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## The Meaning of "Imagination" In William Wordsworth's Prelude

Henry Robert Lynch  
*Loyola University Chicago*

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THE MEANING OF "IMAGINATION" IN  
WILLIAM WORDSWORTH'S  
PRELUDE

BY  
HENRY R. LYNCH

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER  
OF ARTS IN LOYOLA UNIVERSITY

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## VITA AUCTORIS.

Henry Robert Lynch, son of James E. Lynch and Margaret M. Lynch, was born in Chicago, Illinois, June 7th, 1927. He received his elementary education at St. Barnabas and St. Dorothy parochial schools, and his high school education in St. Ignatius High School, Chicago, graduating in February of 1944.

He was entered in the College of Liberal Arts at Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio, in September of that year. In the summer of 1948 he transferred to Loyola University, Chicago, Illinois, and received his Bachelor of Arts degree from that university on June 8, 1949, registered as a graduate student in the Department of English.

In 1951, upon the completion of a three year course in Philosophy, he went to Cleveland, Ohio, where for two years he was an instructor in English literature.

## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTION.

In the body of a gaunt, slope-shouldered, somber-eyed rebel named William Wordsworth, resided a most unusual mind. And the most vital activity of that mind, according to his own vehement assertions, was his "Imagination". Nor was he alone in this belief. Blake, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley and others stood with him, so much so, that the standard of the period in which they lived is embossed with the inscription, "the new birth of imagination." In order to understand the most vital activity of the rebel Wordsworth's mind, i. e., the "Imagination" and its importance and interest to us, we must look back upon the poetry of the preceding period.

Poetry, during the Neo-classical period, was a person living almost exclusively in the town, very urbane. He appeared in elegant attire, always neatly and correctly dressed. Scented with terseness, powdered with convention, lackered with vigor and befobbed with epigrams, he concerned himself with the artificial manners and outside aspects of men. He indulged in no personal whims but spoke in general terms for the common experience of men. The unfamiliar,

the unseen, the mysteries of life brought no wrinkles of concern to his brow. Life was familiar, and he presented it with as much charm and truth as he could commend. Altogether, he was a rather artificial, constrained, monotonous and sapidly unmusical fellow.

Ancient models were the rigid, formal norms which guided his pen, the painter's brush and the sculpture's chisel. He lighted vigil lights before judgment, logic and reality without illusion. He made votive offerings to reason, and wove a mantle of sameness on the loom of outer authority. This he cast over everything, smothering imagination, blighting originality, spontaneity and true creativeness. His acknowledgement of the individual and his worth was but a curt and incisive nod.

Above this parched personality, appeared a galaxy of rebellious men who believed in themselves and in their capacity to create. And the star which burned the most steadfast, introspective and emotive though it was, bore the inscription, William Wordsworth.

Ever since his star arose, it has traced an indelible path across the sky of literature. With the rest of the Romantic cavalcade, Wordsworth is one of the emancipators of imagination, feeling and individuality. But if there had been

no circumscription of the imagination in the preceding-period, Wordsworth would never have turned his power of poetry toward explaining and extolling the "imagination" as in some analogous fashion partaking of the creative activity of God.

Not to understand the meaning of the "imagination" is to misunderstand not only Wordsworth but all the Romantics and the period as well. Again, inasmuch as Wordsworth is basically describing the primary poetic faculty, to understand his meaning is to know in some manner the experience which all great poets undergo.

But if Coleridge, Blake, Shelley and Keats each treat of the imagination, why single out Wordsworth? Wordsworth is the only Romantic who has explicitly narrated his experiences with this power and its effects on his soul within the framework of a poem. His treatment has the benefit of an original over translations. In a sense, all the other Romantics interpreted or translated their experience in terms of German metaphysics, (Coleridge), mysticism, (Blake), Platonism, (Shelley) and associationism, (Keats). Obviously it is easier to examine a fabric before it is dyed, and Wordsworth alone furnishes us with such an opportunity.

Furthermore, even in the few instances when Wordsworth does interpret his experiences, he is more moderate, less

extravagant in his claims for the imagination than the other Romantics. For instance, Blake states with all the assurance of a seer:

This world of Imagination is the world of Eternity; it is the divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the Vegetated body. This world of Imagination is Infinite and Eternal, whereas the world of Generation, or Vegetation, is Finite and Temporal. There exist in that Eternal World the Permanent Realities of Every Thing which we see reflected in this Vegetable Glass of Nature. All things are comprehended in their Eternal Forms in the divine body of the Saviour, True Vine of Eternity, The Human Imagination.<sup>1</sup>

Most readers would consider such a statement quite radical, necessitating a theological background to interpret, inasmuch as the obvious implication is that the imagination is nothing less than God as He operates in the Human Soul. For Blake, one Power alone made the poet: "Imagination, The Divine Vision."

Coleridge is not so apodictic, but his conclusions are similar and require an extensive knowledge of the nineteenth century German philosophers and their vocabulary. For Coleridge:

The Primary Imagination I hold to be the living Power and Prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition of the finite mind of the

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<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Keynes (ed.), A Vision of the Last Judgement, in Poetry and Prose of William Blake, 1 vol., 4th ed.; London, The Monesuch Press, 1939, 639.



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eternal act of creation in the infinite I am.

Concerning the above quotation, Bours writes:

It is true that Coleridge regards poetry as a product of the secondary imagination, but since this differs only in degree from the primary, it remains clear that for Coleridge the imagination is of the first importance because it partakes of the creative activity of God.

This is a tremendous claim, and it is not confined to Blake and Coleridge. It was to some degree held by Wordsworth... Each was confident not only that the imagination was his most precious possession but that it was somehow concerned with the supernatural order.<sup>2</sup>

The analogous comparison which Wordsworth describes as existing between his poetic power and the creative activity of God is an interesting point and will be discussed later in the thesis.

At this point we are somewhat aware of Wordsworth's interest in the imagination; the importance of understanding the word, and the choice of Wordsworth as the subject for investigation rather than any of the other Romantics.

The next logical step would be to discuss briefly the primary text for our investigation. Fortunately, Wordsworth

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<sup>2</sup> J. Shawcross (ed.), Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, 2 vols.; Oxford, 1907, I, 202

<sup>3</sup> C.M. Bours, The Romantic Imagination, Oxford University Press, London, 1949, <sup>4</sup>

furnishes us with a text which directly describes his experiences. This text is The Prelude, or Growth of a Poet's Mind, a poem of almost nine thousand lines. The history behind this poem is informative.

Wordsworth felt from his earliest youth that he was cut from the same cloth of dedication as Milton and Descartes. Like Milton he aspired to the composition of a great poetic masterpiece. Like Descartes he thought of himself as a teacher and instructor of men. In his own words Wordsworth wished "either to be considered as a teacher or as nothing."<sup>4</sup> Also like Descartes, who had dreamed his vision of dedication dozing besides an old German stove, Wordsworth also entertained a vision of teaching men all about themselves, nature and society. Needless to say, Wordsworth's ambition crystallized itself in a more romantic locale than that usually associated with products from German ironworks.

His medium of instruction was to be a philosophical poet of biblical proportions. But first he had to prove to himself that he was equipped to execute such a lofty calling. The Prelude is the story of that introspective study. What are the judgements of the critics?

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<sup>4</sup> William Knight (ed.), Memorials of Coleridge, Edinburgh, 1887, II, 31

A. C. Bradley considers The Prelude to be the greatest long poem in the language, after Paradise Lost. Herbert Read has labeled Wordsworth's poem "the greatest exaltation of the mind of man that has ever been conceived."<sup>5</sup> Ernest de Selincourt believes "... The Prelude has never been rivaled in its own kind."<sup>6</sup>

The poem is truly a patchwork quilt of alternate verses of magnificence such as this tribute to Newton as,

The marble index of a mind forever  
 Voyaging through strange seas of  
 Thought, alone,<sup>7</sup>

and the description of autumn in the Lake Country with its beautiful climax, "clothed in the sunshine of withering fern." But there are other verses whose dynamism and beauty are less than that usually found in cookbook recipes. Regarding his many exquisite lines of natural description, Shairp makes this observation:

No one, that I know, has yet laid his finger on a single mistake made by Wordsworth with regard to any appearance of nature or fact of natural history.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Herbert Read, Wordsworth, J. Cape and H. Smith, New York, 1931, 56  
<sup>6</sup> William Wordsworth, The Prelude, or Growth of a Poet's Mind (Text of 1805), edited from the manuscripts of Ernest de Selincourt, Oxford University Press, London, 1932, xxviii. Unless otherwise noted, this text is used throughout the thesis.  
<sup>7</sup> de Selincourt, Prelude, III, 62-63  
<sup>8</sup> Ibid., VI, II  
<sup>9</sup> J. C. Shairp, Studies in Poetry and Philosophy, Edinburgh, 1866, footnote, 67.

What concern us more directly are the poet's own humble comments on The Prelude.

I began the work because I was unprepared to treat any more arduous subject, and diffident of my own powers. Here, at least, I hoped that to a certain degree I should be sure of succeeding as I had nothing to do but describe what I had felt and thought.<sup>10</sup>

That in germ, is The Prelude, "a description of what I felt." To analyze those descriptions and thus work out a definition of the "imagination" together with an understanding of its relation to knowledge, emotion, creativity, and intuition is the spine of this thesis. Of necessity, such research would involve an explanation of the origin of this faculty, if it is a faculty, and the reconciliation of the apparently contradictory qualities which the poet seems to ascribe to "imagination." This latter problem will be discussed in looking over the interpretations of some of the critics. For example, Mr. Downey states that Wordsworth is anti-rational. Yet there are numerous passages which refer to the "Imagination" as an intellectual power, or even "reason". Mr. Beatty explains the "Imagination" in terms of associationism, citing texts, perhaps more accurately interpreting texts. However, there are other passages which seem to indicate that the "Imagination" is much more than the power of juxtaposition of sense images.

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<sup>10</sup> de Selincourt, Introduction, xxviii, To Sir George Beaumont, May 1, 1805 (letters), 1, 186

By limiting the thesis in the above manner, the writer will avoid all discussion of Wordsworth's poetic style, his critical principles, his personal character, his political and educational views, and, in large part, his philosophy... all, areas of heated and articulate controversy which has caused one critic to write in despair and exasperation:

Wordsworth cannot be put into any one formula, and the truth about him has been beclouded by the efforts of critics to do so...

The growth of Wordsworth's mind, instead of being simple, as is usually supposed, is extraordinarily complex...

Perhaps the best that can be done is to trace the main tendencies...<sup>11</sup>

However, to avoid Wordsworth's philosophy altogether is hardly possible. In the first place, The Prelude is the study, through the medium of poetry, of the growth of his own mind. Necessarily, then, some conclusions about the nature of this mind, speculative or experimental, are inevitable. Thus the very subject matter makes it intrinsically impossible to shy away from philosophy. Again, there are occasions when Wordsworth will forget his resolve to be objective. Then he will either interpret his experiences in philosophical terminology, or else make philosophical implications so manifest that they cannot be ignored.

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<sup>11</sup> Solomon F. Gingerich, Essays in the Romantic Poets, The Macmillan Company, New York, 138

A few remarks remain to be made concerning the difficulty of the problem. We want to understand the meaning of the word "imagination." Usually, we have to understand the less known in terms of the more familiar. In The Prelude Wordsworth is describing the "imagination" but using the very faculty he is attempting to illuminate to do so. And since there is nothing more familiar or more intimate than his personal experience, he will necessarily be hard pressed to find words more comprehensible to the reader than "imagination."

A consequence of this is the profusion of abstract words such as 'power', 'faculty', 'forms', 'shapes', etc. Nor does Wordsworth give us any definitions of these words though obviously using them with different connotations at different times in the poem. Aristotle's observation concerning the general ineptness of poetry and poetic language to convey precise meaning is nowhere more verifiable than when reading through The Prelude.

Wordsworth's attempt at blank verse is not particularly felicitous in its results. Often, in order to sustain his meter he makes frequent use of awkward inversion and long subordinate clauses. The net result is the addition of troubled readability to an already harassed intelligibility.

## CHAPTER II

### POPULAR CONCEPT OF THE CREATIVE IMAGINATION.

Those trained in scholastic philosophy think of the imagination as an internal sense that is able to know sensible things even in their absence. It is a power by means of which the sensitive being habitually conserves the similitude of things perceived by the senses. Under the right conditions, these likenesses can be reproduced. The imagination of the scholastics also has the power of combining in various ways the elements of things sensibly perceived. Thus the three notes of Scholastic imagination are conservation, reproduction and combination.

The above definition, with its conciseness and precision, is not too widely known, but if you asked an intelligent adult what he meant by imagination, he would imply the above qualities in some form or other. The word 'imagination' would very likely suggest to him the making of images... images in the mind's eye which more or less resemble the images which are there when the object is seen. But if we stopped our analysis there, the imagination would then appear to be just a peculiarly vivid form of memory, applicable, however,

not just to sight but to all five senses. Even so, such a faculty would enable the poet to write:

full grown lambs loud blast from hilly bourn,  
Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft,  
The red-breast whistles from a garden craft.<sup>1</sup>

But the imagination is more than mere memory. Besides recalling past sensations, it adds to or subtracts from them. The result is an image which has no precise counterpart in nature. These images are, in a sense, creations, and we begin to see how the adjective 'creative' can be added to 'imagination.' Such creations may take us out of the realm of ordinary experience, as in the case of the home of Arnold's Merman,

Sand-strewn caverns, cool and deep,  
Where the winds are all asleep;  
Where the spent lights quiver and gleam,  
Where the salt weed sways in the stream...  
Where great whales come sailing by,  
Sail and sail, with unshut eye,<sup>2</sup>  
Round the world for every and aye.

Or the result may even be an experience quite beyond human possibility. For example, the wondrous music in Tennyson's Vision of Sin:

Then methought I heard a mellow sound  
Gathering up from all the lower ground;  
Narrowing in to where they sat assembled  
Low, voluptuous music winding trembled...  
Then the music touched the gates and died.

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1 John Keats, To Autumn, 30-32

2 Matthew Arnold, The Forsaken Merman, 35-41.



Rose again from where it seemed to fall,  
 Stormed in the orbs of song, a growing gale;  
 Till, thronging in and in, to where they waited,  
 As 'twere a hundred-throated nightingale,  
 The strong tempestuous treble throbb'd  
 And palpitated.<sup>3</sup>

Or through his creative imagination the poet may create new characters which do not really exist, such as Hamlet, Portia, Othello, Iago, Cyrano, Natasha, etc. Still we consider those names to be the names of very real persons.

A peculiarly vivid type of memory...but more than that...a power that adds to or subtracts from past sensation...and thus creates...above ordinary experiences...even those beyond human possibility...new characters which do not really exist... these are the properties and qualities which ordinarily attribute to the creative imagination.

A brief analysis of imagination with reference to that popular genre of fiction, the 'Whodunit' will enable us to add another note or quality to those already described above. Most of us have made the acquaintance of officials of the law, either under real and variant circumstances, or certainly through fiction. Undoubtedly we noticed that they seem to divide themselves into two rather unequal groups. The larger segment is comprised of the professional law officer whose attendants are

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<sup>3</sup> Alfred Tennyson, Vision of Sin, 14-28

opportunity, method and experience. The other group, small and select, but losing some of its exclusiveness as the popularity of crime novels increase, is characterized by exceptionally acute observation abetted by a mysterious power called 'imagination'. By virtue of this power these men seem to grasp instinctively the significant through all veneers and disguises. Their solutions come in the form of inspirations, hunches, intuitions, etc., nor is the process belabored with ratiocination. And so we add the note of intuition to the concept of imagination.

This intuitive element popularly associated with the word 'imagination' is mentioned here because it fits in very readily with the more comprehensive meaning of the word since the time of Wordsworth. No longer is imagination just a power to produce mental experiences resembling those of the five senses. In the larger and more comprehensive meaning, it includes the power of comparing and combining such images, noting resemblances between them which have a meaning for the inner life, though they may have none for the sense or the pure discursive reason. Also, this power enables the poet to leap to conclusions which resemble those drawn by the discursive reason from common experience, only more rapidly and in different regions.

Let us illustrate this from Shelley's Sky-lark. He says the lark resembles many things. It springs from the earth "like a cloud of fire;" it is as invisible as "a star of heaven in broad daylight;" that the air and the earth are as full of its voice as they are of moonlight "when night is bare..." All these comparisons are between images of sense...; but none of them are such comparisons as the discursive reason would suggest. ...the skylark is not like a cloud, still less like a rose, least of all like a moonlight night.<sup>4</sup>

However, the poet has declared this resemblance because the emotion awakened in him by the skylark has leaped from one thing to another; from the sensation produced by moonlight to that produced by a haunting song. This transfer or perception resulted naturally from the effort of the poet to reveal that emotion in all its beauty. So we see that the qualities of the emotions aroused by the skylark and by the moonlight "when night is here," are similar. Shelley even passes out of the range of images of sense altogether when he declares that the lark is "like an unbodied joy." This cannot be pictured by the eye. Nevertheless, in a purely spiritual way a theme is presented to an inner imaginative sense. Nor is there any lengthy process of ratiocination involved. Somehow or other, the imagination alters, adds, subtracts, combines, and thus evokes a new emotion arising from a fair perception of essential beauty.

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<sup>4</sup> Raymond M. Alden, An Introduction to Poetry, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1809, 98

The creative imagination that we have been describing here is obviously something more than the sensible organic faculty which is the repository of sensible images of objects.

The creative imagination involves essentially the intelligence. Once the intellect is in possession of ideas it bears a different relation to the physical imagination. In its turn now the intellect can act upon the imagination and arouse in it sensible images in conformity with its intellectual species. The creative imagination described above is the poet's ability to resort to particular and concrete pictures to illustrate his abstract and universal principles. The intellect here is eminently active in framing to its own uses the mass of elements that exist within the treasury of the imagination. The creative imagination seems to be this type of cooperation between intellect and physical imagination. But it is in the intellectual operation that the ideal which has been formulated is clothed with the imaginal elements, a process which might be described as concretizing the universal.

Orestes Brownson writes:

The creative imagination is commonly regarded as a mixed faculty, partaking both of the rational and irrational nature, and in some sense, as a union of the two, so to speak, of soul and body. But it is primarily and essentially intellectual, and moves as intellect before moving as sensibility; in other words, it is

intellectual apprehension before it is sensitive affection, as the life and activity of the body are from the soul, not the life and activity of the soul from the body.<sup>5</sup>

It is easily apparent that Wordsworth exhibits the results of such a faculty or power when he composes simple and beautiful lines as:

The moon doth with delight 6  
Look round her when the heavens are bare.

The sleep that is among the lonely hills. 7

There is an eminence of these our hills, 8  
The last that parleys with the setting sun.

And not only did he have such a power but he uses the word "imagination" to describe the power in The Prelude.

...While the Orb went down  
In the tranquility of Nature, came  
That voice, ill requiem! seldom heard  
By me without a spirit overcast, a deep  
Imagination, thought of woes to come 9  
And sorrow for mankind and pain of heart.

I love a public road; few sights there are  
That please me more; such abject hath had power  
O'er my imagination since the dawn  
Of childhood.<sup>10</sup>

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5 Orestes Brownson, Works, Vol. xix. 319

6 Ode to Immortality, 12-13

7 Broughm, 164

8 There is an eminence, 1

9 de Selincourt, Prelude, X, 302-307

10 Ibid., XII, 145-147

But the question we are concerned with is whether or not Wordsworth confines his meaning of the word to the process we have described. What are some of the synonyms which the poet employs in connection with the "Imagination?" We read: "This faculty"<sup>11</sup> ... "main essential power"<sup>12</sup> ... "image of right reason"<sup>13</sup> ... "reason in her most exalted mood"<sup>14</sup> ... "absolute strength"<sup>15</sup> ... "clearest insight"<sup>16</sup> ... "amplitude of mind"<sup>17</sup> ... "awful power"<sup>18</sup>. He makes other references to the "Imagination" as the glorious faculty that higher minds bear with them as their own; the prime and vital principle; reason which is indeed Reason; the very faculty of truth and the grand and simple Reason.

Wordsworth here gives the impression of dogged persistence, the struggling impatience of a person who is trying to recall the image and contour of a face that he knows so well, and yet, as the eye of memory investigates more and more anxiously, his eyesight dims, and part by part the features of that face also dim. Wordsworth, like such a person, still persists in attempting to describe at least likenesses, if not the image itself.

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- 11 The Prelude, XIII, 171  
 12 Ibid., XIII, 289  
 13 Ibid., XII, 25  
 14 Ibid., XIII, 170  
 15 Ibid., XIII, 168  
 16 Ibid., XIII, 169  
 17 Ibid., XIII, 169  
 18 The Prelude (1850) XI, 595

Ultimately Wordsworth admits that he is dissatisfied with the word "Imagination."

Imagination...the power so-called 19  
Through said incompetence of human speech.

All poets glory in their imaginative powers, but few would describe the same with the variety and intensity of Wordsworth. Judging merely from the number of synonyms which the poet gives us, we have that this "Imagination" which defies the competence of human speech is much more than the creative imagination as popularly conceived, that is, the cooperation of the sensible imagination and intellect.

But that is surmise and we must again return to the text in order to obtain a more explicit account of the imagination as it developed during the various stages of his life. We learn first, that he passed his early days in a "wise passiveness."<sup>20</sup>

Nature by extrinsic passion first  
Peopled my mind with beauteous forms and grand.<sup>21</sup>

Naturally enough, as a youngster of five or six years he did not analyze or examine scientifically just what was happening within his mind. It is only in retrospect that he became cognizant of the influence of the natural beauty

19 The Prelude (text of 1850) XI, 592-593

20 Exposit., 24

21 de Selincourt, Prelude, I, 572-573

him and its relation to the "Imagination."

The sounding cataract  
 Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock  
 The mountains, and the deep and gloomy wood,  
 Their colours and their forms, were then  
     to me 22  
 An appetite; a feeling and a love.

As a boy he was only conscious that the quiet lake, with its few attendant, vagabond clouds, the wrinkled mountains and heedless cataracts, the shawled hills and rhythmic wheat-fields were so intimate to him as to be almost alive:

...the fairest of all rivers, loved  
 To blend his murmurs with my nurse's song  
 And, from his alder shades and rocky falls,  
 And from his fords and shallows, sent a voice  
 That flowed along my dreams...<sup>23</sup>

To him nature around him was making a ceaseless symphony which composed his thoughts.

This passive role of the "Imagination" seems to be nothing other than the storage of images in the warehouse of his physical imagination. Such an explanation is simple, indeed too simple for those who are sensitive to the philosophy of animism and seem to recognize a familiar in such lines as:

Wisdom and Spirit of the universe!  
 Thou Soul that art the eternity of thought!  
 That giv'st to forms and images a breath  
 And everlasting motion! not in vain,  
 By day or star-light didst Thou intertwine for me  
 The passions that build up our human soul,

22 Ibid., I, 597-601

23 The Prelude, (text of 1850) 270-274



...with high objects, with enduring things,  
 with life and nature, purifying thus<sup>24</sup>  
 The elements of feeling, of thought.

and

Ye Presences of Nature, in the sky,  
 And on the earth! Ye visions of the hills!  
 And Souls of lonely places!<sup>25</sup>

There seems to me to be no justification in reaching for a mystic element or animism to explain such invocations. To me it is merely the natural result of a sensitive temperament in ideal proximity and contact with the outdoors. Other country boys were thrilled to accompany their fathers and uncles on the hunt, feeling happy and important when the slack weight of a rabbit or a pheasant bumped on their high. Wordsworth was a little different. He preferred to tread through the woods alone, not killing but stirring to life. All the things in nature were to him like a gentle hand, shaking an awakening in his soul a love for beauty and life. In comparison to his friends Wordsworth was exquisitely sensitive to the moods of nature. He caught a variety of meanings in the face of the things he saw about him. The child reads the expressions on the faces of its parents.

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<sup>24</sup> de Selincourt, Prelude, I, 428-438

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., I, 490-492

Wordsworth read the face of nature. He had but to crumble a clod of woodland soil to feel "modest pleasure and undisturbed delight." The murmur of the leaves was to him as the quiet, evening conversation of parents, perhaps unintelligible but comforting and reassuring. He had merely to raise his opened eyes to nature and it seemed that he was lifted up to the great tranquil beauty of the hills, forests and lakes. And if his parents had asked why he was so affected, he would have answered with the perfectly adequate response of young children, "I don't know, it just happens." You don't ask a child how he reads the expression of its parents, but that does not alter the fact.

The poet, above all else, is a person who never forgets certain sense-impressions which he has experienced and which he can relive again and again as though with all their original freshness.

All poets have this highly developed sensitive apparatus of memory, and they are usually aware of experiences which happened to them at the earliest age and which retain their pristine significance throughout life.<sup>26</sup>

To me, "Ye Presences of Nature" are nothing other than the sense-impressions of nature experienced as a youth and stored to be relived. We hear of an instance in Wordsworth

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<sup>26</sup> R. W. Stallman (ed.), Critiques and Essays in Criticism, 1920-1948, The Ronald Press Company, New York, 1949, 24,

where a young child, perhaps it was his niece, died. Wordsworth was present at the time but seemed to give no indication of grief. Yet, twenty years later he was able to describe the scene and its pathos so accurately as to bring tears to all those who were listening to them. We should be careful to think of Wordsworth as a poet, an extraordinarily sensitive person who found the objects of nature so intimate that in the manner of sensitive children, he personified them. Why call upon Caesar or animism when the local precinct captain will do just as well!

Fair seed-time had my soul and I grew up  
Fostered alike by beauty and fear.<sup>27</sup>

How simply the poet explains the passive role of the "Imagination". "Imagination slept."<sup>35</sup> It is laying itself open to the objects and sights of external nature, making use of the body's organic and recipient faculty. There is no confusion of "Imagination" and the objects of nature. One is internal and the other external. His "Imagination" is fueling, drinking in and purifying the strong emotional perceptions which nature afforded him. Later the intellect would seize upon those first emotional perceptions and in cooperation with the physical imagination,

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<sup>27</sup> de Selincourt, The Prelude, I, 305-306

clarify, strengthen and combine them.

But what about when he speaks of feeling:  
 . . . . .gleams like  
 The flashing of a shield;  
 The earth and common face of Nature  
 Spake to me rememberable things...

A lbeit lifeless then, and doomed to sleep  
 Until maturer seasons call'd them forth  
 To impregnate and elevate the mind.<sup>28</sup>

The visions that came to him in childhood were such as come to every child who can practice his simple creed of delight and liberty. Wordsworth was ambitious and felt destined, but he did not consider himself to be a precocious child-prodigy like Milton or Ruskin. Indeed, he would have been one of the first to admit that the little bootblack on a Harlem street corner has his own world of imagination that is just as real and thrilling for him as was the wonderful world of nature for the Poet. Allowing for the unusual sensitivity of the poet to explain what appears to us well-paved city dwellers as extravagant language and experiences, we must mark also Wordsworth's habit of insistence on trifles such as lodge in corner of everyone's memory, as if they were unique lessons given to him alone. Taken together these two characteristics make it very easy for us to judge that his "Imagination" is not the abnormal faculty that some critics would have us believe.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., I, 613-624

By looking back again to the various synonyms which the poet employs to describe the "Imagination", we find the word "power" recurring again and again. This "power" refers to the active role of the "Imagination". In almost all the instances in which either word is used, "Imagination" or "power", the connotation is one of ability to discern and to teach a truth. The point is that the truths taught are not arrived at through any discursive process but are rather suggested by objects in nature. The emotional overtones are quite pronounced in these instances. Once again, as was the case with the "passive" role, I believe that a very simple and logical explanation is at hand, nor should we reach for more complex explanations which most commentators apply. Once again we must use caution in avoiding a too literal interpretation of the text.

Wordsworth tells us that:

...Imagination slept,  
And yet not utterly. I could not print  
Ground, where the grass had yielded to the steps  
Of Generations of illustrious men  
Unmoved...29

But when the first poetic Faculty  
of plain imagination and severe  
No longer a mute influence of the soul  
An elements of Nature's inner self,  
Began to have some promptings, to put on  
A visible shape...a new importance to  
The mind...<sup>30</sup>

Wordsworth is here describing a vital process, no  
painful grasping and groping. The time of "wise passiveness"  
was past, the time of drawing

Things of earth and sky and of human life  
into himself, as the calm, clear lake does  
the imagery of the surrounding hills and  
overhanging sky.<sup>31</sup>

The clouds settle on the mountain top in the early  
morning mist but later in the day clear away and leave the  
mountain exposed in its splendor. In a sense the truths  
Wordsworth speaks about are like that mountain suggested by  
the mysterious clouds which are the separate objects of nature  
which had left their innermost secrets and passed out of  
consciousness. Wordsworth considered it one of the cardinal  
works of the imagination, to possess itself of the life of  
whatever thing it dealt.

The first truths which interested him were those con-  
cerning natural phenomena, without any implications.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., VIII, 510-516

<sup>31</sup> Shairp, 58

The moon doth with delight  
 Look round her when the heavens are bare.<sup>32.</sup>

Does not this give the essence, the truth of a clear  
 moonlight sky more truthfully in its relation to the human  
 spirit than any meteorological explanation can? Or the essence  
 of mountain stillness.

The sleep that is among the lonely hills<sup>33</sup>  
 or the solitariness of a mountain peak,

There is an eminence of these our hills, 34  
 The last that parkeys with the setting sun.

Certainly no one can deny that he is rendering the  
 inner truths of things. Wordsworth captures the essence of  
 nature's animate life also. One has to love the woods to  
 appreciate the real truth of;

The grass is bright with rain-drops; on the moors  
 The hare is running races in her mirth;  
 And with her feet she from the plashy earth  
 Raises a mist; that, glittering in the sun,  
 Runs with her all the way, wherever she doth run.<sup>35</sup>

And again;

There sometimes doth a leaping fish  
 Send through the tarn a lonely cheer;

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32 Ode to Immortality, 12-13

33 Broughm, 164

34 There is an Eminence, 1

35 Fidelity, 12-17

The crag's repeat the raven's croak  
In symphony austere, <sup>36</sup>

And the evening calm after a tempestuous day;

Loud is the Vale! the voice is up  
With which she speaks when storms are gone,  
A mighty unison of streams!  
Of all her voices, one!

Loud is the Vale! this inland depth  
In peace is roaring like the sea;  
Yon star upon the mountain-top  
Is listening quietly. <sup>37</sup>

But when he has described how his "Imagination" has first exercised itself on the natural objects around him, the flower patch, the moonlight, the black rock which becomes an entrance to a magical cave, he then describes how such objects of nature directed him to truths which directly concern man;

Nor could I with such object overlook  
The influence of this Power which turn's itself  
Instinctively to human passions, things  
Least understood. <sup>38</sup>

This History, my friend, hath chiefly told  
. . . of Imagination teaching truth. <sup>39</sup>

Again I took the intellectual eye  
For my instructor, studious more to see  
Great truths, than touch and handle little ones. <sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Fidelity, 27-28

<sup>37</sup> Loud is the Vale, (Lines composed at Grasmere)

<sup>38</sup> de Selincourt, VIII, 582-585

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., XI, 43, 46

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., XII, 57-59



Even the reading of the histories of glorious civilizations and looking at famous paintings furnished food for his 'Imagination.'

Thus here imagination also found  
 An element that pleased her, tried her strength  
 Among new objects, simplified, arranged  
 Impregnated my knowledge, made it live  
 And the result was elevating thoughts  
 Of human nature.<sup>41</sup>

When Wordsworth says that he is studious to learn great truths rather than little ones, he is referring to his self-imposed restriction of describing the moral and spiritual part of man, and this usually the humble rustic, rather than man's external decorum and social life. He told us that he "could not print ground where the grass had yielded to the steps of generations of illustrious men unmoved."<sup>42</sup> The truth he is trying to express could be badly stated as follows: "Ignorance and humble toil are not convertible. There is nothing in humble work that of itself implies ignorance, and he proves that to himself and to us by the remembrance of men whom he most admired and who had toiled in the same fields that he walked as a boy. Here we see a typical example, perhaps not the best, of the "Imagination" feeding upon a physical

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., VIII, 796-801

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., III, 257-275

experience, namely walking in the fields, combined with the image of illustrious men walking these same fields, and producing the felt truth that ignorance and toil are not to be identified.

Without excessive research the writer found nine other examples of truths concerning man which Wordsworth "felt" without recourse to the discursive reason. And yet, each of these truths has been verified either speculatively or scientifically since his time. In his own day, many of the truths were considered radical innovations. Besides the truth already mentioned, Wordsworth points out the following:

- 2. Absolute monarchy detracts from the dignity of the governed.
- 3. The framework of society is built upon immutable laws.
- 4. There is a Providence latent under the apparent chaos of world events.
- 5. Judgments of right and wrong are more than convention.
- 6. Man has intrinsic worth, and should be judged apart from rank and station.
- 7. Moral goodness and intelligence are not confined to the well-educated. Knowledge and goodness are not convertible.
- 8. Love could and did flourish outside the bailiwick of refined society, apart from leisure and polished manners.
- 9. Grinding poverty can crush the finer affections of men by preoccupying their minds with sense wants.

10. The soul is essentially different than and superior to the sense or material world.

Perhaps now we understand more sympathetically what the Poet meant when he said that the "Imagination" enabled him to perceive some things unseen before.<sup>43</sup>

In the same manner, Wordsworth learned patience; freedom from vanity and restless passion; equanimity of soul; the ability to discern depth and worth in all men; the hypocrisy of superficial intellectuality; that the artificial barriers between classes are largely unjust; that there are grades of nobility among all classes, and especially among the poor.<sup>44</sup>

Those are some of the truths which the "vital soul" of the poet penetrated and enumerated for other men.

Now also, we understand better what was meant when the poet described "Imagination", in its highest office, as but another name for 'absolute power, clearest insight, and reason in her most exalted moon.'

Such an interpretation of the creative imagination is certainly simple, but not too simple, inasmuch as we find other modern poets who trace similar currents in their own imaginative process. I have in mind Stephen Spender when he

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., cf. XII, 305 FF.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., cf. XII, 250-286

wrote:

There are some days when the sea lies like a harp  
 Stretched flat beneath the cliffs. The waves  
 Like wires burn with the sun's copper glow  
 (all the murmuring blue very silent)

Between whose spaces every images  
 Of sky (field and) hedge and field and boat  
 Dwells like a huge face of the afternoon.

When the heat grows tired, the afternoon  
 Out of the land may breathe a sigh  
 (Across these wires like a hand  
 Which moves across those wires like a soft hand  
 (then the vibration)

Between whose spaces the vibration holds  
 Every bird-cry, dog's bark, man's shout  
 And creak of rollock from the land and sky  
 With all the music of the afternoon.<sup>45</sup>

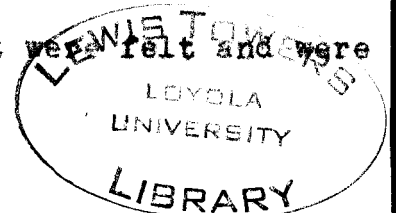
Spender tells us, and it is obvious to us, that these lines are attempts in the rough to sketch out an idea which exists clearly enough on some level of the mind where it yet eludes the attempt to state it.

The idea of this poem is a vision of the sea, The faith of the poet is that if this vision is clearly stated it will be significant. The vision is of the sea stretched under a cliff. On top of the cliff there are fields, hedges, houses. Horses draw carts along lanes, dogs bark far inland, bells ring in the distance. The shore seems laden with hedges, roses, horses and men, all high above the sea, on a very fine summer day when the ocean seems to reflect and absorb the shore. Then the small strung-out glittering waves of the sea

lying under the shore are like the strings of a harp which catch the sunlight. Between these strings lies the reflection of the shore. Butterflies are wafted out over the waves, which they mistake for the fields of the chalky landscape, searching them for flowers. On a day such as this, the land, reflected in the sea appears to enter into the sea, as though it lies under it, like Atlantis. The wires of the harp are like a seen music fusing landscape and seascape.

He then tells us that looking at this vision obviously has symbolic value. The sea represents death and eternity, the land represents the brief life of the summer and of one human generation which passes into the sea of eternity. Spender mentions here that although the poet may be conscious of this aspect of his vision, it is exactly what he wants to avoid stating, or even being too concerned with. There are things which should be said, and things which just as definitely should not be said. The unsaid inner meaning of the poem is revealed in the music and the tonality of the poem, and the poet is conscious of it in his knowledge that a certain tone of voice, a certain rhythm, are necessary.

The point of similarity between Wordsworth and Spender may not be obvious. It is this: objects or scenes of nature for both poets suggested truths that were felt and were



not rationalized. No one will deny their validity. .

Perhaps another and briefer example from Spender will clarify matters.

I was standing in the corridor of a train passing through the black country. I saw a landscape of pits and pitheads, artificial mountains, jagged yellow wounds in the earth, everything transformed as though by the toil of some enormous animal or giant tearing up the earth in search of prey or treasures. At this moment the line flashed into my head

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A language of flesh and roses.

That was the physical sight or image, then the combination by the intellect with images almost totally diverse all intended to express emotionally the fact that

the industrial landscape which seems by now a routine and act of God which enables both employers and workers who serve and profit by it, is actually the expression of man's will. Men willed it to be so, and the pitheads, slagheaps and the ghastly disregard of anything but the pursuit of wealth, are a symbol of modern man's mind. In other words, the world which we create, the world of slums, and telegrams, and newspapers - is a kind of language of our inner wishes and thoughts. Also this is so, it is obviously a language that has got outside our control. It is a confused language, an irresponsible senile gibberish. This thought greatly distressed me, and I started thinking that if the phenomena created by humanity are really like words in a language, what kind of language do we really aspire to? All this sequence of thought flashed into my mind

with the answer than came before the question:

A Language of flesh and roses.<sup>47</sup>

The congruency of the experiences of Wordsworth and Spender is not perfect. Wordsworth, once he has gained possession of the truth, whatever it is, is much more didactic than Spender, but this is merely a peculiar facet of Wordsworth's teacher-personality rather than his poet-personality, if we may so speak. Another difference we notice is that Spender is more concerned with the imaging of the universal, the actual artistic fashioning of the thought, and the imagination is the faculty which enables him to do that. In The Prelude at least, this does not seem to be Wordsworth's primary claim for the "Imagination". He stresses its ability to apprehend the truth suggested by an external object of nature.

But each of us, no matter how prose-minded we are, have had experiences analogous to those of Spender and Wordsworth which should help us to understand that we too have this same power, though muted. In listening to the melancholy gasp of the foghorn, is it not almost an automatic emotional process to sense the vague growth of thoughts concerning the brevity of life, eternity and the

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47 Ibid., 23

weeping within one's soul; or looking at a flower and 'thinking of it as a puff of frozen color,' does not the transience of beauty seep into our consciousness; and are not thoughts stimulated by looking up into the impassive face of night or the white-blue radiance of a cold December moon, or even the smoke from so commercial an object as the cigarette? What comes into our minds is usually vague and certainly not always profound. But we recognize the fact even though there is not a single drop of conscious rationalizing in the whole solution.

In this second chapter we 1) have defined the imagination according to the Scholastic doctrine, as a physical sense faculty with the notes of a. conservation, b. reproduction, and c. combination; but on the sense level.

2) investigated the popular estimates of imagination with reference to poetry. Here we saw how the adjective 'creative' was aptly applied to the imagination. The poet, as most people realize, adds to, or, subtracts from, past sensations, and in this sense 'creates' experiences outside of and even beyond the realm of human possibility.

Another attribute popularly attributed to imagination was insight without ratiocination, or intuition. 3) coupled the notes of comparison and combination of images to the third note of insight and arrived at the concept of



imagination as a power by which the poet, noting resemblances between universal truth and images, attains to a conclusion which has meaning for the inner life. This conclusion is not consequent upon a process of discursive reason, but does bear some resemblance to a logical conclusion. 4) illustrated this definition from Shelley's Skylark, noting that the poet declared the resemblance because the emotion awakened in him by the skylark has leaped from the sensation produced by moonlight to that produced by a haunting song. 5) came to the conclusion that the sensible imagination and the creative imagination were not the same. 6) showed that creative imagination involved essentially the intelligence; and is indeed nothing other than the cooperation between intellect and the sensible organic faculty termed imagination. 7) quoted lines from Wordsworth showing that he obviously and consciously possessed such a power. 8) raised the question whether Wordsworth's meaning was identical to our definition. 9) listed synonyms which Wordsworth used for "Imagination", commenting on his dissatisfaction with the word. Then we turned to quotations concerning references to the "Imagination" during the various stages of his life. 10) noted and explained the qualities of passivity, activity, power to possess itself of inner truths concerning natural objects

first, and then later, concerning the narrower field of moral and spiritual truths suggested by various natural phenomena. We enumerated and exemplified some of these truths from the text. 11) investigated a modern poet and found his experience with imagination basically the same as Wordsworth's, noting the latter's didacticism. 12) realized that we ourselves have this power, at least virtually, noting again that we are not conscious of rationalizing. We realized that this is certainly not the only way of knowing, but it is valid knowledge as universal experience testifies.

This problem of the relation between the "Imagination" and knowledge is one of the most interesting and challenging the writer investigated. We know Wordsworth insisted that he attained to valid knowledge by means of the "Imagination." There are critics, who reading Wordsworth, maintain that he was anti-intellectual or sub-rational. The above problem and its ramifications will form the major portion of the following chapter.

## CHAPTER III

### IMAGINATION AND REASON

In the previous chapter we saw that Wordsworth considered the "Imagination" to be a faculty for truth, and this consideration was verified. However, there are some critics, the most articulate and specific of whom is Mr. J. F. Downey, who maintained the Wordsworth's "Imagination" is anti-rational, non-intellectual and transcendental.<sup>1</sup> Whether or not these are characteristics of the "Imagination" along with passivity, activity, and the power of intuiting truths about man and nature must certainly be given some consideration.

Mr. Downey realizes the fact that Wordsworth attached a special and comprehensive meaning to the "Imagination". He knows that it is no mere organic faculty assisting the intellect, "But a comprehensive power of the soul, a power for truth, and the peculiar faculty of poetic and philosophical insight."<sup>2</sup> After noting the supreme value and exalted notion the poet has of this faculty, Downey investigates the relation of this faculty to reason understood as the

<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth's Religious Philosophy, J.P. Downey, S.J., an unpublished Master's thesis for Loyola University, 1946, Chapter II, Wordsworth's Theory of Mind is of especial interest.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 31

as the logical or discursive faculty.

To begin with, Wordsworth distinguishes Imagination "the grand and simple reason," as he calls it, from discursive reason

"that humbler power  
Which carries on its no inglorious work  
By logic and minute analysis."<sup>3</sup>

It is rather typical of Wordsworth that being at a loss to describe "Imagination" he should choose to call it reason, being careful however to distinguish it from discursive reason, by which we argue from premises. Downey notes some of the clarifying phrases which set "Imagination" apart: "reason in her most exalted mood," "the image of right reason...that lifts the Being into magnanimity," or "the grand and simple reason." As we noted in Chapter II, whenever Wordsworth uses a synonym for "Imagination" he always chooses a word with the connotation of discernment. What references does he make to the logical faculty? As Downey notes, it is: "a humbler power," "a secondary power," "false imagination." "Imagination" was for Wordsworth the pre-eminent power of the mind, but he did admit the validity of discursive reason in certain limited spheres of knowledge. His bias against discursive reason is seen in the following

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<sup>3</sup> Prelude, XI, 124-128

quotations:

that false secondary power, by which  
In weakness, we create distinctions, then  
Deem that our puny boundaries are things  
Which we perceive, and not which we have made.<sup>4</sup>

Reason, Wordsworth says, is an idol,

of all idols that which pleases most  
The growing mind. A trifler would he be  
Who on the obvious benefits should dwell  
That rise out of this process; but to speak  
Of all the narrow estimates of things  
Which hence originate were a worthy theme  
For philosophic Verse; suffice it here  
To hint that danger cannot but attend  
Upon a Function rather proud to be  
The enemy of falsehood, than the friend  
To truth, to sit in judgment than to feel.<sup>5</sup>

Nor do the logicians and the associationist psychology of  
Hartley please him, for he asks,

Who shall parcel out  
His intellect, by geometric rules,  
Split, like a province, into round and square?  
Who knows the individual hour in which  
His habits were first sown, even as a seed  
Who that shall point, as with a wand, and say,  
'This portion of the river of my mind  
Came from you fountain?'<sup>6</sup>

To Coleridge, Wordsworth says,

Thou, my Friend, art one  
More deeply read in they own thoughts; to thee  
Science appears but, what in truth she is,  
Not as our glory and our absolute boast,  
But as a succedaneum, and a prop  
To our infirmity.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., II, 221-224

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., II, 127-137

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., II, 208-215

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., II, 215-220

On the scientific method of the day he comments:

Hard task to analyze a soul, in which,  
Not only general habits and desires,  
But each most obvious and particular thought,  
Not in a mystical and idle sense,  
But in the words of reason deeply weigh'd  
Hath no beginning.<sup>8</sup>

Downey's comment after citing such passages is:

In such passages as these, Wordsworth's confirmed anti-rationalism breaks through. For science, identified with the vaunted method and exaggerated intellectualism of the eighteenth-century Rationalists, he has small regard; for it must depend in its processes upon an inferior function of the mind, namely, reason. While analytical method and scientific distinctions, abstractions, and classifications have some validity, yet for inquiry into the more profound reaches of the soul, they are, Wordsworth insists, of no avail.

Hence his condemnation of "the ape of philosophy", as he calls it, and of metaphysics as derived from reason.<sup>9</sup>

To the writer's mind, Mr. Downey's conclusions are somewhat hasty and certainly unsupported by textual proof. In the first place he is in disagreement with another critic who writes:

Wordsworth did not go so far as the other Romantics in relegating reason to an inferior position. He preferred to give a new dignity to the word and to insist that inspired insight is itself rational.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., II, 232-237

<sup>9</sup> Downey, 35

<sup>10</sup> Bowra, 19

Again, there is a valid personal reason why Wordsworth should so speak out against reason. During the early days of the French Revolution the young and impressionable Wordsworth thought he saw in Reason the promise of the millenium in liberty, progress and happiness for humanity; he writes:

O pleaaant exercise of hope and joy!  
 For great were the auxiliars which then stood  
 Upon our side, we who were strong in love;  
 Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,  
 But to be young was very heaven; O times  
 In which the meagre, stale, forbidding ways  
 Of custom, law, and statute book took at once  
 The attraction of a country in Romance;  
 When Reason seem'd the most to assert her rights  
 When most intent on making of herself  
 A Prime Enchanter to assist the work  
 Which then was going forwards in her name.  
 Not favored spots alone, but the whole earth  
 The beauty wore of promise.<sup>11</sup>

At this point Wordsworth must have had his mental fingers crossed. He himself was in sympathy with Rousseau and his 'feeling heart' as the truest characteristic of man, but at the same time science was making great progress. Which school was right? Rousseau's doctrine was obviously anti-intellectual. Then the aftermath of the French Revolution. The consequent reign of terror and Napoleon's Imperialistic aggressions destroyed his trust in the directive force of the human emotions or the 'feeling heart'. His agitated spirit now sought relief in a system as remote from

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<sup>11</sup> Prelude, X, 690-703





Thus I fared,  
 dragging all passions, notions, shapes of faith,  
 Like culprits to the bar, suspiciously  
 Calling the mind to establish in plain day  
 Her titles and her honours, now believing  
 Now disbelieving, endlessly perplexed,  
 With impulse, notice, right and wrong, the ground  
 Of moral obligation, what the rule  
 And what the sanction, till, demanding proof,  
 And seeking it in everything, I lost  
 All feeling of conviction, and, in fine,  
 Sick, wearied out with contrarieties,  
 Yielded up moral questions in despair. 13

A third consideration, and one which Mr. Downey does not acknowledge, is that Wordsworth very likely did not understand the word "reason" in the same precise sense as most formal philosophers do.

We understand reason as the third operation of the intellect which enables us to produce a third judgment from two other judgments. Even though the intellect is characterized by abstraction, progression and extrinsic dependence upon sense and is consequently an imperfect way of knowing, the object of the intellect is everything that is in any manner. In technical terms, the formal object of the intellect is being as being. This means that the intelligence can know something of all reality, and that the knowledge, although imperfect, is still real and valid.

If this were that Wordsworth understood reason to mean, and he denied the power of reason to reach moral and spiritual truths discursively, the accusation of 'anti-rational' would

13 Ibid. X, 879-901. Italic's are Wordsworth's.

be well-founded and just.

However, it seems far more probable that the Poet's understanding of the role of reason was that which Godwin and Hartley assigned it. Hartley was an associationist and the process of abstraction and progression which we have described is of a wholly different order from the empirical series of facts ruled by the laws of association, which are only juxtapositions of images. The only legitimate knowledge such a faculty could give would be sense knowledge, and Hartley logically enough held that the only legitimate knowledge was sense knowledge and that man's inner nature was wholly the product of sense impression. In condemning such a concept of reason, Wordsworth would find himself in company with every generation of Thomistic philosopher.

Godwin was a materialistic mechanist, explaining reason in terms of mechanical laws and matter. Consequently for Godwin also, spiritual truths were closed and impossible. In the first place there was no soul since only matter existed. And secondly, even if spiritual truths did exist, which Godwin denied, you could never reach them through his materialistic concept of mind.

We have universal experience of universal truths, moral and spiritual, so that we too, with Wordsworth, would condemn such reason as false with respect to the attainment

to higher truths. 'reason' for Godwin and Hartley could not give a man truth in the more profound aspects of reality, and since Wordsworth's concept of reason was taken from these men, Downey's accusation of anti-rational needed qualification.

Another consideration is the difference in minds which analytical psychology has discovered. Admittedly, the field has not been penetrated too deeply but we do have evidence which leads us to believe that some men,

reach their creative synthesis by arduous step-by-step thinking, while others see in a flash the conclusion and then need to work out the details. For the first, elaboration precedes the discovery; for the second, it follows. The former go from details to a whole; the latter from a whole to details. 14

Another psychologist has named the above types, the reflective, and the intuitive, and mentions that they are found in all fields of productive thinking so that either art or science can furnish examples. Darwin was discursive; Wallace and Chopin, intuitive.<sup>15</sup> In music, Mozart and Beethoven give us an analogous comparison. Mozart thought out symphonies, quartets and even scenes from operas, entirely in his head, sometimes while perturbed by other pressing problems, and then transcribed them, in their completeness,

<sup>14</sup> June Etta Downey, Creative Imagination, Studies in the Psychology of Literature, Harcourt, Brace and Co. New York, 1929, 156.

<sup>15</sup> T. Ribot, Creative Imagination, op. cit.

onto paper. Beethoven wrote fragments of themes in note books, which he kept beside him, working on and developing them over the years. There we have an analogy of two types of mind, the one intuitive as it were, and the other plodding and discursive. The point to be made here is that Wordsworth is describing his personal experiences and they seem to have been on a highly intuitive character. There are such minds and they are perfectly normal.

Downey also holds that Wordsworth's intuitive faculty of Imagination, in its higher acts at least, is essentially transcendental. This means that a man's knowledge of the spiritual has its origin, not in the witness of reason or of external experience but from within the mind itself. It is from within that man contacts truth, and this by immediate and intuitive experience. Downey reasons that Wordsworth was driven to this position because of his unfortunate sorties in the realm of discursive reason. The point would be valid unless Wordsworth's understanding of the word was different from Downey's which I believe to have been the case. If Wordsworth rejected the ability of the mind to know moral and spiritual truths through the imperfect but valid medium of abstraction, and if he did have experience of the existence of these truths then the only possible way he could attain such truths would be in a more perfect manner, i.e., immediately and from within the mind itself.

But we have seen that moral and spiritual truths were suggested by nature after the Imagination in her passive stage had absorbed countless, unconscious sense impressions. There is a stability, an order, a conformity to an eternal law that seems to be embodied and made visible in nature. There is also an obvious unity of life and power pervading all its parts and binding them together into a living whole. The life of nature is characterized by calmness which could still and refresh man; a sublimity, which could raise man to the noble and majestic thoughts; a tenderness, which stirs not only in the largest and loftiest things but also in the humblest. Man had his own separate life, and nature had hers, but there were many lessons, moral and intellectual which man could learn from observing nature. To the sensitive soul of the poet it were almost as if nature took on a maternal, tutorial role. But the action of the "Imagination" was not transcendental;

The truths of order, stability, the calm obedience to the natural and eternal law, the slow steady working of nature from which he took an admonition to cease from hoping to see man regenerated by sudden and violent convulsions, and yet to esteem and reverence what is permanent in human affection, and in man's moral being, and to build his hope on the gradual expansion and purification of these. All these perceptions about Nature had been more or less present to him from boyhood, only now, what were before

but vague emotions, came out as settled convictions.<sup>16</sup>

Downey's conclusion, after reading of the cooperation which exists between nature and man, is that they have a common life. And this common life appears "to be the root principle of the creative power of the "Imagination" and at the same time the source of that almost moral and intellectual activity of nature which Wordsworth insists upon."<sup>17</sup> He also writes that:

this Life is apparently the term of the intuitive experience of the mind, revealing itself as immanent in nature and in man and thus becoming the object of transcendental experience.<sup>18</sup>

Why did Downey write the above? Apparently after reading the following passage which he quotes partially and I shall quote in full. Wordsworth was walking up a mountain path on a misty, dark night when suddenly he noticed a marvelous effect produced on the landscape by a change in the atmosphere, a clearing of the mists and clouds, a sudden flood of moonlight let down into the darkness of mountain abyssess. He then writes:

A meditation rose in me that night  
Upon the lonely Mountain when the scene  
Had Pass'd away, and it appear'd to me  
The perfect image of a mighty Mind,  
Of one that feeds upon infinity,  
That is exalted by an underpresence,

<sup>16</sup> J.C. Shairp, Poetic Interpretation of Nature, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston and New York, 1877, 261

<sup>17</sup> Downey, 44

<sup>18</sup> Downey, 45

The sense of God, or whatso'er is dim  
 Or vast in its own being, above all  
 One function of such mind had Nature there  
 exhibited but putting forth, and that  
 With circumstance most awful and sublime,  
 That domination which she oftentimes  
 Exerts upon the outward face of things,  
 So moulds them, and endues, abstracts, combines,  
 Or by abrupt and unhabitual influence  
 Doth make one object so impress itself  
 Upon all others, and pervade them so  
 That even the grossest minds must see and hear  
 And cannot chuse but feel...19

An explanation of these lines need not be involved. The Poet tells us that the manner in which the scene he witnessed took place reminds him of the way a mighty mind, universal in interest and with a sense of the infinite and God's all pervading power, functions when working creatively. Just as nature took the mists, the darkness, the sea, the moonlight and the abyss, and moulded, abstracted and highlighted them so that even relatively unpoetic minds were focused on one or other aspect of the scene, in the case just described, the deep and gloomy chasm, so these great minds had almost the same power. The Poet continues:

The Power which these  
 Acknowledge when this moved, which Nature thus  
 Thrusts forth upon the senses, is the express  
 Resemblance, in the fulness of its strength  
 Made visible, a genuine Counterpart  
 And Brother of the glorious faculty  
 Which higher minds bear with them as their own.  
 That is the very spirit in which they deal  
 With all the objects of the universe;

They from their native selves can send abroad  
 Like transformation, for themselves create  
 A like existence, and, when'er it is  
 Created for them, catch it by an instinct;<sup>20</sup>

Poets, through the exercise of Imagination can also mould, abstract, combine and highlight the different aspects of nature. They can 'transform' the objects of the universe by pointing out new relationships. They can 'create' like 'existences' or scenes. And when they see such unusual relationships or scenes in nature, this same imaginative power enables them to perceive these relationships instinctively, that is without any lengthy process of ratiocination.

they build up greatest things  
 From least suggestions, ever on the watch,  
 Willing to work and to be wrought upon,  
 They need not extraordinary calls  
 To rouse them, in a world of life they live,  
 By sensible impressions, not enthrall'd,  
 But quicken'd, roused, and made thereby more apt  
 To hold communion with the invisible world.  
 Such minds are truly from the Deity,  
 For they are Powers; and hence the highest bliss  
 That can be known is theirs, the consciousness  
 Of whom they are habitually infused  
 Through every image, and through every thought,  
 And all impressions; hence religion, faith,  
 And endless occupation for the soul  
 Whether discursive or intuitive.<sup>21</sup>

The metaphysician reasons from first principles and builds up a whole science. The geometrician builds his science

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., XIII, 84-96

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 98-113



from a few postulates, whose import is certainly not apparent to most of us, nor are the self-evident principles of the metaphysician. Yet certain types of minds can see the tremendous ramifications in both these fields. Is it then so unusual for a poet to be able to perceive great truths of unity, dignity of the human person, etc. in relatively "least suggestions"? The poet is not hypnotized by sense impressions, but he is stimulated by them and made more conscious of the spiritual and moral life which nature can easily symbolize. His awareness of spiritual things is not a substitute for religion and faith but rather a confirmation or an introduction as the case may be.

Downey also states that the "Imagination" is now intellectual because of the place Wordsworth assigns "feeling and emotion."

Now the Imagination is not totally intellectual in its apprehension of important truths, the feelings as well are incorporated, though subordinate, and texts showing Wordsworth's apparent estimation of the "Imagination" as a complex of mind and feeling are not numerous, but they are definite: he speaks of,

passion, which itself  
is highest reason in a soul sublime. 22

and blessed is he

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22 Ibid., V, 39-40

whose soul hath risen  
Up to the height of feeling.intellect. 23

and at times,

My trust was firmer in the feelings.24

He was

ever with the heart  
Employ'd, and the majestic intellect.25

I felt and nothing else; I did not judge,  
I never thought of judging, with the gift  
Of all this glory fill'd and satisfied.26

Hence sovereignty within and peace at will  
Emotion which best foresight need not fear  
Most worthy then of trust when most intense.27

Just what Wordsworth meant by his use of the word "feeling" "emotion" and "heart" is rather difficult to say. If we understand him to mean sheer emotion, without any coloring of intellect and, indeed, offering emotion as a substitute for intelligence, then the "Imagination" would qualify not only as anti-intellectual but actually sub-rational. And it is only right to admit that this tendency was prevalent among the Romantics. The power of genius, in the Romantic view, was measured by the degree of individuality. Nothing was more familiar to the Romantic

23 Ibid., XIII, 204-205

24 Ibid., XII, 60-61

25 Ibid., XI, 144-145

26 Ibid., XI, 238-240

27 Ibid., XIII, 114-116

than the universal fact of the individuality evidenced in nature. They overlooked the equally apparent fact that all men, are, in some profound respects, the same. And as regards individuality, what is more individual than feeling? Feeling then, for some Romantics, became the chief object of cultivation. The first principle of Romanticism was individuality; the second, was, for some at least, an indulgence in, and expression of feeling and emotion. But in these matters, Wordsworth's conservatism and orthodoxy saved him from excess.

To the writer, Wordsworth's use of the words 'intellectual' and 'feeling' in conjunction, means that the Poet recognized that there was an intellectual element involved in the "Imagination." Emotion also, was involved, but whether the emotion initiated the thought, was concomitant with it or subsequent to it, is impossible to determine from the text. Also, there seems to be some doubt as to whether he was referring to brute emotion or some other type more closely allied to the intellect. At any rate, we do know that emotion or feeling was involved in the imaginative prehension of some object in nature. Perhaps an example from ordinary experience will clarify this;

In the case of husband and wife, or wherever two people have a strong bond of inter-knowledge, affection and

concern drawing them together, it is a common experience that a gesture, a word, or some slight familiar movement on the part of one person is often enough to cause powerful and sweeping emotions to rise in the other. The reason is, of course, that the gesture or peculiar movement is an external, partial manifestation of the total personality that is loved and admired. To another who does not know and feel this personality, the gesture has no more significance than the flexing of one's knees while walking. In the former case a real unity was perceived or experienced directly and immediately, nor was there any inventory by discursive reason or logical procedure. And when such an intuitive process takes place, no one denies that the reciprocal knowledge of husband and wife is not real, valid and intellectual. We do have to admit that this knowledge is, in part part, non-conceptual, but that is not the same as anti-intellectual, as will be brought out more fully in the subsequent chapter.

Applying our example to Wordsworth and his sensitivity to nature, we see that emotion is naturally and simply entwined with the intuitive character of the "Imagination." The example of the husband and wife also gives us a better idea of the "intuition". Through insight, apparent diversity was resolved into fundamental unity. The whole had properties which emerged out of the parts, but which were not present

in each of the parts. Similarly with Wordsworth. The parts of nature were, in large measure, significant to the Poet only because of the whole. The Poet's account of nature could only bring out the concrete parts in which he tried to signify what he saw underlying them. To relay this experience of integral nature he had to employ descriptions and language which seem to us extravagant, contradictory and confusing. One thing is certain though, and that is that the faculty which enabled him to pierce the parts to the core and resolve them into a fundamental unity was the "Imagination".

Very likely, Coleridge had in view this implied tendency toward creation, and the unifying power involved, when he borrowed Schelling's expression, "esemplastic (to make into one) Imagination."

By way of summary: in this chapter we gained a more refined understanding of the nature of the "Imagination" through a consideration of the interpretations of Mr. Downey, to whom the "Imagination" was an anti-rational, transcendental and non-intellectual faculty. Interpreting the text literally, there were expressions of antagonism between this faculty and reason. Antagonism or friction does not constitute anti-rationalism. Bowra stated that Wordsworth gave a new dignity to the word 'reason' and insisted that inspired insight was itself rational. By way of explaining the antagonism, we

showed how Wordsworth might easily have written heatedly against reason because of his unfortunate alliance with Hartley and Godwin after his disillusionment in the French Revolution and its aftermath. Again Wordsworth was not temperamentally suited for philosophic investigation. His mind was more in the intuitive mould as artists are inclined to be. Empirical psychology was quoted in support of this view, and examples from science and music were given. Another important point was the investigation of Wordsworth's probable understanding of the word 'reason'. It seemed likely that it was the same as Godwin's and Hartley's, in which case his distrust of the power was well-founded.

The next point to be treated was the alleged transcendentalism of the "Imagination". This would follow if the "Imagination" had been proved anti-rational, because then knowledge could only have been acquired from within the mind itself. But inasmuch as we showed the probability of the "Imagination" not being anti-rational, we also cast serious doubt on its being transcendental. We pointed out Wordsworth's expressed debt to external nature, and quoted both Bowra and Downey himself as saying that nature had an existence of her own. These points would militate against the transcendental interpretation.

Wordsworth's awareness of nature's power of selection

and highlighting as an image of the poet's creative power of combining, transforming, highlighting and thus pointing up hitherto unperceived relationships, was noted and analyzed. Our interpretation differed with Downey who thought that nature's power was identified with a life common to man and nature. This common life was the root principle of the creative power of the Imagination; the source of nature's moral and intellectual power; the term of the intuitive experience of the mind; and the object of transcendental experience.

Our last point was a discussion of the alleged non-intellectuality or sub-rationality of the "Imagination" because of the place awarded to feeling, emotion, heart, or other synonyms which Wordsworth used in this regard. We attempted to explain Wordsworth's use of the words 'intellectual' and 'feeling' in conjunction, and also exemplified our interpretation that emotion was a concomitant phenomenon of the manner in which the intuitive faculty worked. This knowledge was valid and non-conceptual. But non-conceptual and non-intellectual are not convertible.

## CHAPTER IV.

### IMAGINATION AND THE SPIRITUAL PRECONSCIOUS.

One of the points in the previous chapter to which we paid special attention was the apparent friction between Imagination and the discursive reason. The problem is in a sense the key to understanding the Imagination more fully. Consequently, in this chapter we will analyze the problem more thoroughly in the hope that it will render the relations between Imagination, knowledge, intuition, and emotion more obvious.

Wordsworth was by no means the first person to point up the difficulty. Plato wrote:

A poet is a light and winged thing, and holy, and there is no invention in him until he has become inspired, and is out of his senses, and reason is no longer in him.<sup>1</sup>

. . . sound reason fades into nothingness before the poetry of madmen.<sup>2</sup>

Shakespeare also made numerous references to this fact. For example:

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains  
Such shaping fantasies that apprehend

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1. Plato, *Ion*, 534, 536 Translated by J. Maritain

2. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 245 Translated by J. Maritain



More than cool reason ever apprehends,  
 The lunatic, the lover, and the poet  
 Are of imagination all compact. . . 3

And Aristotle:

For this reason, those are called fortunate who, whatever they start on, succeed in it without being good at reasoning. And deliberation is of no advantage to them, for they have in them a principle that is better than intellect and deliberation. They have inspiration, but they cannot deliberate. . . Hence we have melancholic men, the dreamers of what is true. For the moving principle seems to be stronger when the reasoning process is relaxed.<sup>4</sup>

Consonant with these observations spanning many centuries, we have the traditional invocation to the Muse, a mysterious and spiritual being who inspires the pen of the poet. Most critics are agreed that we cannot predicate real existence of the Muse, nor shall the writer, even though it would enable the thesis to shut down immediately. Rather, we must find out if this Muse can be explained as abiding in the soul of the poet under the pseudonym of creative Imagination, i.e., the intellect united to the sensible imagination, resulting in inspiration explicable outside of conceptual and rational intelligence.

The poets themselves have repeatedly told us that they

3 Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream, V, 1.

4 Aristotle, Rhetoric, III, 7

are not restricted to conceptual reason. We should not find this fact too difficult. Previously we have enumerated sparse similar experiences common to all men. If the above is true, can we discover a spiritual unconscious or pre-conscious from which non-conceptual knowledge arises?

Jacques Maritain, one of the most famous living philosophers, believes we can. He prefers the word 'preconscious' to 'unconscious' because the activity of the poet is not totally unconscious but born there and emerging into the conscious. The poet, Wordsworth in this case, was not unaware of his gift of imagination. As we remember, he considers it to be his most precious gift. Maritain prefers to use the adjective 'spiritual' when talking about the preconscious because we have within us two great domains of psychological activity screened from the grasp of consciousness. One is the spiritual preconscious of which Plato and the ancient philosophers were aware, and the other is the unconscious of Freud, i.e., the unconscious of "blood and flesh, instincts, tendencies, complexes, images and desires and traumatic memories".<sup>5</sup> Freudian unconscious is "deaf to the intellect, and structured into a world of its own apart from the intellect."<sup>6</sup> The poet's inspiration is both

<sup>5</sup> J. Maritain, Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry, Kingport Press, Kingport, Tennessee, 1953, 91.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 92

cognitive and spiritual, consequently, it must be intimately related to the intellect.

Before continuing, it will probably be a help to the understanding of this last chapter if the writer briefly indicates the direction to be taken in the exposition of imagination as conceived by M. Maritain and applied to Wordsworth.

We will attempt to establish the existence of the spiritual preconscious both from experience and from a philosophical analysis of the construction of the intellect. Then, we will show that such a life is the root of the soul's powers. Thus the rational intellect, the intuitive intellect (both one faculty), and the sensible imagination are all connected there. Next we can propose a definition of the creative imagination. Following the definition we will note the qualities of this power, namely, freedom, creativity, and intuitive or poetic knowledge which is an obscure grasping of the poet's self and of things in a knowledge through connaturality, a knowledge born in the spiritual preconscious and fructifying in the poem. And finally, we will attempt to analyze the manner in which this knowledge arises, namely, through intentionalized emotion.

That there is, in each of us, some sort of preconscious life is easily verified from our personal experience.

A person need not be an introvert to realize that the acts and fruits of human consciousness, and the clear perceptions of the mind as we experience them in the ordinary, everyday function of the intelligence, rise from an existent and deep nonconscious world of activity. And not only do ideas regularly rise from we know not what but even whole poems, stories, mathematical theories, inventions and scientific discoveries. Among others who have recorded their unusual experiences of this phenomenon are Coleridge the poet, Poincare, the mathematician, and Gauss the scientist. Newton also relates similar inspirations as it were. In each case there was no lengthy process of ratiocination; the solution or theory suddenly emerged from the unconscious. <sup>7</sup>

A look inside the intellect would reveal a universe of concepts, logical connections, rational discursus and deliberation in which the activity of the intellect takes definite form and shape. We realize that some unconscious life underlies all this. The comparison of the mind to the surging sea is particularly apt here. The surface of the mind is profusely populated with explicit concepts and judgments, all in the bright sunlight as it were. But below this surface of sunlight are the sources of knowledge

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<sup>7</sup> cf. Skinner, Readings in Psychology, Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., New York, 1935, 603.

and creativity, of love and suprasensuous desires. These are hidden in the depths where the light is translucent and opaque, where the intimate vitality of the soul abides. We yearn for personal freedom, we thirst and strive to know, to see, to grasp and to express. Whence these desires?

Certainly this appeal to personal experience is valid. What person has ever turned his thoughts inward and not realized that much of his mental life is played off the boards and behind the scenes, from which come promptings as undeniable as they are unexplainable?<sup>8</sup>

But strong as is our personal experience we also have an explanation in the very structure of the intellect. However what is the relation between the structure of the intellect, with its origin of ideas and birth of concepts, and creative Imagination? If we can show that even with regard to the birth of concepts, i.e., with regard to the rational intellect, there is a nonconceptual activity explainable through spiritual preconsciousness, then how logical to assume such a non-rational activity also plays an essential part in the exercise of the creative imagination. Maritain gives us a clear exposition of positing the existence of the spiritual preconscious through an analysis of the intellect.

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<sup>8</sup> cf, Jane Downey's, Springs of the Imagination, 155 ff.

Before Descartes, the human soul was considered a substantial reality accessible in its nature only to metaphysical analysis; a spiritual entelechy informing the living body, and distinct from its own operations;...The Schoolmen were not interested in working out any theory about the unconscious life of the soul, yet their doctrines implied its existence...

The intellect is spiritual and distinct in essence from the senses. Yet, nothing is to be found in the intellect which does not come from the senses. Then it is necessary to explain how a certain spiritual content which will be seen and expressed in an abstract concept, can be drawn from the sense, that, is, thephantasms and images gathered and refined in the internal sensitive powers, and originating in sensation. It is under the pressure of this necessity that Aristotle was obliged to posit the existence of a merely active and perpetually active intellectual energy, the intellect agent, let us say the illuminating intellect, which permeates the images with its pure and purely activating spiritual light and actuates or awakens the potential intelligibility which is contained in them.<sup>9</sup>

Maritain then narrates St. Thomas' additions to this doctrine, namely the Illuminating Intellect as an inherent part of each individual's soul...the primal quickening source of all his intellectual activity. He continues,

Now the process of formation of intellectual knowledge is a very complex process of progressive spiritualization. For the act of intellectual vision can only be accomplished through the identification of spiritual intelligence with an object brought itself to a state of spirituality in act. The intellect, on the other hand, which the ancients called intellectus possibilis, because it is first and of itself a tabula rasa, only in potency with respect to knowing and to the intelligible forms it will receive...the knowing intellect,

in order to know, must be actuated, and shaped, by what is drawn from the images, and the images are imbued with materiality. Thus, at a first step, the intelligible content present in the images, and which, in the images, was only intelligible in potency,..., is made intelligible in act in a spiritual form (species impressa, impressed pattern), let us say, in an intelligible germ, which is received from the images by the intellect, under the activation of the Illuminating Intellect...It is necessary that the intelligible content drawn from the images should not only be intelligible in act...but intellected in act, or actually become an object of intellectual vision. Then it is the intellect itself, which, having been impregnated by the impressed pattern or intelligible germ, vitally produces - always under the activation of the Illuminating Intellect--an inner fruit, a final and more fully determined spiritual form (species expressa), the concept, in which the content drawn from the images is brought to the very same state of spirituality-in-act in which the intellect-in-act is, and in which this now perfectly spiritualized content is seen, is actually an object of intellectual vision.<sup>10</sup>

The point to be made through the above quotation is the fact that philosophical reflection established, through the logical necessities of reason, the fact of the existence of the Illuminating Intellect and the intelligible germ or impressed pattern, and yet, they totally escape experience and consciousness. The Intellect knows nothing either of the impressed patterns or of the very process through which it produces its concepts. And the Illuminating Intellect whose

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 97-98

light causes all our ideas to arise in us cannot be seen but remains concealed in the spiritual preconscious. Thus, if there is in the spiritual unconscious a nonconceptual or preconceptual activity of the intellect even with regard to the birth of our concepts, it is reasonable to think that such a nonrational activity is an essential part of poetic inspiration also.

Further, the powers of the soul emanate in an order with regard to nature, namely, the imagination flows from the essence of the soul through the intellect, and the external senses proceed from the essence of the soul through imagination. Thus there is a common root of all the powers of the soul, which is hidden in the spiritual preconscious.

The life of the intellect is not entirely engrossed either by the preparation and engendering of its instruments of rational knowledge, or by the process of producing concepts and ideas which we recognize as terminating at the level of conceptualized externals of reason.

But there is, for the intellect, another kind of life, free from the workings of rational knowledge and the disciplines of logical thought. It is the life of the intuitive intellect. This free life of the intellect involves a free life of the imagination and both are united in the spiritual preconscious because the spiritual preconscious is the single



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root of the soul's powers. This life is, in large part, nonconceptual.

At this point we are ready to give at least a partial definition of what Wordsworth meant by "Imagination" in terms of our findings in this chapter. Let us say that "what Wordsworth was describing was the vital union, in the preconscious life of the spirit, of the sensible imagination and the intuitive intellect. We remember that Wordsworth's "Imagination" was nonconceptual, free, creative, intellectual and "feeling". With these qualities in mind, let us examine our own interpretation.

As we have already pointed out, the activity of the intuitive intellect is free in comparison to the rational intellect which is disciplined and channeled. But our imagination is also cognitive and productive or creative. It is cognitive of knowledge, and it is productive or creative in beautifying that knowledge. As Maritain points out this free creativity "involves an infinity of possible realizations and possible choices."<sup>12</sup> Maritain then explains how, in this respect, the poet's power is analogous to God's.

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11 Ibid. of 110-111

12 Ibid., 112

God's creative Idea, from the very fact that it is creative, does not receive anything from things, since they do not yet exist. It is in no way formed by its creatable object. It is only and purely formative and forming. And that which will be expressed or manifested in the things made is nothing else than their Creator Himself, whose transcendent Essence is enigmatically signified in a diffused, dispersed, or parceled-out manner, by works which are deficient likenesses of and created participations in it. And God's Intellect is determined or specified by nothing else than His own essence. It is by knowing Himself, in an act of intellection which is His very Essence and His very Existence, that He knows His works, which exist in time and have begun in time, but which He eternally is in the free act of creating.

Such is the Supreme analogate of poetry. Poetry is engaged in the free activity of the spirit. And thus it implies an intellectual act which is not formed by things, but is, by its own essence, formative and forming.<sup>13</sup>

Thus we can see that Wordsworth's gift was truly "from the Deity".<sup>14</sup> But Wordsworth was also well aware of his dependence upon the outer world, and the same is true when we return to consider the creative imagination and its limitations.

It is true that the poet must have a grasp of his own subjectivity but man does not know himself in the light of his own essence. His dependence upon the external world is profound and humbling. He depends upon ideas which he did not create, language which he did not compose, and the infinite manifestations of beauty already composed by other men. If

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 112-113

<sup>14</sup> The Prelude, XIII, 406

he is not to remain empty, his creative activity must be conditioned by an inpouring of the things of the universe. To be creative, a grasping of the reality of the outer and inner world must be joined to the obscure self-knowledge he experiences, this grasping also obscure and non-rational.

Even Wordsworth's difficulty in perceiving whether the knowledge he experienced came from within or without is explicable.

Hence the perplexities of the poet's condition. If he hears the passwords and the secrets that are stammering in things...if he captures those more things which are in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy, he does not do so by knowing all this in the ordinary sense of the word to know, but by receiving all this into the obscure recesses of his passion. All that he discerns and divines in things, he discerns and divines not as something other than himself, according to the law of speculative knowledge, but, on the contrary, as inseparable from himself and from his emotion, and in truth as identified with himself.<sup>15</sup>

And the visions or bursts of knowledge concerning nature and man which Wordsworth notes can be understood better.

...the creative intuition is an obscure grasping of his own Self and of things in a knowledge through union or connaturality which is born in the spiritual unconscious and which fructifies only in the work. So the germ...which is contained in the free life of the intellect, tends from the very start...to the humble revelation, virtually contained in a small lucid cloud of inescapable

<sup>15</sup> Maritain, 115

intuition, both of the Self of the poet and of some particular flash of reality in the God-made universe; a particular flash of reality bursting forth in its unforgettable individuality, but infinite in its meanings and echoing capacity----16

As we have already learned, this knowledge or 'revelation' is not traceable to a conceptual, logical and discursive exercise of reason. Rather, it is to use the term of M. Maritain, knowledge through connaturality.

Knowledge through connaturality is a term which St. Thomas first used in explaining the two ways of judging things pertaining to a moral virtue; first, a rational knowledge of the virtue; and second, its embodiment within ourselves. In the latter instance our knowledge is genuine and real, though perhaps obscure and unexplainable in rational and conceptual language. Similar to this latter way of knowing, i.e., through connaturality, is the knowledge of the poet, its embodiment within himself, to which he gives form, beauty and expression in his poem. The creative imagination is the power which enables the poet to put this knowledge through effective connaturality, into the concrete form which appeals so powerfully to the human mind, or rather, to the whole human person, for the appeal of highly imaginative poetry is to the totality of man, sense, sensible imagination, intellect, love

16 Ibid., 115

desire, instinct, blood and spirit. And this is so because the poetry proceeded from the totality of the poet, as M. Maritain points out:

Poetic knowledge, as I see it, is a specific kind of knowledge through inclination or connaturality—let us say a knowledge through effective connaturality which essentially relates to the creativity of the spirit and tends to express itself in a work. So that in such knowledge, it is the object created, the poem...in its own existence as a world of its own, which plays the part played in ordinary knowledge by the concepts and judgments produced within the mind.

In the mind of the poet, poetic knowledge arises in an unconscious or preconscious manner, and emerges into consciousness in a sometimes almost imperceptible way, through an impact both emotional and intellectual, or through an unpredictable experiential insight, which gives notice of its existence but does not express it.<sup>17</sup>

The question of emotion or feeling remains:

This particular kind of knowledge through connaturality comes about, I think by means of emotion. That is why, at first glance, one believes, and often the poet himself believes, that he is like Ahab of Moby Dick: 'Here's food for thought, had Ahab time to think; but Ahab never thinks; he only feels, feels, feels..<sup>18</sup>

However, since knowledge is involved, the intellect must also be involved, since only the intellect knows.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 118

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 119

Emotion knows nothing; although it is through the indispensable instrumentality of feeling that this knowledge through connaturality comes about. At any rate, we can understand to some degree at least, how Wordsworth could use the term "felt-thought" and still be neither anti-national or subrational.

But let us try to understand what is meant by the word 'emotion' with reference to the creative imagination. It is not merely subjective or brute emotion; emotion as a simple psychological state. Such affective states are merely material and consequently devoid of any determining power with regard to the knowledge the poet attains. The poet does not experience a vivid and overwhelming affective emotion, and then attempt to reproduce this same 'tingle' in his readers, although Byron has been criticized for this fault, and also for describing his effective state rather than the experience which stimulated him. Wordsworth also errs at times in this regard, but the state of inspiration which he describes, and with which we are concerned now, is not affected by this fault.

T.S. Eliot, in his *The Perfect Critic*, writes that,

The end of the enjoyment of poetry is a pure contemplation from which all the accidents of personal emotion are removed. 19

and again,

Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion  
but an escape from emotion.<sup>20</sup>

These two quotations have probably caused many of his readers, especially the younger ones, a good deal of frowning, inasmuch as subjective emotion is usually the only meaning they affix to the use of the word.

The emotion which poet's experience in connection with their creative process is much more complex. To paraphrase Maritain; it is emotion as form, as intentional. Now these are terms usually associated with the process of formal cognition, but they are helpful in understanding the role of emotion.

It is the form which makes anything intelligible. It is emotion as formative which makes the poet's connatural knowledge apprehendable by the reader of the poem, under this particular aspect, and not under some other.

As we know, our concepts of realities are in the intentional order, i.e., ideas or concepts intend or carry within themselves much more than themselves. They 'tend' by their very nature to reveal not themselves, but the realities known in this immaterial way. We are not conscious of the concepts as such, but of the realities which they represent. For instance, we are not conscious of the idea of a roughhousing

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 121

river, but of the river itself. So with intentional emotion, it carries within itself much more than itself. It 'tends' to reveal not itself, but the reality which the poet is driven to attempt to give adequate expression. And the poet is conscious not of the emotion itself, but of the reality. I believe this is what T. S. Eliot meant when he said that the emotion must have its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet. But is there no connection between sensible and intentional emotion? Maritain replies.

This creative emotion, distinct as it is from the merely subjective feelings of the poet, lives on in them, so that while being bound to transmute them, he cannot escape from them." 21

Usually, the attempt to visualize abstract thoughts is productive of confusion and misunderstanding, but perhaps the attempt to do this with regard to the emotion may succeed.

We see a translucent reservoir into which has seeped all the harvests "of experience and memory preserved in the soul, all the universe of fluid images, recollections, associations, feelings and latent desires."<sup>22</sup> It is a reservoir with vast depths of subjectivity, the spiritual unconscious. The contents of the reservoir are self-possessed, available, not absorbed "by activity toward the outside or

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21 Ibid., 121

22 Ibid., 122



or by the toil of its powers."<sup>23</sup> The pool itself, seems to be asleep, but the waters, being spiritual, are "in a state of virtual vigilance and vital tension, owing to the virtual reversion of the spirit on itself and on everything in itself."<sup>24</sup>

Into the depths of such a reservoir, asleep and yet vitally tense, emotion intervenes. "On the one hand, it spreads into the entire soul" so that certain particular aspects in things become connatural to the soul so affected.

On the other hand emotion, falling into the living springs, is received in the vitality of intelligence permeated by the diffuse light of the Illuminating Intellect...<sup>25</sup>

and stirs all the experiences, desires, memories and images, commingled under pressure in the subjectivity of the poet and his spiritual unconscious.

And it suffices for emotion disposing or inclining...the entire soul in a certain determinate manner to be thus received in the undetermined vitality and productivity of the spirit, where it is permeated by the light of the Illuminating Intellect: then, while remaining emotion, it is made with respect to the aspects in things which are connatural to, or like, the soul it imbues into an instrument of intelligence judging through connaturality, and plays, in the process of this knowledge through likeness between reality and subjectivity,

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23 Ibid, 122  
24 Ibid, 122  
25 Ibid, 122

the part of a nonconceptual intrinsic determination of intelligence in its preconscious activity.<sup>26</sup>

Maritain sums up our position with this short paragraph.

Poetic knowledge is as natural to the spirit of man as the return of the bird to his nest; and it is the universe which, together with the spirit, makes its way back to the mysterious nest of the soul....The soul is known in the experience of the world, and the world is known in the experience of the soul, through a knowledge which does not know itself. For such knowledge knows, not in order to know, but in order to produce. It is toward creation that it tends.<sup>27</sup>

The preceding resume ends this thesis, perhaps unsatisfactorily. But as long as we must interpret the most intimate experience of another through the medium of common language it is inevitable that fissures and even gaps of dissatisfaction should open.

The writer believes that inasmuch as Wordsworth was merely describing his experience and not interpreting them, many facets of that experience should have been congruent with the experiences of the artists of all generations. Thus in the analysis of Wordsworth we came to a more refined knowledge not only of his "Imagination" but also of the creative imagination of all poets worthy of the name.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 122-23

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 124

Be that as it may, the writer is also aware that The Prelude's contents could have been interpreted sympathetically to three or four prominent influences in his own day, Rousseau for instance. It was Rousseau who broke away from rigid classical connections in thought and language, and had affirmed that feeling and personal experience are more important guides to life than abstract reasoning. Certainly he awakened poets of the period to the beauties of natural scenery and taught them how to find in it something that responds to the aspirations of the human heart.

Or again, the writer could have made a case for Spinoza, (difficult as he is to understand), and his teaching that man and nature have their common ground in God, and that man may gain exaltation of spirit and inner peace and contentment if he identified himself with the universe whose substance is God, a substance that has never changed and never will change thus insuring perpetual peace. Wordsworth spoke of "this love more intellectual" and Spinoza of "intellectual love of God". However, there are certain very significant differences in their manner of speaking of God. Even so, Wordsworth very likely interpreted some of his experiences in the language of Spinoza.

With more research and study, the influence of Emmanuel Kant might be seen in Wordsworth's explanation of his

"Imagination". Kant asserted that in a measure the outer world of experience is the product of our own minds. Such veins of idealism could be traced in The Prelude. Kant also found in our feelings of the beautiful and sublime in nature the suggestion that the world may be the outward manifestation of a Spirit who has produced it in somewhat the manner in which a genius creates a work of art.

There are critics who interpreted Wordsworth in these aspects and it is precisely because the writer found it so difficult to follow their eclectic estimations that he decided to attempt to interpret Wordsworth as much in terms of common sense as possible. This calling upon "common experience" as a criterion may appear somewhat naive to a few. But the method is valid inasmuch as John Donne's statement that "no man is an island" is true and valid for bootblack and artist. It is the writer's hope that for some, this method may be a small candle which will help them to understand, Wordsworth, artists and their art, better.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Mr. Henry R. Lynch has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English .

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that the necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

Nov. 28, 1953.  
Date

Rev. John B. Conrath, S.J.  
Signature of Adviser