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The Spring of Meditation

Interpreting Wordsworth's Theory of Poetry Described in the Preface and Applied in Poems from Lyrical Ballads

The present essay will make an attempt at interpreting William Wordsworth's theory of poetry presented in his Preface written to *Lyrical Ballads*, and will argue that his ideas about poetry and about the *ways* to write poetry can be found in his poems, that his ideas in the Preface are consistent with his poems. The essay will mainly rely on the 1800 and 1802 editions of the Preface, but will also point out some ideas from the Advertisement, Appendix, and the 1815 supplementary essay written to the *Lyrical Ballads*. In interpreting Wordsworth's theory of poetry, the essay will claim that the Preface can be seen as a coherent and logical text, that Wordsworth describes a systematic theory; and will question the assumption that Wordsworth can be linked and likened to the ideas of primitivism, that he can be connected with the ideas of Rousseau in trying to go back and reach a "natural state," where man is deprived of social habits and conventions, in favour of offering two other probable sources of inspiration for Wordsworth in creating his creative theory, Edmund Burke and John Dennis. After the analysis of the Preface, the essay will interpret two poems from *Lyrical Ballads: Expostulation and Reply* and *Lines Written in Early Spring* in connection with the presented analysis of Wordsworth's theory of poetry.

It is a generally acknowledged assumption that "Wordsworth began as a rebel." He abhorred passionless, artificial poetic diction, "his theory of poetry was a revolt of feeling against form" to defend natural responses and attitudes in poetry.² It is in the Preface (1800) written to *Lyrical Ballads*, now regarded as a romantic manifesto, "a fascinating hybrid of derivation and innovation of traditional precept and primitive challenge," where Wordsworth rages against form and artificiality.³ The supposed alternative, as Heffernan argues, against the "passionless contrivances of contemporary poetry," which has led Wordsworth to "an indiscriminate hostility to artifice and art," is to give up the conscious control (of form and art) when writing poetry in favour of a natural response to nature and feelings.⁴ Heffernan even goes as far as to question how seriously one might take Wordsworth's speculations in the Preface, as the Preface is, according to his views, not a systematic defence or theory of poetry, it is not a homogenous text; it is rather an ephemeral outburst, a reflection of a mind in motion, and as it happens, it is a rebel's mind, who came to destroy.⁵ (60)

In what follows, Heffernan's views will be called in question and the present research will make an attempt at demonstrating that Wordsworth's Preface and his theory of poetry described in it is neatly constructed. Although the goal is to prove the contrary of Heffernan's ideas, if we take his phrase "a mind in motion" out of its context, we can highlight two important points concerning the Preface. One is that Wordsworth will indeed rebel against something: he will criticise the poetic style and diction, the rhetoric of his contemporaries (but, as it will be argued, not because it is artificial). The other is that it is possible – if we interpret "mind in motion" as referring to a reflective, rational mind – to

²HEFFERNAN 1969, 30.

³HEFFERNAN 1969, 31.

⁴HEFFERNAN 1969, 48, 37.

⁵HEFFERNAN 1969, 60.

read the Preface as an organised, systematic text, using rhetorical devices. It is even possible to read it, as Nabholz did, as a “successful rhetorical piece” which follows the rhetorical conventions of an apologia.⁶ Clancey, relying on the arguments of Nabholz, says that the rhetoric of the Preface is not only apologetic, but is also an example of epideictic writing, where Wordsworth, relying on ethical proofs, wants to “establish the *credibility* of the writer.”⁷ Wordsworth wants to “establish his honesty as chief voice in the Preface.”⁸ If it is possible to identify (consciously used) rhetorical devices in Wordsworth’s Preface, one should probably reconsider just how much Wordsworth is rebelling against artificial, rhetorical forms and devices.

Nevertheless, there is a possible perspective from which the poems in *Lyrical Ballads* can be seen as innovative and revolutionary, because they are claimed to be based on a new theory of poetry, and the “Advertisement” written to the 1798 edition already contains some claims about this innovation.⁹ Here, Wordsworth announces that “the majority of the following poems are to be considered as experiments.”¹⁰ The readers may very well have a strange and awkward feeling, as “they will look round for poetry, and will be induced to enquire by what species of courtesy these attempts can be permitted to assume that title.”¹¹ If there are obstacles which prevent the readers from enjoying these poems (as poems), then these are “our own pre-established codes of decision.”¹² So in order to enjoy these poems, we have to dislocate ourselves from our pre-established ways of thinking.¹³ In the Preface, written to the 1800 edition, Wordsworth returns to this problem introduced in the Advertisement and says that “by the act of writing in verse an Author makes a formal engagement that he will gratify certain known habits of association.”¹⁴ So he realises and acknowledges that there is an implicit agreement between readers and writers which defines what can be considered as poetry, and that this changes over time.¹⁵ These “habits of association” work both ways, they influence the way readers think, and also influence the way a poet writes. The aim of Wordsworth is to dislocate the readers from these habits, in order to receive “from ordinary moral sensations another and more salutary impression than we are accustomed to receive from them.”¹⁶ This is a possible sense in which Wordsworth’s theory is revolutionary.¹⁷

But the “habits of association” also work on the part of the artist, and it is in connection with this that Wordsworth criticises the language of his contemporaries, as they “indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression in order to furnish food for fickle tastes and fickle appetites of their own creation.”¹⁸ So Wordsworth discredits the language, the “habits of expression” of his contemporaries. But it is important to see that he does not discredit habits in general, but only those of his contemporaries,

⁶ CLANCEY 2000, 91.

⁷ NABHOLTZ 1986, 71.

⁸ CLANCEY 2000, 91.

⁹ KOMÁROMY 2008, 170. The summaries and quotations from Komáromy’s Hungarian text appear in my translation.

¹⁰ WORDSWORTH – COLERIDGE 2005, 7.

¹¹ WORDSWORTH – COLERIDGE 2005, 7.

¹² WORDSWORTH – COLERIDGE 2005, 7.

¹³ KOMÁROMY 2008, 170.

¹⁴ WORDSWORTH – COLERIDGE 2005, 235.

¹⁵ KOMÁROMY 2008, 171.

¹⁶ WORDSWORTH – COLERIDGE 2005, 238–239.

¹⁷ KOMÁROMY 2008, 171.

¹⁸ WORDSWORTH – COLERIDGE 2005, 236–237.

because those habits of expression are “arbitrary and capricious.”¹⁹ But then it follows that there are good and bad habits, with good and bad languages. The question is how to decide what counts as a good habit and a good language, and how Wordsworth authorises his language as one that can be seen as the poetic language that can be accepted as such.

According to the speculations in the Appendix he wrote to the 1802 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, “The earliest Poets of all nations generally wrote from passion excited by real events; they wrote naturally, and as men: feeling powerfully as they did, their language was daring, and figurative.”²⁰ What is important is that there was a natural connection between the feelings and the figurative speech of the poets. Furthermore, the language used by poets was “really spoken by men, language which the Poet himself had uttered when he had been affected by the events which he described.”²¹ So there seems to be a connection between the language of ordinary men and poets, in which the relationship between natural feelings and way of expression was maintained.²² The poets who abused the natural poetic language went astray when they

“contented themselves for the most part with misapplying only expressions which at first had been dictated by real passion, carried the abuse still further, and introduced phrases composed apparently in the spirit of the original figurative language of passion, yet altogether of their own invention, and distinguished by various degrees of wanton deviation from good sense and nature.”²³

The reason why the distorted poetic language could survive is because, despite not being identical with the original one, it could still excite the mind of the readers, and as time passed, „the true and the false became so inseparably interwoven that the taste of men was gradually perverted and this language was received as a natural language.”²⁴ Due to the fact that the distorted poetic language could excite the mind, it survived and was perceived as the original, “natural” language, but as Wordsworth points out, there is a difference between the two.²⁵ The difference is that the “natural” language was really “spoken by men,” which maintained the natural connection between language and feelings, as opposed to the language which “they themselves had invented, and which was uttered only by themselves.”²⁶

So Wordsworth is not discrediting habits, he is perfectly aware of the fact that what counts as poetry is defined by the agreement between poets and readers. He is after changing the agreement, because he thinks that poets and readers are basing their agreement on the misconception of following the original poetic language. More precisely, he wants to change with going back and recapturing the original poetic language. This act of recapturing will be based on habits because, on the one hand, there are passages in the Preface where he talks about them positively, and on the other, it is in connection with his positive attitude concerning habits that he is going to base his quest for

¹⁹ KOMÁROMY 2008, 173.

²⁰ WORDSWORTH – COLERIDGE 2005, 311.

²¹ WORDSWORTH – COLERIDGE 2005, 312.

²² KOMÁROMY 2008, 173.

²³ WORDSWORTH – COLERIDGE 2005, 312.

²⁴ WORDSWORTH – COLERIDGE 2005, 313.

²⁵ KOMÁROMY 2008, 177.

²⁶ WORDSWORTH – COLERIDGE 2005, 313.

re-capturing the natural poetic language in certain habits. This can be seen in the passages where he argues for why he has chosen the environment and language of rustic people.²⁷

“The principal object then which I proposed to myself in these Poems was to make the incidents of common life interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature: chiefly as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement. Low and rustic life was generally chosen because in that situation the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that situation our elementary feelings exist in a state of greater simplicity and consequently may be more accurately contemplated and more forcibly communicated.”²⁸

As Owen points out, “the most important element in the passages under examination is the notion of *permanence*.”²⁹ This can be seen as one of the guiding thoughts in the Preface, and the reason why the language of rustic life was chosen has to do with this permanence. “The language too of these men is adopted (purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust) because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived...”³⁰

What Wordsworth highlights is that due to the “narrow circle of their intercourse,” and their “repeated experience and regular feelings” rustics represent a close connection with the permanence of natural forms.³¹ So it is not simply because rustic people would be, by definition, due to their habitation and occupations, “closer” to nature. The passage is featured by words referring to habituality, repetitive activities, and this is what is important for Wordsworth. But this is again a kind of habit, and the reason Wordsworth chooses the language and environment of rustics is because they can be seen, with their habitual lifestyle and, consequently, their habitual language, the representative source of the natural poetic language which Wordsworth has favoured, as argued before.³²

This passage about rustic life is the one which ends with the scolding of the “arbitrary and capricious” language used by Wordsworth’s contemporaries, which has been previously mentioned. After these speculations, Wordsworth tells us of a further component of his poetry besides language (that will be, however, in connection with language) that differentiates it from those of his contemporaries: he claims that “each of them has a worthy *purpose*.”³³ The purpose is “to illustrate the manner in which our feelings and ideas are associated in a state of excitement...to follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature.”³⁴ To put it in another way, as Owen interprets the previously quoted passage, the purpose will be

²⁷ WORDSWORTH – COLERIDGE 2005, 179.

²⁸ WORDSWORTH – COLERIDGE 2005, 235–236.

²⁹ OWEN 1969, 12. With “passages under examination” Owen refers to the previously introduced passage from the Preface which deals with the language of rustics.

³⁰ WORDSWORTH – COLERIDGE 2005, 236.

³¹ WORDSWORTH – COLERIDGE 2005, 236.

³² KOMÁROMY 2008, 180–181.

³³ WORDSWORTH – COLERIDGE 2005, 237.

³⁴ WORDSWORTH – COLERIDGE 2005, 238.

“to define ‘general truth’, the norm of human emotional behaviour, and to show that particular incidents are congruous with it. The obscure passage... is meant to show how mental habits are formed in the poet such that, when his feelings have been ‘strongly excited’, they have ipso facto been excited by something which has inevitable connections with general truth.”³⁵

What are the mental habits that make Wordsworth able to write poetry in a way that they carry along with them a purpose? It is not, as Wordsworth argues, “that I always began to write with a distinct purpose formally conceived,” but “my habits of meditation have so formed my feelings, as that my descriptions of such objects as strongly excite those feelings, will be found to carry along with them a purpose.”³⁶ Wordsworth is again talking about a habit, the habit of meditation, and it is due to the fact that this process got habitualised that it will consequently carry along with it a purpose.

This is similar to and in connection with the language of rustics. In both cases (the habit of meditation and the language of rustics), habit gives a mental framework to the feelings that arise.³⁷ The language of rustics is in close relationship with “the best part of language” as their way of life is defined by “repeated experience and regular feelings,” by a habitual mode of existence, which makes their language, according to Wordsworth, “permanent” and “philosophical.”³⁸ And, in a similar way, the possibility for (the description of) feelings to “carry along with them a purpose” (to trace the “primary laws of our nature,” the “simple affection of our nature,” to define general truth) is achieved through making the process of meditation a habit that can serve as a mental framework which grants a (purposeful) form for the feelings that arise in the poet. The language of rustics and the process of meditation are, in Wordsworth’s theory, connected through what they have in common, their habitual nature. In other words, “the poet follows the rustic model with lending purpose to the description of feelings by habit’s formative influence.”³⁹ So then the concept and process of habit in Wordsworth’s theory is something that leads to the natural poetic language he wants to recapture, that can give way to natural feelings. Consequently, in light of the present argumentation, habit itself can be seen as a natural phenomenon.

But one may wonder how, on the one hand, a habit can be natural, and on the other, how the language and feelings that Wordsworth wants to achieve and represent can be seen as natural, after going through such a complex and conscious process. In order to shed some light on the questions of what “the habits of meditation” mean with Wordsworth, and how the feelings that appear in them can be seen as “natural” that comprise the “simple affection of our nature,” we may turn to some of Edmund Burke’s speculations, as his writings have probably influenced Wordsworth on these matters. As Chandler sums it up, in Burke’s system, feelings take priority over theory, as when “our feelings contradict our theories... the feelings are true, and the theory is false.”⁴⁰ Furthermore, feelings take priority also over reason. If this is true and feelings take priority over reason, how can we tell when our feelings are “right” and when they are not? Burke’s answer would be that “the Englishman’s reliable sentiments are his natural entrails; he has a natural heart of flesh and blood. The feelings that can be trusted must therefore be

³⁵ OWEN 1969, 38.

³⁶ WORDSWORTH – COLERIDGE 2005, 237.

³⁷ KOMÁROMY 2008, 185.

³⁸ WORDSWORTH – COLERIDGE 2005, 236.

³⁹ KOMÁROMY 2008, 185.

⁴⁰ CHANDLER 1984, 63.

the natural ones.”⁴¹ But the question is then how one can distinguish the natural from the unnatural feelings. A passage from Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* will probably get us closer to the nature of this problem. Burke says about the “nature” of the Englishmen that

“...instead of casting away all our old prejudices, we cherish them to a very considerable degree; and, to take more shame to ourselves, we cherish them because they are prejudices... Many of our men of speculation, instead of exploding general prejudices, employ their sagacity to discover the latent wisdom which prevails in them. If they find what they seek, (and they seldom fail,) they think it more wise to continue the prejudice, with the reason involved, than to cast away the coat of prejudice, and to leave nothing but the naked reason; because prejudice, with its reason, has a motive to give action to that reason, and an affection which will give it permanence... Prejudice renders a man’s virtue his habit, and not a series of unconnected acts. Through just prejudice, his study becomes a part of his nature.”⁴²

This passage already contains some similarities with the way Wordsworth presents his arguments. If we substitute the word “prejudice” for “meditation,” we get a similar line of reasoning as that of Wordsworth’s: “[Meditation] renders a man’s virtue his habit, and not a series of unconnected acts.” It becomes his habit, and furthermore, that it is not an “unconnected act”, but “has a motive to give action to that reason” can be seen as giving a purpose to the activity.

Considering the Burke excerpt in itself, we can claim that, although Burke argued in favour of feeling over reason, he implies here that one must have a rational criterion, reason, especially when one has to distinguish good prejudice from bad prejudice.⁴³ With Burke, the use of the word “nature” is just as ambiguous as “feeling,” “reason,” or “prejudice.” Chandler compares the previously quoted passage with another from Burke’s *Reflections*:

“All the superadded ideas, furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns and the understanding ratifies, as necessary to cover the defects of our naked, shivering nature, and to raise it to dignity in our own estimation, are to be exploded, as a ridiculous, absurd, and antiquated fashion.”⁴⁴

As Chandler argues, “the ‘coat of prejudice’ from the later passage would seem to be an item from the moral imagination’s wardrobe. But the garments in the earlier passage clothe ‘our naked...nature’ whereas the coat of prejudice clothes the ‘naked...reason.’”⁴⁵ Furthermore, with the phrase “our nature” in the second excerpt, Burke refers to something that simultaneously comprises both our reason and our clothes or prejudices, both reason and habit. Thus, nature, in the second excerpt comprises both our naked, shivering “nature” (which was described first through feeling, then through reason which we have to apply because of our prejudices); and our “second nature,” which manifests itself as we create a habit out of our prejudices. Consequently, it is an inherent feature of Burke’s philosophical system that “there is Nature and there is a second nature which is at once within Nature yet parallel to it. Second nature is

⁴¹ CHANDLER 1984, 63.

⁴² BURKE 1962, 105–106.

⁴³ CHANDLER 1984, 66.

⁴⁴ BURKE 1962, 92–93.

⁴⁵ CHANDLER 1984, 67.

at once metaphorical and metonymous with Nature.⁴⁶

Wordsworth's text shows many similarities with Burke's concerning the uses of "nature" and "feeling" and these notions are just as central to him as they are to Burke.⁴⁷ Let us return to the discussion of the creative process (the habit of meditation) that was introduced before turning to the speculations of Burke. Wordsworth claims that "my habits of meditation have so formed my feelings, as that my descriptions of such objects as strongly excite those feelings, will be found to carry along with them a *purpose*."

Owen points out a problem in this passage concerning Wordsworth's ambiguous use of the word "feeling." It seems that the word "feeling" (when mentioned first) is something that can be excited (like our senses from outward stimuli). As Wordsworth goes on, he tells us that the purpose will be "to illustrate the manner in which our feelings and ideas are associated in a state of excitement...to follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature." Then these feelings can be seen not as the ones mentioned before (which behave like our receptive senses), but as feelings that can enter our minds as "stimulating agents."⁴⁸ This is similar to how Burke operated with the notions of nature and second nature. Second nature was nature and was, at the same time, something parallel to it. As Owen argues, in the mind, there are "thoughts" which represent the past influxes of feelings (which are the secondly mentioned, stimulating ones), which comprise, at the same time, the past excitement of feelings (in the firstly mentioned sense, that they were feelings that were stimulated). The contemplation, reflection on the connection of these two types of "feelings" "produces knowledge of what is important." So then this can be seen as an evaluative process which (although based on feelings) requires reason, a process that can be summed up as the "evaluation of past emotional experiences by a process of introspection which works upon the memory of the experiences."⁴⁹ So then, the "habits of meditation" can be seen as the "second nature" concerning the "nature" of Wordsworth's poetic theory: as argued before, habit can be seen as a "natural" phenomenon, because it gives a mental frame to the thoughts that arise. During the habit of meditation, the poet contemplates on his feelings, but while he does so, he not only contemplates feelings, but also contemplates thoughts that are the past excitement of feelings, and through contemplating the relationship of feelings and feelings of past influxes that have become thoughts, the contemplation gives direction, generates a purpose for the poet. So on the one hand, the poet reaches back to the natural language through habit's formative influence (as discussed earlier), and on the other, during the meditation, he goes through an evaluative process of feelings and thoughts that grants a purpose. Although this is an active process that requires reason and will besides feelings, it can be said to be natural, because, as Wordsworth argues, it became his habit, and as we could see, habit can be interpreted as a natural phenomenon in Wordsworth's theory.

It might be worth then to reconsider the kind of connection that Wordsworth is supposed to attribute to nature and natural feelings. There is a tradition in Wordsworth criticism, established by M. H. Abrams, to think that Wordsworth's moments of insight and natural feelings come, like Rousseau's, when deprived of habitual, conventional customs, which Abrams sums up "when he says of Wordsworth's poetic enterprise that its 'prime opponent-power is custom.'⁵⁰

⁴⁶ CHANDLER 1984, 67.

⁴⁷ CHANDLER 1984, 67–68.

⁴⁸ OWEN 1969, 38–39.

⁴⁹ OWEN 1969, 40.

⁵⁰ CHANDLER 1984, 74.

Rousseau in the Second Discourse (from *Discourse on the Origin and Foundation of Inequality*) makes an absolute distinction concerning the nature of human feelings and actions, investigating man both as subject and object in his discussion. In case of the subjective aspect, Rousseau claims that our habits, our education make us unable to see naturally, prevent us from “going back to the state of nature.”⁵¹ Concerning the objective analysis of the natural man, he will “himself be as nude as we can make ourselves in the act of reconstruction,” meaning with this that Rousseau’s hypothetical natural man is “naked” in the sense that he is deprived of all civil habits and codes, thus being able to represent a natural state, where nature is deprived of social conventions. “Rousseau represents the states of nature and civil society as two...absolutes... [which] represent opposing extremes that brook no compromise.”⁵²

As opposed to this, Burke’s system is one that does not work with extremes. His doctrines represent a transitional place, a place amid extremes, and the function of his theory of second nature “is to compromise the absolute extremes of a writer like Rousseau by occupying the medium between them.”⁵³ And Wordsworth’s use of “nature” and “feeling” is more akin to the way Burke handles these notions. For example, the notion of “feelings” comprises a past feeling, a memory, the affect this had on the person, and the rational contemplation of this connection.

Furthermore, Wordsworth does not discredit conventions, because, as it was argued, he is, on the one hand, very much aware of the fact that art and poetry is something based on conventions, and on the other, Wordsworth himself proposes a new convention for his audience (instead of those adhered to by his contemporaries), so they can gain “from ordinary moral sensations another and more salutary impression than we are accustomed to receive from them,” as already mentioned. And what Wordsworth describes when talking about the creative process is also a process that is of habitual nature. In the following, a new aspect of Wordsworth’s theory of poetry will be discussed, through which we will question another of Abrams’ assumptions.

According to Wordsworth’s famous doctrine, “poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.”⁵⁴ In Abrams’ interpretation, this formulation of Wordsworth’s literary pronouncement makes him a representative of cultural primitivism.

“Wordsworth’s cardinal standard of poetic value is ‘nature,’ and nature, in his usage, is given a triple and primitivistic connotation: Nature is the common denominator of human nature; it is most reliably exhibited among men living ‘according to nature’...and it consists primarily in an elemental simplicity of thought and feeling and a spontaneous and ‘unartificial’ mode of expressing feeling in words.”⁵⁵

Abrams claims that spontaneity, with Wordsworth means the “spontaneous and genuine, not the contrived and stimulated, expression of the emotional state of the poet” so that the language he uses and the feelings he describes are natural, because extemporaneous.⁵⁶ According to Paul Magnuson, however, we have reason to give another interpretation to the word “spontaneous,” with which we can question the assumption of Abrams and later critics of Wordsworth’s poetic theory, who (alongside

⁵¹ CHANDLER 1984, 69–70.

⁵² CHANDLER 1984, 70.

⁵³ CHANDLER 1984, 71.

⁵⁴ WORDSWORTH – COLERIDGE 2005, 237.

⁵⁵ ABRAMS 2010, 105.

⁵⁶ ABRAMS 2010, 102.

with Abram) interpreted spontaneous as natural.⁵⁷ Eighteenth century dictionaries contain definitions of “spontaneity” that can probably reflect more precisely the Wordsworthian meaning of the word. According to these definitions, “spontaneous” can mean “voluntary,” “without constraint,” and “of one’s own record or free will.” These meanings first appeared in the scientific discourse of philosophy and biology in the eighteenth century. In its philosophical context “spontaneous indicates freedom, and in its biological context it indicates self-generation.”⁵⁸

In what follows, the argument will be that Wordsworth’s poetic theory can be seen as an autogenous one that does not rely exclusively on outside stimuli but works in a self-generating fashion. The following observations will hopefully shed more light on the “second nature” of feelings (already introduced via the speculations of Owen) and Wordsworth’s habits of meditation.

After the first time Wordsworth formulates his doctrine (“poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”), he continues thus: “but though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached, were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility had also thought long and deeply.”⁵⁹ And when pages later he formulates his theory for the second time (“I have said that Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”), he adds that

“it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, similar to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind.”⁶⁰

So, Wordsworth describes a poetic theory that is based on retrospection and meditation. There is no timespan given concerning how much time should pass before a past experience, a past emotion can undergo a process of contemplation until it will subside into thought.⁶¹ Wordsworth will, after the first formulation of his poetic theory, clarify and connect several arguments before mentioned (such as purpose and the nature of feelings). As already mentioned, the purpose that his poems carry along with them is “to follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind,” because “our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings.”⁶² So what Wordsworth implicates in this passage is that the feelings that subside into thoughts, which very thoughts can direct our feelings, are “the representatives of all our past feelings,” in other words, they are memories. As argued before, it is the habit of meditation that gives purpose, shape to the feelings that arise. If past feelings turn into thoughts in memory, then recollection comprises a past emotional reaction and a reflection adjoined to this.⁶³ And indeed, “as by contemplating the relation of these general representatives to each other, we discover what is really important to men.”⁶⁴

⁵⁷ Paul Magnuson mentions, besides Abrams and his famous work, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, the formerly quoted works of W. J. B. Owen and James Heffernan, who also interpret “spontaneity” as natural.

⁵⁸ MAGNUSON 1972, 103.

⁵⁹ WORDSWORTH – COLERIDGE 2005, 237.

⁶⁰ WORDSWORTH – COLERIDGE 2005, 251–252.

⁶¹ MAGNUSON 1972, 102.

⁶² WORDSWORTH – COLERIDGE 2005, 237.

⁶³ KOMÁROMY 2008, 186.

⁶⁴ WORDSWORTH – COLERIDGE 2005, 237.

So the habit of meditation, (which can be also called) recollection, through which powerful emotions overflow will not mean a “spontaneous,” an impromptu reaction to outside stimuli, but denote a consciously used and practised process which operates with mental constructions. And it is through “the repetition and continuance of this act” of recollection in meditation that “such habits of mind will be produced” that can be followed “blindly and mechanically” by the poet.⁶⁵ So then, in other words, the poet will have to practice the consciously used technique of recollection (the habit of meditation) in which one contemplates the connection of past experiences until it becomes an automatized process.⁶⁶

However, some further clarification is still needed to see exactly how autogenous Wordsworth’s “spontaneous” poetry is. As quoted above already, “the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, similar to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind.”⁶⁷ Magnuson points out that there are two different emotions, which are according to this passage, not one in creation: “one is engendered, perhaps by personal experience or nature, and subsides, and a second is stimulated by contemplating the first.”⁶⁸ The second, “poetic emotion” is not a mere re-creation of the first, it cannot be, because then the process would be merely regressive. Furthermore, in the 1802 edition of the Preface, Wordsworth changed the word “similar” to “kindred,” a gesture that can be interpreted to signal Wordsworth’s awareness of the relationship of the two emotions. The new, “poetic emotion” has its source in the first emotion, but it is crucial that it will subside into thought, will become the subject of meditation, and through the contemplation of their relationship, a new, “kindred” poetic emotion will be engendered.⁶⁹ Furthermore, to prove more precisely that Wordsworth differentiates between two emotions, we may highlight the end of the sentence: “an emotion...is gradually produced, and does *itself* actually exist in the mind.” So there are going to be two emotions, one from the past that is recollected, and one that is new and is created through the recollection, which overflows spontaneously in the sense that it is free and void of external stimuli.⁷⁰

To support his interpretation about the nature of Wordsworth’s creative process, Magnuson calls our attention to the writings of John Dennis, who has probably influenced Wordsworth in formulating his poetic theory in terms of distinguishing between two different emotions. Dennis differentiates “Vulgar Passion” from “Enthusiastic Passion” and according to his ideas, “Vulgar Passion is that which is moved by the Objects themselves, or by the Ideas in the ordinary Course of Life.”⁷¹ As opposed to this, “Enthusiastic Passion is a Passion which is moved by the Ideas in Contemplation, or the Meditation of things that belong not to common Life.” Dennis’ influence can be seen in the 1815 Preface, where Wordsworth differentiates between “enthusiastic and meditative Imagination” and “human and dramatic Imagination.”⁷² The phrase “enthusiastic and meditative Imagination” used by Wordsworth refers to the poetic emotion that is, as described in the 1800/1802 Preface, created during the habit of meditation, through recollecting and contemplating past experiences, and contemplating the relationship between these.

⁶⁵ WORDSWORTH – COLERIDGE 2005, 237–238.

⁶⁶ KOMÁROMY 2008, 187.

⁶⁷ WORDSWORTH – COLERIDGE 2005, 251–252.

⁶⁸ MAGNUSON 1972, 106.

⁶⁹ MAGNUSON 1972, 106–107.

⁷⁰ KOMÁROMY 2008, 190–192.

⁷¹ DENNIS 1997, 154–155. quoted in Magnuson, “Wordsworth and Spontaneity,” 107–108.

⁷² MAGNUSON 1972, 108.

That Wordsworth uses the word “enthusiastic” in the above mentioned phrase to refer back to something he has earlier conceptualised as the habit of meditation is important as it signals the presence of Dennis’ way of thinking in Wordsworth’s theory.⁷³ Thus, the influence of Dennis on Wordsworth can be seen as already present when formulating the first version of his Preface.

Dennis’ influence can be also observed through what Wordsworth has written in “The Sublime and the Beautiful,” a manuscript that was probably intended for Wordsworth’s *A Guide Through the District of the Lakes*. In this text Wordsworth differentiates between two kinds of sublimity, which can be seen as parallel to the distinction he made between the two emotions that are present in the creative process. Wordsworth describes two kinds of emotional reactions to the sight of mountains or clouds:

“He distinguishes between a sublime based upon terror and personal fear, which, if continued ‘beyond a certain point,’ results in ‘self-consideration & all its accompanying littleness’ and a second, the more exalted sublime, which ‘rouses us to a sympathetic energy & calls upon the mind to grasp at something towards which it can make approaches but which it is incapable of attaining.’ The familiarity with natural objects that mitigates personal fear and transforms it into the more exalted sublime resembles the deliberate process of contemplation...which transforms the original emotion into the poetic emotion.”⁷⁴

“Enthusiastic Passion” can be connected with what Wordsworth describes as “the more exalted sublime,” because “Enthusiastic Passion” is generated through contemplation and meditation, “and those thoughts are, in their most sublime, religious ideas, which produce thoughts quite different from those of common objects.”⁷⁵ And, concerning the creative process which Wordsworth describes in the Preface, “Vulgar Passion” can be paralleled with the first emotion that comes to the poet (probably from outside stimuli), and “Enthusiastic Passion” (that is gained by meditation and contemplation) can be paralleled with the poetic emotion, which is derived from the contemplation of the first emotion.⁷⁶

Magnuson also points out several parts of the Preface where Wordsworth writes about the poet’s self-sufficiency and independence of external stimuli. According to Wordsworth, since he has acquired the habit of meditation through which he creates the poetic emotion, the poet “has acquired a greater readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels, and especially those thoughts and feelings which, by his own choice, or from the structure of his own mind, arise in him without immediate external excitement.”⁷⁷ Furthermore, in the *Essay, Supplementary to the Preface*, written in 1815, Wordsworth writes the following: “To be moved, then, by a passion, is to be excited, often to external, and always to internal, effort...”⁷⁸ So then, Wordsworth’s feelings are “spontaneous” in the sense that they are, on the one hand, conjured up by the poet, voluntarily, “of one’s own accord or free will,” and on the other, that the final product, the poetic emotion will be the result of the habit of meditation, which may have its source in the past from external stimuli, but which works through recollection: the poetic emotion is a result of contemplating the relationship between a past emotion (which may stem from external stimuli) and the past emotion which has subsided into thought. And in this sense, the feelings and stimulations that Wordsworth works with are self-generative, autogenous.

⁷³ KOMÁROMY 2008, 194.

⁷⁴ MAGNUSON 1972, 107.

⁷⁵ MAGNUSON 1972, 108.

⁷⁶ KOMÁROMY 2008, 194.

⁷⁷ WORDSWORTH – COLERIDGE 2005, 246.

⁷⁸ Wordsworth quoted in Magnuson 1972, 105.

It is probably worth summing up at this point the presented analysis of the Preface: the centre of Wordsworth's theory is the act of meditation. Through this meditation, he generates the poetic emotion, which is created through the contemplation of feelings. There is an initial emotion (that may have its source from external stimuli) but which will subside into thought through an undefined span of time. Through contemplating (via recollection) the relationship between the initial emotion and the thought (which is a memory, the representative of our past feelings), the poet will be able to create the new, poetic emotion. Because this self-generative process has become a habit of the poet, it will be a natural process (because, as argued before, habit can be seen as a natural phenomenon in Wordsworth's system). Moreover, it is exactly habit's formative influence through which the poet follows the natural language of rustics (which is based on repetitiveness, habituality), through which he can recapture the original, poetic language "really spoken by men," and it is through the habitual nature of this meditation that the poet can create a purpose for his poems (that differentiates his poems from those of his contemporaries and) which makes them experimental.

To see how important the habits of meditation, the conscious reflection on sensual impressions, feelings and thoughts is important for Wordsworth, it is worth having a look at an excerpt from an essay written by Aubrey de Vere. De Vere (who made acquaintance with Wordsworth eight years before Wordsworth's passed away) recalls the following:

"An untrue description of Nature was to him a profaneness, a heavenly message sophisticated and falsely delivered. He expatiated much to me one day, as we walked among the hills above Grasmere, on the mode in which Nature had been described by one of the most justly popular of England's modern poets [who was, according to Bateson, most probably Tennyson⁷⁹] – one for whom he preserved a high and affectionate respect. 'He took pains,' Wordsworth said; 'he went out with his pencil and notebook, and jotted down whatever struck him most – a river rippling over the sands, a ruined tower on a rock above it, a promontory; and a mountain-ash waving its red berries. He went home, and wove the whole together into a poetical description.' After a pause Wordsworth resumed with a flashing eye and impassioned voice: 'But Nature does not permit an inventory to be made of her charms! He should have left his pencil and notebook at home; fixed his eye, as he walked, with a reverent attention on all that surrounded him, and taken all into a heart that could understand and enjoy. Then, after several days had passed by, he should have interrogated his memory as to the scene. He would have discovered that while much of what he had admired was preserved to him, much was also most wisely obliterated. That which remained – the picture surviving in his mind – would have presented the ideal and essential truth of the scene, and done so, in a large part, by discarding much which, though in itself striking, was not characteristic. In every scene many of the most brilliant details are but accidental. A true eye for Nature does not note them, or at least does not dwell on them.'⁸⁰

As Bateson argues, for Wordsworth, "memory was not primarily a recording mechanism, passively registering whatever came before the mind's eye. It was active, a 'power' which selected from the stream of consciousness those items, and those items only, that *deserved* to be remembered."⁸¹ And memory is worked upon by the poet's mind during the habit of meditation, where the poet creates, through

⁷⁹ BATESON 1956, 164.

⁸⁰ DE VERE 1887, 276–277. Emphasis added.

⁸¹ BATESON 1956, 165.

reflection on thoughts that are “the representatives of all our past feelings,” poetic emotions. That Wordsworth told this to de Vere in his later years may signal that this process, the workings of a reflective mind through recollection, was important for Wordsworth not only then when he formulated his ideas about it in the Preface, but also in his later career as a poet. This is, of course, not to say that this is the only way Wordsworth has written poetry, or that these ideas can be traced down in each and every poem of his, but in terms of the present research, it is important to see the crucial importance of the thought-based process of the habits of meditation in Wordsworth’s creative theory.

Before turning to the analysis of the first poem, there is one last topic in Wordsworth’s Preface that has to be addressed, and that is the question of morality. As Wordsworth argues, his main goal through his poetry is to make the readers able to receive “from ordinary moral sensations another and more salutary impression than we are accustomed to receive from them.” To give a possible interpretation of what Wordsworth might mean under the term and idea of “moral,” it is worth discussing some ideas from another essay of James Chandler’s entitled *Wordsworth’s Great Ode*. In this particular essay, Chandler discusses Wordsworth’s famous “Immortality Ode,” but before doing so, he elaborates on the idea of progress. It is this first part of this essay which is more important in our case, because, as it will be argued, Chandler’s ideas about progress can be also made relevant in terms of the previously mentioned question of morality appearing in the Preface. As Chandler argues, what has to be acquired, in terms of progress, is the ability of acquiring what he terms “sympathetic imagination,” to create “a virtual point of view from which [we have] to *imagine* ourselves undergoing experience, to imagine ourselves feeling.”⁸² Chandler links this notion with the ideas of moral sense philosophers, Adam Smith and David Hume. In connection with Smith’s *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), he gives the following summary to the idea of “sympathetic imagination:

“our ability not to feel what others feel but to feel what we would feel in their place, our capacity to bring their case home to our own bosoms. In these Scottish theorists, moreover, this talent already belongs very specifically to a scheme of progress.”⁸³

In terms of the ideas of David Hume, we will shortly discuss Annette Baier’s interpretation of Hume’s way of thinking. According to Baier, Hume (in his *Enquiry Concerning the Principle of Morals* and in Part III of the *Treatise*) basis his moral theory on reflective passions and corrected sentiments, in which thoughts and reasoning play an essential role.⁸⁴

“...passions and sentiments are, for Hume, impressions of reflection... ‘sentiments’ and ‘passions,’ as Hume uses those terms, are far from excluding thought and judgment. They positively require them. ... Hume’s terms ‘passion’ and ‘impression of reflection’ explicitly unite feeling and thought.”⁸⁵

The main point of these speculations is the idea of achieving a moral progress which is acquired via “imaginative sympathy.” Wordsworth can be linked to Hume in that both of them lay a heavy emphasis on the necessity of both feelings and reason, and on the idea of conscious reflection, a process which

⁸² CHANDLER 2008, 140–141.

⁸³ CHANDLER 2008, 140.

⁸⁴ BAIER 1991, 180.

⁸⁵ BAIER 1991, 180–181.

Wordsworth called his habits of meditation. Furthermore, Wordsworth's creative process can be also considered as a process of progress, because the point of Wordsworth's creative process is to create a new, poetic emotion, and, as argued before, what he wants to achieve with these poetic emotions is a moral rhetoric, through which the readers can gain more salutary moral impressions than are usually accustomed to receive, which can be thought of as a progressive achievement.

After having discussed a possible interpretation of the Preface, Wordsworth's possible sources, who have influenced his way of thinking and writing, we turn to the second section of the present essay in which we will discuss two poems from the *Lyrical Ballads* ("Expostulation and Reply" and "Lines Written in Early Spring"), assuming that Wordsworth's thoughts and speculations about poetry and writing poetry (described in the Preface) can be detected in them. In interpreting these poems, the main focus will be on the habits of meditation, the memories, feelings, and thoughts that arise through this habit, the poet's relationship to this habit and to external stimuli, that is, to his environment that is usually nature. The first poem to be analysed is "Expostulation and Reply." Although the main focus will be on the second part of the poem, which ought to be Wordsworth's "reply" to William Hazlitt's expostulation and question (who appears as Matthew in the poem), we will also have a look at the problems Matthew articulates in the first part of the poem, because they will be helpful in the overall interpretation of the poem.⁸⁶ The poem starts with the following three stanzas:

"Why William, on that old grey stone,
 "Thus for the length of half a day,
 "Why William, sit you thus alone,
 "And dream your time away?

"Where are your books? that light bequeathed
 "To beings else forlorn and blind!
 "Up! Up! and drink the spirit breath'd
 "From dead men to their kind.

"You look round on your mother earth,
 "As if she for no purpose bore you;
 "As if you were her first-born birth,
 "And none had lived before you!"⁸⁷

It seems that, according to Matthew, William is sitting on the "old grey stone," and, because he is not reading Shakespeare or Milton, for instance, what he is doing is void of purpose, has no meaning, and thus does not contribute to the (let us suppose, moral) amelioration of the "forlorn and blind." So then, Matthew argues that William, with dreaming his time away, is wasting his time, is passive, and is purposeless. What Matthew does not realise is that what he conceptualises and phrases as "dream your time away" can be seen as (although seemingly a passive but) a creative activity that William is

⁸⁶ WORDSWORTH – COLERIDGE 2005, xxxiii. The generally acknowledged assumption is that the conversation's participant is William Hazlitt: "Wordsworth concludes the Advertisement to the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads* with the following information: The lines entitled Expostulation and Reply, and those which follow, arose out of conversation with a friend who was somewhat unreasonably attached to modern books of moral philosophy. The friend to whom he refers is Hazlitt..."

⁸⁷ WORDSWORTH – COLERIDGE 2005, 102–103.

pursuing right “now.” Before William would formulate his “reply,” there is a stanza between the exposition and the “reply” which also has some implications worth noticing:

“One morning thus, by Esthwaite lake,
When life was sweet I knew not why,
To me my good friend Matthew spake,
And thus I made reply.”

Why was life sweet on that particular morning? To answer this question, it is worth pointing out that Wordsworth, after describing his creative process (already quoted above, after mentioning for the second time that “poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”), continues thus:

“In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on; but the emotion, of whatever kind and in whatever degree, from various causes is qualified by various pleasures, so that in describing any passions whatsoever, which are voluntarily described, the mind will upon the whole be in a state of enjoyment.”⁸⁸

So then, it turns out that the habit of meditation, from which the poetic emotion will be generated, is a state and process of enjoyment. (Furthermore, with this excerpt, we can also refer back and reinforce our assumption that the emotions that overflow “spontaneously” are “passions...voluntarily described,” are free from external stimuli and are self-generative.) With turning to the analysis of the second part of the poem, to the “reply,” it will turn out that dreaming time away, in this poem, means that William is actually practising his habit of meditation, which is a “state of enjoyment,” and from which state he has been dislocated by Matthew’s questionings. With these thoughts in mind, let us turn to the following stanza:

““The eye it cannot chuse but see,
“We cannot bid the ear be still;
“Our bodies feel, where’er they be,
“Against, or with our will.”

This stanza has two implications. One is that William is either exposing himself to the natural setting, in order to get feelings, which can through (an unspecified span of) time become past experiences, subside into thoughts, and then these feelings and thoughts can serve as components for practicing the meditation, the contemplation of the relationship of these thoughts in order to generate poetic emotions. (But the experiences can come, of course, also from books, reading, what is important is that some time has to pass for feelings to become memories which then can be participants of Wordsworth’s creative process.) The second implication is that the mind of the poet is affected not because of outside stimuli, but because he is actually practising his habit of meditation, and this is what we are going to observe in the following stanzas:

⁸⁸ WORDSWORTH-COLERIDGE 2005, 252.

“Nor less I deem that there are powers,
 “Which of themselves our minds impress,
 “That we can feed this mind of ours,
 “In a wise passiveness.”

Here, the argument is, in accordance with the ones presented in the Preface, that the feelings and experiences that are collected in the previous stanza, or are already under the process of recollection (hence under contemplation through the habit of meditation), are self-generative, are “powers / Which of themselves our minds impress,” and they are spontaneous in the sense that they are recollected freely, and that the process through which the poet contemplates the relationship between past experiences got automatized and will be thus able to “feed this mind of ours,” they will be autogenous.

Nevertheless, the phrase “wise passiveness” may cause some disturbance in the present analysis, as so it was argued that William is not presenting a passive, but an active process. However, according to the speculations of Mark Jones, we have reason to believe that “wise passiveness” denotes an active process.

“‘Wise passiveness’ is an oxymoron; passiveness is qualified, in the fullest sense of the term, by the wisdom or strategy that wields it. True ‘passiveness’ would take what comes, but to be passive wisely is to seek something through passiveness, and this is not really to be passive at all.”⁸⁹

If we argue that wise passiveness refers to the habit of meditation, we can say that it is, on the one hand, passive in the sense that meditation is the ground for “emotion [to be] recollected in tranquillity,” but through this process of meditation, the poet goes through an active, mental process of contemplating the relationship between past experiences in order to generate kindred feelings, new poetic emotions. A possible reason for why Wordsworth uses the word “passiveness” can be seen in the context of the “conversation.” In the eyes of Matthew, William is dreaming his time away, is passive, and the reason why William is using the word “passiveness” is because he wants to explain to Matthew what he is doing with a word and concept that fits Matthew’s frame of reference. (And there are a few more thoughts that need to be discussed in connection with the nature of this “conversation”), but before doing so, let us turn to the following stanza of the poem:

“Think you, mid all this mighty sum
 “Of things for ever speaking,
 “That nothing of itself will come,
 “But we must still be seeking?”

This stanza can be seen as one that reinforces the speculations that were presented in the previous stanzas: if one gives oneself over to the habit of meditation, the wise passiveness, then the feelings and thoughts will come of themselves, because they work in an autogenous way, and there is no need for seeking for them. If one has already past impressions from books or nature, then one does not need to seek further, but one has to contemplate the relationship between past experiences. The following, last stanza of the poem goes thus:

⁸⁹ JONES 1991, 77.

“—Then ask not wherefore, here, alone,
 “Conversing as I may,
 “I sit upon this old grey stone,
 “And dream my time away.””

The focus, concerning the last stanza, will be on the second line, “Conversing as I may.” This could implicate two things: one is that William is, during his habit of meditation, “conversing,” with his feelings and memories so to say, contemplating the relationship of his past experiences in order to create a new poetic emotion. On the other hand, it can also refer to the “conversation” they are carrying on. It may be seen as an apology to Matthew for the nature of William’s “reply,” because it is a reply in a sense, but one could also argue that it is not a proper reply. It is not a reply in the sense that it does not answer Matthew’s question (“Why William, sit you thus alone, / “And dream your time away?”) with a straightforward, logical answer that begins with: *because*. The reason why he does not give such an answer is because William is “out of joint,” so to speak. He was in the pleasant mood of his creative process, and was unfortunately disturbed. Because Matthew is not realising why William is doing what he is doing, instead of giving a straightforward answer, William tells Matthew *what* exactly he is doing, and he is pursuing his habit of meditation. William, in this case, is “the poet in action,” demonstrating and explaining wise passiveness, his creative process. Furthermore, it was one of Matthew’s arguments that dreaming time away like this is void of purpose. Now, if we interpret the poem in light of the thoughts presented in the Preface, we can question Matthew’s assumptions, because it will be exactly the habit of meditation, in which the poet contemplates on the relationship of his past emotions and thoughts (which will generate a new, poetic emotion), through which the poems will be able to have a “worthy purpose.” And, as we have already argued before, the purpose of the poems in the *Lyrical Ballads* are of moral nature, and this is the aspect through which we are going to analyse the following poem. However, before doing so, we will have to return to some speculations concerning Burke’s influence on Wordsworth, as his writings have probably affected Wordsworth also concerning the question of morality.

Chandler, after presenting how Burke operates with his conception of man’s second nature, and after calling our attention to the fact that Wordsworth is also using this conception via Burke, tries to define the “nature” of the Burkean “second nature.” It is possible to identify two parts of human nature, one is the physical, and the other is the moral. In this case, the moral nature is the “second nature.” It is also possible to say that these two form together human nature, and then the “second nature” is an acquired attribution that one can gain through being moral. Furthermore, second nature can also be defined by a nature/habit opposition, in which case the second (moral) nature is constituted by social circumstances, by habits of social conventions.⁹⁰

Later, Chandler tracks down the influence of Burke’s *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* in one of Wordsworth’s texts: “That Wordsworth learned some of his Burke through the *Enquiry* is clear; only the question how much and how early have not been settled.”⁹¹ An obvious proof of the use of Burke’s *Enquiry* can be depicted in the “Sublime and Beautiful” section written for the *Guide to the Lakes*. The latest possible date is 1811–12, but he argues that it was most probably written much earlier.⁹² (As we have seen via the speculations of Magnuson and Komáromy, when discussing the influence of John Dennis in this very same text, and finally coming

⁹⁰ CHANDLER 1984, 71–72.

⁹¹ CHANDLER 1984, 77.

⁹² CHANDLER 1984, 77.

to the conclusion that Dennis has probably influenced Wordsworth already when formulating his theories presented in the Preface, we may assume, alongside with Chandler's intuition, that Wordsworth's "The Sublime and the Beautiful" could have been written earlier.)

Another text which shows Burke's possible influence on the writings of Wordsworth is an unfinished prose text bearing the title *Essay on Morals*. This was written during Wordsworth's residence at Goslar, probably as early as the latter part of 1798, and "its subject is not so much morality as moral writing – specifically, the relation between moral writing and its rhetorical effect."⁹³ Although this particular text is a fragment, the Preface can be seen as a text which explicates and continues the arguments that are presented in the *Essay*. (And it probably also contains speculations that are in "The Sublime and the Beautiful.") And, as Chandler also points out, a central topic in the Preface is the question of purposiveness, and this is a crucial aspect which distinguishes Wordsworth's poems from others: "that each of them has a worthy purpose."⁹⁴ The purpose of these poems will be, as already mentioned earlier, to receive "from ordinary moral sensations another and more salutary impression than we are accustomed to receive from them."

Now, let us bring together the thoughts of Burke and Wordsworth's thoughts in the Preface: second nature is of moral nature, and is also constituted by social constructions, habits of social conventions. Wordsworth's poems differ from contemporary poems in the sense that they have a worthy, moral purpose. Wordsworth wants to convey moral sensations for the readers' moral amelioration (or to use Chandler's phrase, for the amelioration of the readers' sympathetic imagination). As argued before, Wordsworth is aware of the fact that what counts as poetry will be negotiated through conventions set up by readers and writers of poems. So then, Wordsworth will most probably offer a new, moral construction of poetry. With these thoughts in mind, let us turn to the second poem to be analysed entitled "Lines Written in Early Spring." The poem will be similar to "Expostulation and Reply" in the sense that this poem will also describe a breakdown in communication. The difference will be that the breakdown will not occur between two persons, but between the poet's present and past thoughts, in the connection of the internal processes that he goes through and the natural environment which surrounds him. The poem starts with the following stanza:

"I heard a thousand blended notes,
While in a grove I sate reclined,
In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts
Bring sad thoughts to the mind."⁹⁵

As it was argued during the discussion of the previous poem, going through the process of meditation finally leads to a "state of enjoyment." According to this, it can be probably assumed that "sweet mood" in this poem refers not to the immediate surroundings of the poet, but to the habit of meditation. Furthermore,

⁹³ CHANDLER 1984, 81–82. Chandler even highlights some stylistic features in Wordsworth's text to emphasise and reinforce Burke's influence: "Even Wordsworth's figures of speech in the *Essay* are Burkean. When he says, for example, that the rationalists 'strip the mind of its old clothing,' he is punning on 'habit' just as Burke did when he called habits the 'moral wardrobe of the imagination.' Burke's related figure of reason's 'nakedness,' which looms so prominently in the France book of *The Prelude*, also appears in the *Essay* where Wordsworth speaks of our 'bald & naked reasonings.' Burke did not himself invent these figures, of course, but they are properly called Burkean, because in the 1790s he invested them with an ideological power distinctively his own."

⁹⁴ CHANDLER 1984, 82.

⁹⁵ WORDSWORTH – COLERIDGE 2005, 70.

that in this “sweet mood” “pleasant thoughts / Bring sad thoughts to the mind” also confirms to the view that Wordsworth is depicting his creative process. There is an initial (pleasant) thought which goes through the process of contemplation and becomes a poetic emotion, a (sad) thought. The question is what are the new, sad thoughts that have been generated? The answer to our question can be found in the following stanza:

“To her fair works did nature link
The human soul that through me ran;
And much it griev’d my heart to think
What man has made of man.”

It turns out that the sad thoughts that grieve the heart of the poet are the following: “to think / What man has made of man.” The question that arises concerning these newly generated thoughts that are kindred, but not analogous with the pleasant thoughts is the following: is the newly generated thought in connection with the natural setting, with nature? Well, it seems more probable that it is not. And it is this opposition that creates the tension that can be perceived in the poem. There is a dissonance between the poet’s mind and his environment, the poet is pre-occupied with his habit of meditation, and his thoughts and emotions that go through contemplation are not congruous with his immediate environment, with nature. Although nature will do all it can to “link / The human soul that through me ran,” there will be no real connection established. Let us turn to the following stanza:

“Through primrose-tufts, in that sweet bower,
The periwinkle trailed its wreathes;
And ’tis my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes.”

The difficulty (or even almost impossibility) concerning the interpretation of the creative process arises from the fact that we do not know the source of the “pleasant thoughts,” and we will not get to know them from the poem. Why would it be the poet’s, man’s faith “that every flower / Enjoys the air it breathes?” These thoughts would parallel, for example, the thoughts of Abrams in the sense that the poet is trying to create a kind of connection with nature that Rousseau would have suggested, where man is deprived of social constraints and appears (in a primitivistic mode) as the “natural” man, thus would be able to generate extemporaneous reactions to the natural scene. But the case might be that it does not need to be his faith, that he has a different faith and to see this, let us turn to the following stanza:

“The birds around me hopp’d and play’d:
Their thoughts I cannot measure,
But the least motion which they made,
It seem’d a thrill of pleasure.”

This stanza is already more suggestive concerning the overall message of the poem. On the one hand, the poet cannot measure the thoughts of the birds (if they can be said to have “thoughts” the way humans do, and if they can be measured at all), and on the other, “the least motion which they made,

/ It *seem'd* a thrill of pleasure,” which suggests that the poet cannot know for sure if it was indeed a “thrill of pleasure,” because birds and humans simply cannot think in the same frame of reference. (In this sense, this poem is similar to the previous one in which communicative breakdown was caused due to the fact that the different participants have thought in different frames of reference.)

“The budding twigs spread out their fan,
To catch the breezy air;
And I must think, do all I can,
That there was pleasure there.”

The last two lines are reinforcing the unease that was already present in the previous stanza, finally culminating in the act of self-persuasion. The poet can think “That there was pleasure there,” but will be unable to *know* if there was indeed any pleasure there. A possible explanation for why he does not know for sure might be in connection with the fact, as argued before, that we do not see the initial “pleasant thoughts.” The point then is not that it would be impossible to create a connection with nature. The point is that in order to get to know this connection, the poet has to go through the process of meditation. Because the new poetic emotion, in this poem, comes from an emotion that we cannot see, it is not engendered by the stimulations of the present environment, but by ones we do not know, consequently, the poet here is and his feelings are in an extemporaneous relationship with nature. The poem ends with the following stanza:

“If I these thoughts may not prevent,
If such be of my creed the plan,
Have I not reason to lament
What man has made of man?”

What are the thoughts that the poet cannot prevent? Are these the thoughts that appear in the poem? It is more likely that with thoughts he refers rather to the implications of these thoughts, presented above. But it can also be that, with referring to thoughts, he refers to the sad thoughts which had been generated at the beginning of the poem. The poet can be seen in an intermediate position: he has been through a meditation, but it does not come from his immediate environment, but from some past emotions that we cannot see. The stimulations that could come from his immediate environment could not go through the habit of meditation until this point. And the poet feels, as it can be seen in the poem, hesitant about generating an extemporaneous emotional reaction to his immediate environment. (And as argued before, the unpremeditated emotional reaction would probably represent the conventional reaction expected from a poet, but the poet seems rather dubious about this kind of reaction.) There might be a purpose on Wordsworth’s part in representing the poet in this intermediate position.

So the real question is the following: what is the moral purpose of this poem? The creed, the purpose of Wordsworth’s plan is to replace the contemporary literary language and taste that went astray with his own. It is his moral duty to signal that there is a problem with contemporary taste and conventions because it leads readers astray, as well as writers. In this case, the poem of Wordsworth is a moral one, and also, a successful one. It is successful, on the one hand, because, although it states at the beginning

of the poem that “pleasant thoughts / Bring sad thought to the mind,” but, considering the creative process, a new poetic emotion was created, and the mood was sweet (disregarding that the particular thought is sad) due to the very act of creation. On the other hand, it is successful, because, with representing the poet in an intermediate state, Wordsworth can call attention (through the act of self-persuasion in the poem) on his doubts about the expected, conventional poetic style. And this is actually in coherence with his thoughts presented in the Preface, because he has criticised contemporary poetry for furnishing “food for fickle tastes and fickle appetites of their own creation,” for exciting the minds of the readers in a false way, thus basing poetry on false conventions. With writing this poem, Wordsworth calls attention to the fact that this way of writing poetry should not be followed. And in this sense it gets clear why the poet is lamenting on “What man has made of man?” Because it is not moral to delude readers with saying that nature is a blank canvas on which anybody can pour out his or her emotions, extempore. But it is moral to call attention on the misleading nature of this assumption, and to present instead a new kind of poetry.

Finally, after having presented the interpretation of the poems, the main points of the essay can be summarised thus: Wordsworth’s theory of poetry presented in the Preface can be interpreted as a coherent, logical one which is even in coherence and is presented in a selection of his poems. Wordsworth is indeed experimental in the sense that he offers a new way of writing poetry, and does so with granting a purpose to his poems. The purpose will be “to follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind,” to present the nature of emotions and thoughts. Furthermore, the purpose will be also of moral nature, to define truths about the nature of the human mind, its relation to nature, and the moral aspect of the purpose can be also seen in Wordsworth being experimental, in basing poetry on new conventions instead of the one he thinks went astray. The purpose, for Wordsworth, will be granted through habit. More precisely, it is through the habit of meditation that he recaptures the original, natural poetic language that he wants to re-establish, and it is through the habit of meditation that he can create new poetic emotions through recollection, through contemplating the connection between past emotions and emotions that have subsided into thought (that are the representatives of our past feelings). And by applying and representing his theory in his poems, he is able to create a new poetical convention, basing thoughts and emotions appearing in poetry on reflection, contemplation, on the spring of meditation.

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