the village's environment, some of which signal the intrusion of growing urban industry and commerce into that rural district:

... a farm-house opposite to ours, on the other side of the Lake, has been taken by a dashing man from Manchester who, no doubt, will make a *fine place* of it, and, as he has taken the Island too, will probably erect a pavilion upon it, or, it may be, an Obelisk. This is not all. A very beautiful little Estate has been purchased in the more retired part of the Vale, and the first thing the Gentleman has done preparatory to building his house, has been to make a *sunk Fence* which you overlook on every side from the rocks, thickets, and green sloping hills! Add to all that Sir Michael Flemming has been getting his woods appraised, and after Christmas the Ax is to be lifted against them, and not one tree left, so the whole eastern side of the Lake will be entirely naked, even to the very edge of the water!

(*Letters, Early Years* 638, original emphases)

While suggesting the emergence of conservationist attitude, the claim of this passage is made fundamentally in terms of aesthetics. The writer is worried because the harmonious beauty of the village is threatened by "improvement" on landscape involving fellings, erections and the building of sunken fences; the latter is a typical item of contemporary landscape gardening. Elsewhere he criticizes this style of gardening again on the grounds of taste: "This system [of gardening] I think is founded in false taste, false feeling, and its effects disgusting in the highest degree" (*Letters, Middle Years* 8). We have discussed that the aesthetic side of nature, or its beauty, is fundamental to Wordsworth. So much so that deterioration in Grasmere's condition is tantamount to a partial collapse of that all-important protective shelter of natural beauty for the poet's psychological stability and creative sensibility.

Along with these recent cases of damage done to the Lake District, the immediate stimulus for the composition of *The Tuft of Primroses* is the loss of neigh-

bours and green groves that Wordsworth met with on returning from Coleorton in July 1807. Following a deploring remark on the deaths of many neighbours, Dorothy Wordsworth in a letter of 19 July writes about the loss of greenery: "All the trees in Bainriggs are cut down, and even worse, the giant sycamore near the parsonage house, and all the finest firtrees that overtopped the steeple tower" (*Letters, Middle Years* 159). A dominant theme of *The Tuft* is this sense of loss in Grasmere felt strongly by William and Dorothy Wordsworth.

In *Home at Grasmere*, the whole vale of Grasmere is a sanctuary immune from outside intrusion. A similar protective principle is certainly maintained in *The Tuft of Primroses*, but it is reduced in the form of an apparently insignificant primrose. In addition, even the safety of this primrose seems precarious being guarded only by a fortuitous luck that happens to keep away goats and sheep. At best the flower is kept intact from human hands by the "thought of love" (23) and for the sake of the "pleasure which Thou [the primrose] shed'st . . . Upon the Traveller" (29-31) or of "new gladness" (32) and "genial promises" (33) imparted by the plant to "those who droop, / Sick, poor, or weary, or disconsolate" (33-34). Exactly as in *Home at Grasmere*, no mythical framework or systematic world-view supports the security of this apparently helpless flower; only the purely personal feelings of love and sympathy sustain the privileged position of the primrose.

Ironically the near-immortality attributed to the plant makes the losses in Grasmere Vale stand out the more conspicuously. Relying on his sister's epistolary description, Wordsworth writes:

Stately herself, though of a lowly kind,  
That little Flower remains and has survived  
The lofty band of Firs that overtopp'd  
Their antient Neighbour, the old Steeple Tower.  
(77-80)

Except for that small primrose, Grasmere Vale seems

to have lost its privileged status as claimed in *Home at Grasmere*. Indeed, the vale is now clearly open to vicissitude and external intrusion:

Ah, what a welcome! when from absence long  
Returning, on the centre of the Vale  
I look'd a first glad look and saw them not.  
Was it a dream! the aerial grove, no more  
Right in the centre of the lovely vale  
Suspended like a stationary cloud,  
Had vanish'd like a cloud. (94-100)

As a result of this disfigurement of scenery, Grasmere has lost its special protective power. In *Home at Grasmere* "lofty barriers break the force / Of winds" (455-56) and there is a "Power and a protection for the mind" (458); but now in that 1808 poem the disappearance of trees seems to expose the vale to relentless force from the outside reality:

. . . unfeeling Heart  
Had he who . . .  
. . . did not spare the little avenue  
Of lightly stirring Ash-trees, that sufficed  
To dim the glare of summer, and to blunt  
The strong Wind turn'd into a gentle breeze. (104-11)

As the vale is no longer a place of protection, itself invaded by disturbing force, Wordsworth cannot but have recourse to transcendent principles:

Oh for some band of guardian Spirits, prompt  
. . . to protect from harm  
The wild Beast with her young, and from the touch  
Of waste the green-leav'd Thicket to defend,  
Their secret couch, and cool umbrageous trees,  
Their canopy, and berry-bearing shrub  
And grassy lawn, their pasture's open range;  
Continual and firm peace, from outrage safe  
And all annoyance. (251-62)

An emerging conservatism is implied in this turnaround of the protector-protectee relationship; while beautiful forms of Grasmere's nature used to protect the poet's mind, now it is the poet himself who attempts to keep the vale securely guarded by calling for external intervention. Although ultimately moti-

vated by the need to save his own spirit's stability and poetic creativity, it is the poet who assumes the role of protector.

A few years later Wordsworth's conservationist thought, articulated thus in *The Tuft of Primroses*, re-emerged in *A Guide through the District of the Lakes*, a guidebook first published in 1810 as the introductory notes to Joseph Wilkinson's collection of landscape drawings, and later expanded into a full volume published independently. The final definitive edition, which I refer to in this paper, was published in 1835 in Kendal and London. Wordsworth's *Guide* is a pioneering document in the history of environmentalism. No later than the early nineteenth century, this book prophetically proposes thinking of the Lake country as "a sort of national property, in which every man has a right and interest who has an eye to perceive and heart to enjoy" (225). Without being aware of it, the poet is here foreseeing the Lake District National Park of today. Furthermore, Wordsworth deems the district as an ecosystem, an integrated whole where each element is dependent on, and essential for, other. As Jonathan Bate sagaciously observes, all things in the area, mountains, vales, lakes and even humble tarns, work together to make a necessary contribution to the total system (*Romantic Ecology* 46). Bate illustrates this claim by citing a passage that explains the indispensable role of small tarns in the water circulation of the area's ecosystem:

In the economy of nature these [tarns] are useful, as auxiliars to the Lakes; for if the whole quantity of water which falls upon the mountains in time of storm were poured down upon the plains without intervention . . . the habitable grounds would be much more subject than they are to inundation. (*A Guide* 185)

A fully-formulated conservationist attitude comes to the fore in the third section, titled "Changes, and Rules of Taste for Preventing Their Bad Effects." At the beginning of this section, Wordsworth puts the descriptions of the Lake area presented in the previ-

ous two sections into a historical perspective: "Such . . . was the appearance of things till within the last sixty years" (207). Then, with a quotation from Thomas Gray, the poet emphasizes the healthier state of the Grasmere environment in the past: "Not a single red tile, no flaring gentleman's house or garden-wall, breaks in upon the repose of this little unsuspected paradise" (208). Yet, as it happened, change was soon to take place. Wordsworth cites a number of instances in which Grasmere's long-maintained condition is threatened by the so-called "improvement" by recent settlers and new land-holders. As he has already done in his letters, the poet refers to a several conspicuous cases of impairment done to Grasmere's scenery. The islands of Derwentwater and Windermere "were the first places seized upon, and were instantly defaced by the intrusion" (208). He then mentions further examples of fellings, plantations and buildings, all motivated by land-improvement:

The venerable wood that had grown for centuries round the small house called St. Herbert's Hermitage, had indeed some years before been felled by its native proprietor, and the whole island planted anew with Scotch firs, left to spindle up by each other's side—a melancholy phalanx, defying the power of the winds, and disregarding the regret of the spectator. (208)

At the bidding of an alien improver, the Hind's Cottage, upon Vicar's island, in the same lake, with its embowering sycamores and cattle-shed, disappeared from the corner where they stood; and right in the middle, and upon the precise point of the island's highest elevation, rose a tall square habitation. (208-9)

Wordsworth's concern is all the more urgent as he finds that not only Grasmere and its vicinity, but the whole Lake District are in danger: "this beautiful country has, in numerous other places, suffered from the same spirit" (209).

As is suggested in the quotations from *The Guide* so far, Wordsworth's reproof is directed towards the aesthetic taste of those improvers. In fact, Wordsworth ascribes the disfigurement of natural scenery to the wilful imposition of artificial concepts upon nature,

or transferring “rules of mimic art” to “things above all art” (11. 154, 155) as he explains in the 1805 *Prelude*. In particular, human love of distinct ideas, regular order and artificiality, once applied to nature, tends to destroy its characteristic beauty:

All gross transgressions of this kind originate, doubtless, in a feeling natural and honourable to the human kind, viz. the pleasure which it receives from distinct ideas, and from the perception of order, regularity, and contrivance. (210)

Commenting on construction works to an Windermere island the poet remarks that “An artificial appearance has thus been given to the whole” (209). To correct this unfortunate human tendency, Wordsworth time and again admonishes the reader to subject art to “the powers of Nature” (220) often advising to “recur to Nature” (219) and to “let the images of nature be your guide” (223).

To rectify the inclination towards artificiality is tantamount to the education of sensibility. Wordsworth claims that if one observes nature carefully, a new sensibility will grow in the viewer’s mind, a taste that appreciates subtle gradations of colours and fine differences in shape seen in untouched scenery, rather than artificial distinctions and regularity of form:

. . . a new habit of pleasure will be formed . . . arising out of the perception of the fine gradations by which in nature one thing passes away into another, and the boundaries that constitute individuality disappear in one instance only to be revived elsewhere under a more alluring form. (210)

The poet then leads the reader towards acceptance of the virtue of “self-planted wood,—each tree springing up in the situation best suited to its kind, and with that shape which the situation constrained or suffered it to take” (211). He once remarked in “The Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*” of 1800 that “an *accurate* taste in Poetry and in all the other arts . . . is an *acquired* talent” (156, original emphases). Following this earlier conception, in *A Guide*, too, Wordsworth sticks by

the idea that the right sensibility is a product of education. Importantly in this claim he implies that a truly civilized person is harmonious with, not disrupting to, nature. In the passage below, Wordsworth suggests that the educated mind appreciates untouched nature, whereas the unenlightened sensibility of children or peasants tends to prefer artificial formality:

What endless melting and playing into each other of forms and colours does the one [self-planted woods] offer to a mind at once attentive and active; and how insipid and lifeless, compared with it, appear those parts of the former exhibition [formal plantation] with which a child, a peasant perhaps, or a citizen unfamiliar with natural imagery, would have been most delighted! (211)

If one of the fundamental attributes of humanity is the ability to develop through education, Wordsworth’s insistence on an aesthetic enlightenment of sensibility towards nature can be regarded as an instance of the marriage of nature and the human mind presented in “The Prospectus.”

Towards the end of this section of *A Guide*, Wordsworth briefly discusses an economic cause of the on-going deterioration of the Lake District environment, which, the poet anticipates, can bring further damage to the district. According to the poet, the area’s landownership is being rapidly transferred from landed farmers, or estatesmen, to the hands of gentry as a result of the changing economic system of Britain. The recent introduction of factory-manufacturing, the poet contends, has deprived estatesmen’s households of half the source of their income, that is, home manufacturing such as spinning wool. Consequently, landed farmers, unable to maintain themselves by farming alone, hand their land over to wealthier gentleman-class. Wordsworth continues to argue that these new landowners build new houses at the expense of traditional cottages and wild scenery:

. . . if they [gentry] wish to become residents, [they] erect new mansions out of the ruins of the ancient cottages, whose little enclosures, with all the wild graces

that grew out of them, disappear. (224)

Wordsworth realistically estimates that in the near future, indeed in a matter of a few years, “the country on the margin of the Lakes will fall almost entirely into the possession of gentry, either strangers or natives” (224). The poet wishes that “a better taste should prevail among these new proprietors” and “skill and knowledge should prevent unnecessary deviations from that path of simplicity and beauty along which, without design and unconsciously, their humble predecessors have moved” (224-25). The reader of *A Guide*, then, realizes that a purpose of this book is to educate this new landowning class so as to make them conform to the traditional ways of land management which has long followed nature’s footsteps. As the economic trend cannot be reversed, the poet believes, this is at least a practicable method of protecting the Lake District, a national property of England.

Throughout Section III of *A Guide*, Wordsworth’s conservationist concern is sincere and strongly motivated. Yet, he seems to be largely optimistic about the future of the Lake country. In addition to his belief in the effectiveness of the education of sensibility, Wordsworth trusts nature’s power of self-recuperation. He illustrates this conviction by alluding to actual incidents. In one instance, an island, once disfigured by human hand, has been reverted to the original condition by “the taste of succeeding proprietor” (209). Nature, the poet asserts, whether damaged artificially or by a natural cause, has never lacked the active power to heal itself: “the scars, if any be left, will gradually disappear before a healing spirit; and what remains still be soothing and pleasing” (222-23). In the same spirit, Wordsworth hints at the idea which, in today’s terminology, can be called sustainable forestry:

... out of the numerous copses, fine woods might in time be raised, probably without sacrifice of profit, by leaving, at the periodical fellings, a due proportion of the healthiest trees to grow up into timber. (223)

The poet’s realistic vision is looking at a horizon where the human economic activity and conservation become reconcilable. This is a manifestation, in a very different guise, of the marriage of nature and humanity envisaged years before in *Home at Grasmere*.

## VI

Thus far, Wordsworth’s environmental awareness, fully developed through *The Tuft of Primroses* and *A Guide through the District of the Lakes*, has remained a moderate position. It nonchalantly allows for the possibility of harmonious coexistence of growing economy and natural scenery. As the century progresses, however, the poet’s native country has to face more imminent threats from urban industry and commerce. His attitude inevitably becomes keener and more aggressive. For the conclusion of the current article, I look into the final phase of the poet’s environmentalism in his last prose writing of a sustained length, *Kendal and Windermere Railway*.

When the railway project from Kendal to Windermere was announced in 1844, Wordsworth quickly opposed this plan by writing a couple of fiercely critical letters addressed to the editors of *The Morning Post*. This projected railway was expected to supply the public an easier access to the heart of the Lake District. Wordsworth’s position is conveniently summarized in the second of the two letters:

... the perception of what has acquired the name of picturesque and romantic scenery is so far from being intuitive, that it can be produced only by a slow and gradual process of culture, and ... the humbler ranks of society are not, and cannot be, in a state to gain material benefit from a more speedy access than they now have to this beautiful region. (349)

Its argument being based on the aesthetic taste of the people expected to come to the Lake District, this document is a direct outgrowth of Wordsworth’s conservationist outlook which we have discussed so far,

especially that manifested in *A Guide through the District of the Lakes*.

Wordsworth's view that a readier accessibility to the District contributes nothing to working-class people directly proceeds from his earlier statement that "an accurate taste in Poetry and in all the other arts . . . is an acquired talent" ("Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*" 156, original emphases). He accordingly admits that "the ordinary varieties of rural nature" (*Kendal and Windermere Railway* 343) attract human sensibility intuitively; but "a taste beyond this . . . is not to be implanted at once; it must be gradually developed both in nations and individuals" (343). Wordsworth, then, elaborates on "a taste beyond this" :

Rocks and mountains, torrents and widespread waters, and all those features of nature which go to the composition of such scenes as this part of England is distinguished for, cannot, in their finer relations to the human mind, be comprehended, or even very imperfectly conceived, without processes of culture or opportunities of observation in some degree habitual. (343)

Wordsworth wishes to have only those tourists into the area who have an enlightened vision for looking at nature, or "an eye to perceive and a heart to feel and worthily enjoy" (355). In other words, he wants to establish among people an attitude to respect wilder parts of nature as they actually are. As implied in his message, "let the images of nature be your guide" (*A Guide* 223), what the poet intends to do is to remove human arrogance over nature.

In the closing part of *Kendal and Windermere Railway* Wordsworth refers to his personal experience of witnessing wild scenery stripped of its grandeur by artificial modification. Quoting the "Simplon Pass" passage from *The Prelude*, Wordsworth regrets that the sublime impression that he had received half a century before from that pass stretching along an Alpine ravine was completely nullified because "the new military road had taken place of the old muleteer track with its primitive simplicities" (353). The poet con-

tinues:

. . . though the road and torrent continued to run parallel to each other, their fellowship was put an end to. The stream had dwindled into comparable insignificance, so much had Art interfered with and taken the lead of Nature. (354)

Besides this audacious intrusion of art, Wordsworth also found that the tourists no longer took heed of nature; in their carriages they were only "discussing the merits of 'the last new Novel'" (354). Even worse than this indifference is the fact that tourists lack the right mind-set for appreciating nature. Right in front of the grandeur of Alpine landscape they are merely imposing their preconceived ideas on the scenery by "poring over their Guide-books" (354).

To rectify this deplorable insensibility, the public's taste needs to be gradually educated by habitual exposure to familiar aspects of nature. A few quick visits to the Lake District, therefore, are meaningless; on the contrary, they can lead to disturbance to the area's atmosphere of seclusion and to the loss of its scenic beauty. Instead, Wordsworth proposes a practicable way to enhance people's appreciation of nature: "upon a holiday, or on the Sunday, after having attended divine worship, they make little excursions with their wives and children among neighbouring fields" (344). In such a way only, he contends, "persons who must labour daily with their hands for bread in large towns, or are subject to confinement through the week, can be trained to a profitable intercourse with nature where she is the most distinguished by the majesty and sublimity of her forms" (344). Looming behind this practical proposal is the poet's unchanged belief in the mutual fitness of nature and human consciousness. However, in this late phase of his literary career, the one of the two terms of this grand formulation seems to be given a prominent position at the expense of the other. This is perhaps inevitable. In the century dominated by commerce and industry, the modest submission of humanity to nature has become a far more ur-

gent imperative than nature's benign accommodation of human wilfulness.

For the conclusion of his argument Wordsworth cites a couple of sonnets from his previous collections. One of these is particularly relevant to our discussion, because this offers an optimistic vision of future where nature and humanity are coexistent harmoniously:

Motion and Means, on sea and land at war  
 With old poetic feeling, not for this  
 Shall ye, by poets even, be judged amiss!  
 Nor shall your presence, howsoe'er it mar  
 The loveliness of nature, prove a bar  
 To the mind's gaining that prophetic sense  
 Of future good, that point of vision, whence  
 May be discovered what in soul ye are.  
 In spite of all that Beauty must disown  
 In your harsh features, Nature doth embrace  
 Her lawful offspring in man's Art; and Time  
 Pleased with your triumph o'er his brother Space,  
 Accepts from your bold hands the proffered crown  
 Of hope, and welcomes you with cheer sublime. (355)

Read in conjunction with the main body of *Kendal and Windermere Railway*, this sonnet can be interpreted as linking the Wordsworth as active conservationist of the Lake District and that enthusiastic young republican fighting for the cause of the French Revolution. While in the prose part defending his native soil from urban intrusion, the poet in this sonnet still holds to his old position devoted to the progress of society. As indicated in the forward-looking "prophetic sense / Of future good," he continues to be a millenarian visionary who in the early days of the Revolution saw "France standing on the top of golden hours, / And human nature seeming born again" (*Thirteen-Book Prelude* 6. 353-54). Established in the first half of the nineteenth century, his environmentalist outlook may have its limitation; yet in a important sense it is a vision of a real import. For, without falling into a backward-looking nostalgia, it succeeds in advancing the poet's long-held conviction of the progressive partnership of nature and humanity.

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