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Language, consciousness, and self-perception in Wordsworth's "Intimations Ode"

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LANGUAGE, CONSCIOUSNESS, AND SELF-PERCEPTION
IN WORDSWORTH'S "INTIMATIONS ODE"

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English
San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

By

Patrick M. Nolan

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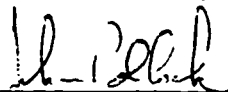
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ABSTRACT

LANGUAGE, CONSCIOUSNESS, AND SELF-PERCEPTION
IN WORDSWORTH'S "INTIMATIONS ODE"

By Patrick M. Nolan

This thesis addresses the relationship between language, consciousness, and self perception, as revealed in the poem "Intimations Ode" by the British Romantic poet William Wordsworth. This thesis argues that the central problems in the "Intimations Ode"--that the self as remembered in the past was connected with nature, but that now that self is perceived as separate from nature--can be explained by a recent linguistic theory of consciousness originated by psychologist Julian Jaynes.

This thesis briefly describes various interpretations of the Ode, gives a condensed historical overview of the term "romanticism," traces how the Ode marks a turning point in Wordsworth's poetry, discusses the problems of language in literary interpretation and in human cognition, explains Jaynes's linguistic theory of consciousness, and applies this theory to the Ode through a close reading of the text.

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Introduction:
Various Interpretations and Critical Problems
of the "Intimations Ode"

Critics have read William Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" ("Intimations Ode") in many different ways: it is at once a poem about childhood, death, immortality, the loss of childhood innocence, faith in philosophic thought, the beauty of nature, the origin of the soul, and even a moving prescription on how to love. It has been read as an instructive poem about childhood and the adult's mature acceptance of his own mortality and reconciliation with his lost past (Trilling). It has also been read as an example of the special, paradoxical nature of poetic language, and how such a language is the only way to understand inexplicable feelings (Vendler, Brooks, Ferguson). It could be a poem about Wordsworth's waning imaginative powers and the poetic dialogue he had with Samuel Taylor Coleridge on the subject (Magnusen). It is quite possibly a poem that attempts to reconcile the uncertainties of the past and future by fashioning a "myth of preexistence and fable of childhood" (Curtis 114).

Yet it can also be, as Jerome McGann asserts, and with whom Marxist critic Terry Eagleton would probably agree, a poetic example of "Romantic ideology," offering refuge from

history within a highly hermetic version of reality: a "grand illusion" and "Bastille" of consciousness, that offers one "the idea that poetry, or even consciousness, can set one free from the ruins of history and culture" (91). Marjorie Levinson sees the poem in this same deterministic light: not only does it show a desire to escape from the pains of history, but it reveals its own political stance, posing and answering "political questions at the level of an abstract idea," though hiding its polemic in "clouds of glory" (81-2). Still other critical perspectives show how the poem exemplifies Wordsworth's particular struggles with then current philosophical problems, specifically the conflict between eighteenth-century empiricism and transcendentalism (Grob, Thomas), and yet other studies examine more specifically the ancient philosophical and theological problems between subject and object, between a knowing "I" and the objective world that this "I" perceives (Gutierrez).

The multifarious approaches toward and critical readings of the "Intimations Ode" suggest a few important, if obvious, things: that critical relativity is alive and well; that such variety of readings reveals the problematic nature of reading and interpreting poetry, unmasking problems that raise very old philosophical issues about the nature of understanding, not soon to be answered; and, finally, that Wordsworth's poem is still an enigma to critics. But beyond these concerns, Wordsworth's Ode reveals more than the difficult nature of

literary interpretation. It raises an important epistemological concern about the role language plays in human understanding: that the relationship between language and self-perception is problematic and ambiguous. The "Intimations Ode" shows how the speaker's feelings of loss and isolation result from the paradoxical situation that language and consciousness create for the speaker's sense of self awareness.

According to a theory of consciousness put forth by psychologist Julian Jaynes, it is through the function of language that consciousness is possible (42-66), that to think, to be conscious of the world and to be aware of oneself in it, we must use the metaphoric capacity of language to imagine a picture of ourselves as existing within a linguistically constituted continuum of time and space. Language is the metaphor-generating tool that enables us to abstract ideas from experience in order to think--to form a picture in the mind--about those experiences. Importantly, this includes thinking about ourselves, which according to Jaynes, "is always a spatialization in which the diachronic is turned into the synchronic"; this means that to think about ourselves existing in time we "excerpt" selected images of experience and generate linguistic signs and put them into a logical, coherent framework of "side-by-sideness" (60) that enables us to think about those experiences. In order to be self-conscious, in order to be able to be aware of the self

as a single, distinct, and autonomous being moving independently in the world, we cannot but imagine ourselves as being separate and distinct from other objects in the world. This thesis argues that the speaker in the "Intimations Ode" struggles with the inevitable loss and isolation that is a result of human self-consciousness, but comes to terms with this loss by realizing the temporal, illusory nature of his linguistic self-identity.

It might be asked then, why study poetry at all if any instance of language can reveal this? And why study Romantic poetry in particular? This poem, and perhaps much of Romantic poetry, deals specifically with how human consciousness creates a feeling of isolation from the world. The "Intimations Ode" shows the speaker struggling with this perceptual dilemma: how language creates the appearance of time and space, and linguistically places the subjective self within that continuum, and how the speaker's feeling of loss and isolation stems from the awareness that this continuum--including the speaker's sense of identity--exists metaphorically within the boundaries of language.

In the opening of the Ode, Wordsworth's speaker laments the loss of a special way of seeing, a mode of perception. Stanza one begins with the famous lamentation about the loss of both the special quality surrounding nature, and the speaker's inability to see it as he was once able to:

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream

The earth, and every common sight,
 To me did seem
 Appareled in celestial light,
 It is not now as it hath been of yore;—
 Turn wheresoe'er I may,
 By night or day,
 The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

(1-9)

By the end of the fifth stanza, the speaker wonders if nature itself has lost this special quality or if instead this loss stems from a lack in his perceptual powers. While looking at a joyous scene of children and animals playing in the springtime, the speaker feels separated from the wonders around him because his ability to think about the things he sees makes them appear distinct, and thus separate from other things, including himself:

—But there's a Tree, of many, one,
 A single Field which I have looked upon,
 Both of them speak of something that has gone:
 The Pansy at my feet
 Doth the same tale repeat:
 Whither is fled the visionary gleam?

Where is it now, the glory and the dream?" (56-57)

This "gleam" or "glory" can be seen as a metaphorical description of a child's perception, that is to say, perception without the full capacity of linguistic

abstraction. While other critics have explained the speaker's reaction to his perceptual loss as either maturity, faith, ideology, or a stoic recognition of mortality, this thesis posits that the speaker's sense of loss is a metaphoric description of human self-consciousness, as created by and revealed through language.

As Helen Vendler describes it, the "Intimations Ode" shows the gap the conscious mind perceives between itself and the world. The poem calls attention to, according to her, the power poetic language gives us to be able to integrate the distance we feel between the memory of ourselves in a more glorious past, and the future vision of ourselves heading toward death. The poem for Vendler is a "mediating between the language of childhood and its mirror language of adult inwardness, a language of disorientation, which conveys the difficulty inherent in the relation of consciousness to sense experience, that difficulty which the great poetry of the Ode so triumphantly overcomes" (86). But while Vendler interprets the poem as an example of a "triumphant" fusion of sense and great poetic language, between inward moral sensibility and less self-conscious, child-like sense experience, this so-called "triumph" of perception is actually something that occurs in all acts of language; though to varying degrees; that to understand ourselves, to be self-conscious, we have to imagine ourselves through the medium of language; that this is not just a poetic occurrence

but a common linguistic occurrence for all humans; and that Wordsworth's poem describes this very process of language creating consciousness.

Wordsworth certainly deserves credit for expressing what linguists and psychologists have only many years later discovered, but he is not describing a peculiar act of knowing, available only to the highly imaginative poet, as Vendler suggests. That he describes this is extraordinary, but what he describes is quite ordinary. What makes Wordsworth's description of perceiving the world unique is that he was one of the first poets to speak about this ordinary function of the human mind in a way that illustrates mimetically how the human mind can only know itself through the metaphors of language. Wordsworth's poem illustrates the metaphoric nature of self consciousness and how language creates the self, yet describes how language simultaneously restricts the ability to perceive the self. This particular reading is perhaps more psycholinguistic than literary, but these insights into the poem may illuminate how Wordsworth's poetic language is descriptive of something everyone does in the act of knowing, and show how language and consciousness enable but ultimately limit self-knowledge.

II.

Historical Overview of Romantic Theory

Wordsworth's poetry and the category of ideas, writings, and events placed under the term "Romanticism" signal a great turning point in English literary theory (Abrams, Mirror 103) and can also be seen as marking the beginning of "modern" poetry (Hartman 14, Kneale 746). The term "Romanticism," though it can be applied to many different ideas and writings, can generally be used to refer to a historical time period (Frye 299) marking a reaction to the unstable intellectual climate in Europe beginning in the early seventeenth century, in which humankind found itself disconnected from nature. This collective sense of separation from nature was due largely to the inability of religion and philosophy to provide a coherent understanding of the world that was not contradicted by science.

Earl Wasserman describes the effect of scientific and philosophical discoveries of the Enlightenment, specifically how new understandings of nature and how the mind perceives itself had undermined older systems of understanding:

In the middle ages and the Renaissance the literate had shared a constellation of synthesizing myths by means of which man could grasp relationships that gave significant pattern to otherwise discrete things and experiences. These systems transformed man and his

world into a lexicon of symbols and integrated the symbols into meaningful cross references. But by the end of the eighteenth century these communally accepted patterns had almost completely disappeared. (170)

Science and philosophy had begun to destroy previously believed conceptual paradigms which had, according to E. M. W. Tillyard, comprised "the notions about the world and man which was previously taken for granted by the ordinary educated Elizabethan" (v). This previous world view was a theological conceptual framework, or cosmogony, that gave man "an ordered universe in a fixed system of hierarchies . . . modified by man's sin and the hope of redemption" (3), as seen in such concepts as the Great Chain of Being, correspondences, and microcosm/macrocosm (23).

Michel Foucault similarly describes what had been lost by Wordsworth's time; one of the ways man had previously understood the world was through the Renaissance concept of *divinato*: the idea that the spirit of God resided in and infused all of nature, and so all natural objects were thought to have an intrinsic meaning and value in and of themselves. By studying nature and its order, one could uncover "a language which God had previously distributed across the face of the earth; it is in this sense that it [divine knowledge] was the divination [intuitive insight] of an essential implication, and that the object of its divination was divine" (59). In other words, nature,

including man, had its own syntax, its own order and meaning, written by God. This was an externally reflective process, whereby we reflected, or as Foucault puts it, we resembled, all natural things made by God, because we too were part of God's creation and influence. All things were interfused and connected in this world picture, most especially the mind of man and the nature he perceived and was a part of.

But the ability to discover these "essential" or spiritual properties of physical objects became impossible during the Enlightenment, according to Foucault, because the new scientific method of the seventeenth century was based upon an arbitrary sign system which placed knowledge and understanding only within the subjective abstractions of the "new science" and its language. Again, to quote Foucault on the changes during the Enlightenment:

In the Classical age, to make use of signs is not, as it was in preceding centuries, to attempt to rediscover beneath them a primitive text of a discourse sustained, and retained, forever; it is an attempt to discover the arbitrary language that will authorize the deployment of nature within its space, the final terms of its analysis and the laws of its composition. It is no longer the task of knowledge to dig out the ancient Word from the unknown places where it may be hidden; its job now is to fabricate a language, and to fabricate it well--so that,

as an instrument of analysis and combination, it will really be the language of calculation. (63)

The influence of scientific thought, seen in the philosophic empiricism of Bacon, Hobbes, and Locke, and the skepticism of Berkeley and Hume, made it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to think one could know nature directly; instead, one was limited only to knowing about nature, indirectly, through arbitrary signs that did not reflect reality but only represented it. Language, poetic and otherwise, was seen as a system of abstractions not unlike mathematics through which one was limited to knowing less about external nature and more about one's own internal world of thought.

Consequentially, this engendered a new sense of subjectivity, which in later Romanticism becomes a dominant poetic subject matter. By the time of the Romantics, as Wasserman describes it, "meaning had become a function of each person's private concern, which alone remained as an interpretive organization" (170).

According to Northrop Frye, poets before the Romantics had believed poetry to be an artificial imitation of reality, but in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, nature was no longer an "objective system for the poet to follow" and imitate, but instead something for the poet to generate "by the constructive power of the mind" . . . "brought into being by experience" (304-5). Poetry of this period, which begins with Blake, shows a marked change not

just in poetic form but in a new "spatial projection of reality" (301) that changes from the old conception of the world as a vertical hierarchy within which man stood at the center--above the animals but below the angels--to a new orientation based upon the inner mind interacting with the outer world of sense experience.

Echoing this idea, in his major work on Romantic aesthetic theory, The Mirror and the Lamp, Abrams describes this shift from Neoclassicism to Romanticism as a monumental change in orientation between the creative artist and the reality he had previously imitated. From Plato and Aristotle onward, art had generally been seen as an imitation of nature (and as well human actions) while nature itself was believed to be only a copy of a more perfect reality. The aesthetic orientation in Romantic poetry changed from a mimetic model (the mirror) to an expressive one (lamp), according to Abrams, where poetry was now primarily a vehicle for the effusion of the poet's feelings. Again, the individual artist no longer participated in a unifying system of nature by imitating it, but instead the artist and his emotional state had become the most important aspect of art, because it was the mind of the poet that created a meaningful sense of reality.

Creating reality by the act of poetic imagination, or using metaphors to fill in the gap where previous systems of thought and symbolism had provided continuity, was the new

"Romantic" way of creating meaning out of experience, but it was partial, limited, and temporary, stable only as long as the poet could sustain the spontaneous, imaginative effort, wrought from the excitement of a heightened emotional state. Such a task is conceivably an immense burden, and the difficulty of continuously creating meaning through poetic expression is one of the central conflicts of the "Intimations Ode," and becomes a major theme in Wordsworth's later poetry. To quote Wasserman again on the intellectual burden placed on the Romantic poet:

The world he lives in is, without the creative act of the mind, atomistic and disordered, a multitude of objects of which his mere perceptive faculties can make no whole and in which no one object has special values . . . For there to be a meaningful whole the nineteenth-century poet . . . must make it by his own willful creative act, and yet the creative act must be forever renewed . . . No longer can the poem be conceived of as a reflection or imitation of an autonomous order outside itself. The creation of a poem is also the creation of a cosmic wholeness that gives meaning to the poem, and each poet must independently make his own world picture, his own language within language. (186)

It is significant to see the term "Romanticism" as signifying a cognitive perceptual shift in the understanding of the human mind, one that represents an orientation toward

subjectivity: an understanding of the world as being separate from and unknowable to the human mind, except when the mind can temporarily gain meaning through the generation of metaphoric, poetic language.

Within this context, Wordsworth's poem clearly illuminates how it is through language that self-consciousness and understanding of the world is possible. Yet this perceptual ability is simultaneously the very source of isolation and loss Wordsworth's poem speaks of, because the self can only know itself through language, as a distinct being separate from the world in which it exists. Wordsworth's great challenge in the Ode is to overcome the isolation created by this linguistic self-awareness by creating meaning in poetic utterances, in a world where order and meaning is dependent upon creative self-expression. The speaker ultimately comes to terms with the isolation of self by accepting the limits language imposes on our understanding of the world. The speaker concludes that ultimately we can only know about nature, indirectly, through the medium of language, rather than the way we used to experience nature as children, when we did not possess the capacity to think about what we perceived.

III.

The "Intimations Ode":

A Troubling Turning Point in Wordsworth's Thought

Wordsworth's poem expresses one of the greatest themes of Romantic literature: the problem of being conscious of oneself as a living being who is part of nature, yet who is also, because of the limitations of perception, separate from nature. But this theme of loss evolves as a later aspect of Wordsworth's own thought, marking a movement from his general optimism in the capacity of poetic imagination to create a sense of continuity between himself and the nature he experiences, to that of doubt and uncertainty in the power of language and the imagination to provide that continuity. Magnusen marks this shift from optimism to doubt as correspondent to the time of composition of the first four stanzas of the "Intimations Ode," written in 1802:

Some of Wordsworth's most optimistic and exulting poetry had been written in the spring of 1800, shortly after he had moved into Dove Cottage, but when the gates of spring opened in 1802, the enthusiasm of 1800 had been tempered by the struggle he had during the winter of 1801-2 to fulfill the promise of 1800. (273)

According to Magnusen, Wordsworth was starting to believe that his own powers of poetic creation were in decline and so

instead of celebrating the joy of the new season, Wordsworth in the spring of 1802 finds himself plagued by "retrospective thoughts of grief" (287) regarding his own poetic capabilities.

Other critics have agreed upon this time in Wordsworth's life and career as being a turning point away from his belief in a mutually interdependent, sympathetic relationship between man and nature, toward feelings of doubt and uncertainty found in the "Intimations Ode" (Hartman 14). Abrams, in "Two Roads to Wordsworth," identifies this shift in Wordsworth's thought by delineating two groups of modern critics, those who choose to read Wordsworth as either the optimistic, or "simple" poet who, in his "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" in 1802, embodies the typically democratic and humanistic values of the European Enlightenment, and those who focus on the more complex, paradoxical Wordsworth found in the later "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface," written in 1815.

The early Wordsworth boldly establishes in the 1802 "Preface" his own poetic "experiment" aimed at "fitting to metrical arrangement a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation"(38), by revealing "the essential, the elementary, the simple, the universal, and the permanent" in the language of common men (Abrams, Two Roads 1). Wordsworth states in his "Preface" that his new poetry in the Lyrical Ballads is an experiment in determining "what

manner language and the mind of man act and react on each other" (39). At this point in his life, Wordsworth seems to have believed that the relationship between man and nature was mutually beneficial, if viewed poetically through the simple language spoken by the people from "low and rustic life" (41). One could discover through such a language that there are "certain inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind," and that there are also "certain powers in the great and permanent objects that act upon it, which are equally inherent and indestructible" (44). According to Zall, Wordsworth felt that the common language "could provide healing sensations that would exercise the imagination in creative activity and stimulate awareness of man's brotherhood in a universe bonded by love" (ix).

Wordsworth's early optimism is probably best seen in "Tintern Abbey," the last poem of the Lyrical Ballads (though not a ballad), where the speaker is comforted from the suffering and solitude of alienating social life by meditating upon a familiar natural scene of beauty, creating a beneficial relationship between the speaker and the beautiful forms of Nature. The speaker affirms, upon his meditation, that "Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her" (122-23), a nature which ultimately functions to protect the speaker as his spiritual "guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul / Of all my moral being" (110-11). Harold Bloom has argued that "Tintern Abbey" is a compact

"miniature" of what Wordsworth had hoped to accomplish with his unfinished autobiographical epic "The Recluse," containing the greatest theme of Wordsworth's best poetry: "the reciprocity between the external world and his own mind" (95). Carl Woodring considers "Tintern Abbey" to be the unique adaptation and transformation of the genre known as the landscape poem, which entails not only observing the sublimity of nature by carefully viewing the objects of nature, but also gaining an awareness of "the mind's part in the continuous creation of a sublime universe" (13), where the mind is equally responsible for creating, in the act perceiving, the sublime found in nature.

The changing Wordsworth we see in the "Intimations Ode," however, exhibits more doubt than certainty, where the focus of the landscape poem, based on the reflection upon an external landscape, is now replaced by the internal reflection upon a memory. The "Intimations Ode" indicates troubling inward thoughts, doubtful "intimations which do not come from without," as they did in "Tintern Abbey," but "from within and have their origin in moments when the 'light of sense' fails him," marking a failure of perception that is "a displacement of the bond of intimate and loving perception of nature" (Sherry 13). According to Fry, the poem exhibits an almost religious faith (56) in the symbolic but paradoxical "obstinate questionings" (line 141) that arise from our vague but emotionally charged memories, which are now but "embers"

(129) of our former selves. These "shadowy recollections" (149) give us a dim but sustaining light by which to make our way through life--a life less of external participation in nature's joys but instead full of internal contemplation of "the soothing thoughts that spring / Out of human suffering" (183-84) which bring us the "philosophic mind" (186) of older age.

Fry also notes that Wordsworth's use of the ode form in the "Intimations Ode" reflects a new confusion and uncertainty in his poetry because the ode form itself, particularly the Pindaric type, classically follows a process of inward search, through memory, of a notion of some idealized past time, in hopes of transforming the sadness or melancholy felt in the present; yet such a poetic ambition is "futile," argues Fry, doomed to failure and disappointment because the present saddened state of mind that the poet wishes to transform, via this remembrance, is ultimately immutable (58). Magnusen presents a similar argument, stating that Wordsworth's use of the ode form "furnished him with license to incorporate abrupt turns and contradictory statements" and provides him an expression of a more "sober and perplexed analysis of his creativity" (288). The writing of the "Intimations Ode," as Fry further states, marks the departure of the poet from youthful poetic innocence, and optimism, embodied in the earlier lyrics of Lyrical Ballads and descriptive poem, to the more somber and mature poet

utilizing the "unnatural conventions" of the ode, marking a "farewell to the natural holiness of youth" (59).

The later Wordsworth, whom Abrams calls "the more complex poet of strangeness, paradox, equivocality, and dark sublimities" (2), is concerned with confronting and finding consolation "in human suffering" (1), and stresses poetry's "'contradictions'—that is, its radical paradoxicality, its union of antitheses, its fusion of the sensuous and the transcendent, its violation of the customary" (2). In the "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface" of 1815, there is a distinct movement away from rendering a realistically accurate picture of the elementary and simple passions of human nature. Instead, there is an urgent, and clearly metaphysical, preoccupation with the limitations of human perception and the ability truly to know nature: "The appropriate business of poetry . . . her privilege and her duty, is to treat of things not as they are, but as they appear; not as they exist within themselves, but as they seem to exist to the senses and to the passions" (160). This orientation toward the semblance or simulation of things in nature leads Wordsworth to what some have considered a more spiritual outlook for the poet (Fry 57, Magnusen 301). Indeed in the 1815 "Essay" we hear Wordsworth sounding more like a priest than a poet, who reconstitutes poetically what is beyond human grasp: the complexities of God's mysterious universe. As Wordsworth states in his later "Essay," because

the "concerns of religion . . . are too weighty for the mind [the common person's mind, not the poet's] to support them without relieving itself by resting a great part of the burthen upon words and symbols" (163), it is the poet's job to provide effective symbolism which can represent that which is transcendent, or beyond, this life. In Wordsworth's early Prefaces, language had been a medium to connect human perception with the benevolent powers of nature, but by the time of the "Essay" language had become more of a means of representing what is beyond human understanding, or representing the frustrating uncertainty caused by our perceptual limitations.

Clearly Wordsworth's early ambitions were no short order, and if we judge from the doubt expressed in the first four stanzas of the "Intimations Ode," we can see that, according to Magnusen, Wordsworth was indeed beginning to doubt his own ability to live up to the promise of the period of "great productivity and optimism," between 1799 and 1801 (284). The first four stanzas end posing the questions: "whither is fled the visionary gleam? / Where is it now, the glory and the dream?" (56-7). The fifth stanza marks the beginning of Wordsworth's answer to these questions, and debate centers on just what kind of answer Wordsworth ambiguously gives. Does the final version of the "Intimations Ode," as well as his supplementary essay of 1815, suggest that Wordsworth becomes a poet of ambiguity,

contradiction and uncertainty, as Brooks suggests? Is he left to doubt the ability to know nature, and so recedes into a "Romantic ideology" (McGann); or, does Wordsworth simply come to terms, quite maturely and stoically, with his own mortal temporality (Trilling); or, does he move into the realm of Christian transcendentalism (Thomas 100); or, does he become, as Wordsworth describes himself in the "Prospectus" to "The Recluse," the epic poet of human consciousness, whose subject is nothing less than the "the mind of Man" (40), which will ultimately be "wedded to this goodly universe" (53)? While these considerations are important, much study has already been done on the poet Wordsworth became after the change in ideas and poetics that occurred at the time of the writing and publishing of the Ode. But for this discussion, we will be looking directly at how the "Intimations Ode" embodies the poet's struggle with the relationship between language and consciousness and the feeling of isolation this relationship creates.

Frances Ferguson shows how the Ode reflects a preoccupation with the poet's awareness of death and "the problems of perceiving--of establishing connections in thought and language" (96). According to Ferguson, the "Intimations Ode" reflects how language, as a medium of thought, creates a double bind by limiting our ability to perceive ourselves but at the same time making us aware of our own mortality:

The life of language in poetry, like the life of the individual, is radically implicated with death; and out of the discontinuities of both language and life, Wordsworth wrests a poetry of memory which enacts and reenacts the impossibility of reconstructing one individual self which would be 'there' for language to imitate . . . For him language can be thought of as external, 'something other,' only within the context of an internal dialectic, in which the self becomes a being 'made up of many beings,' so that language and individual consciousness can be seen temporarily separable from one another." (xvi)

The act of using language, and how it is we create our identity through language, is actually symbolic of death, in that in order for the conscious self to be aware of itself, it has to posit itself separate from its being: a form of removal, separation, or metaphoric 'death.' This "I" or self is contained temporarily within the structures of language--a linguistically imagined self that represents the human body thinking about itself, or being conscious of itself. Because the idea of "self" can be thought of as an abstraction from the perception one has of oneself in the act of experience, the search for permanent identity can become an elusive chase after memory, the fate of the mythological Uroboros eating its own tail.

But does Wordsworth's Ode only show how language creates for us a turbulent, lonely "prison house," offering us not hope, not ideology, but only bewilderment, uncertainty, and ultimate paradox? Does the Ode end up being a problematic representation of "the sustained struggle of the poet's consciousness (operating in the mode often called imagination) to achieve 'autonomy,' or absolute independence from that adversary which is not itself--namely 'nature,' the world of sensible objects" (Abrams 5-6)?

Wordsworth comes to an awareness of the cause of his feelings of isolation and loss, by realizing that his identity is a function of his own ability to think about himself in language, by being confronted with the perception of a loss of and a gap from what he used to perceive without "a thought of grief" (line 22). His awareness is quite unlike that of the child, who, without the advanced capacities of language of the speaker, cannot think about what he perceives, and so is unable to imagine himself separate from it. The child is without the capacity of language to abstract from experience and so feels no loss, no gap, and is not confronted with "obstinate questionings" that cannot be answered. The "Intimations Ode" shows quite explicitly, in its peculiar use of language and its subject matter, the role language plays in creating our consciousness, our awareness of ourselves as temporal beings,

and the creation of isolation and uncertainty this act of perception creates.

IV.

Literary Theory and Human Cognition Coalesced: Julian Jaynes's Linguistic Theory of Consciousness Applied to the "Intimations Ode"

The "Intimations Ode," in its language and the themes it embodies, reflects some fundamental problems in the relationship between language and knowing. It speaks to us in an oftentimes vague, paradoxical, symbolic language that leaves us guessing as to the nature of its utterances as poetic statements. We ask: how do we read language that seems to refer only to itself? What are we to make of the "literary" symbolic use of language, when those symbols refer not just to the objects they identify but to other meanings beyond the sense experience of the reader? If reality for the Romantics, as Wasserman has shown, was no longer a stable structure that could be imitated, and if the only meaningful picture that could be made of reality was from the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," "emotions recollected from tranquillity" (Wordsworth's own famous poetic dictums), and captured but temporarily in the metaphors of poetry, then what exactly do the symbols and images and words of the poem represent? Do those images and symbols refer to the speaker's own political beliefs, an "ideology," that let him hide from the reality of history, or do they refer to a "mystical organic unity" of the symbol

(Eagleton 21), which creates a substitute for traditional religion by making present within the symbol "some universal power that is universally absent until by magic the nomen grows numinous" (Fry 56)? Do the readings of symbols, in the poem and in general, have to be based in morality, spirituality, or political dogma?

The peculiar use of language in "Intimations Ode," especially its diction, as Hartman has stated, does create for the reader "a riddle as well as a puzzle," (152). Although Hartman refers specifically to one statement of the Ode, there are many statements which are quite vague, puzzling, paradoxical, and simply enigmatic. Vendler calls the poem's language a "language of disorientation" (86); Brooks describes it as a language full of "ambiguous symbol and paradoxical statement" (125) and "vagueness" (149). These comments on the language of the poem suggest that the problematic nature of language and the paradox it creates for human understanding is a central concern for both the speaker of the poem and for the critic reading the poem. The ambiguity of the language suggests that the speaker of poem is trying to express in language what is perhaps beyond linguistic expression.

To begin to explore these problems and ambiguities, it is crucial to understand the poem, and any so-called imaginative, fictive linguistic construction, as illustrating an important function of language: that is, it contains

statements, or utterances, expressed in an intentionally figurative manner, the nature of which demands that the reader understand their meanings as referring to the context of the poem--not only to actual things, people and events outside the poem, but also to many possibilities of meaning. There has been much critical debate, as Graff well documents, as to whether or not we can take the statements found in literature to be "genuine statements," referring to actual things in the real world, for if not, these should not be taken therefore as "serious assertions" (81). These ideas go back to Kant, according to Graff, and are seen in Coleridge's request that when reading fiction one should entertain a "suspension of disbelief," which for Coleridge constitutes "poetic faith."

Some critics think of poetic statements as not being "serious," in the sense that they are not to be read as referring to a reality outside of a poem, and that their language is something special, not accountable to the same rules and truth-testing as the rules that apply to genuine statements (Graff 81). But if we cannot take the statements of a poem as serious, meant to be understood as an actual assertion about something we can know beyond the poem, then what do those statements refer to? How do we understand them in contradistinction to so-called "normal" statements? Those who look inside the poem only for meaning are criticized for

trying to extricate the statements made by an author in a fictive work from history, from ideology, and from morality.

Gene Ruoff has described this as an "ecumenical" attempt at incorporating all poetic statements "into a higher unity" (245). This critical tendency is remarkably similar to the "descriptive-meditative" technique of poetic transcendence Abrams describes as the "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric," where the poet meditates on a natural landscape to achieve philosophical, moral, or spiritual insights (103); only in this view the critic uses the Romantic poem as a starting point, instead of the natural scene, to achieve a deeper, more universal insight than might exist in the poem itself. Abrams is, it should be noted, one of the critics whom Ruoff criticizes for this tendency.

What this "ecumenical" approach does, in effect, is reject the possibility that a poem expresses not just 'poetry' but also the author's own beliefs. This ecumenical type of criticism thus transforms the poem into a mirror of a particular critic's own beliefs. Ruoff suggests that separating literature and its statements from the usual accountability and scrutiny applied of all other discourses creates a rift between "the literary academy and the common reader" by investing literature with a special power to accommodate conflicts, especially regarding philosophical or theological beliefs, that may be found within a given work (241).

The other way to look at literature is to consider all statements, whether literary or not, as being inseparable from the rules we apply to all statements, namely, that we must look at all statements as possibly being applicable to reality. This argument seems to be saying that we must, because we can, accept all statements as actual assertions about reality because we cannot separate language from history, belief, ideology. Graff suggests considering another theoretical possibility, namely speech act theory, which places all readings within very specific contexts, which in turn effect varying meanings and understandings. Ruoff looks directly at belief in poetry, and suggests that by confronting the poet's beliefs head-on, we can come to a better understanding of how language can be poetic and contain belief systems as well.

Yet still more questions arise: how are we to read statements that refer to experience by use of metaphor, where the figures of language are not literally true, but refer elsewhere, such as the statement the speaker makes in the beginning of the poem: "I hear the Echoes in the mountains throng, / Winds that come to me from the fields of sleep" (27-8). We have trouble reading such statements literally, trouble finding the actual winds or the fields these winds come from; and furthermore, just what is a field "of sleep"? Is this kind of language to be understood only figuratively, referring only to some aspect of Wordsworth's mind,

symbolizing his emotions, his imagination? Or are they symbols for religious beliefs, political ideologies?

It helps to understand these puzzles by conceding that language, ordinary speech, as well as other types of non-literary discourse and literature, all function in a similar, figurative manner. It is helpful to look at poetry specifically because it best illustrates how language is a system of sign-making in which all linguistic expressions are based upon metaphor, or upon the use of signs to represent or signify meaning. According to Abrams, "metaphor is an inseparable element of all discourse, including discourse whose purpose is neither persuasive nor aesthetic, but descriptive and informative. Metaphysical systems in particular are intrinsically metaphorical systems" (31). Thus, all language is metaphoric, not just poetic or metaphysical language: it is what enables us to know something more than what its name is, to be able to talk about it, or to be able put our conceptions of our sense experiences into language, organize them, and make some assumptions and agreements as to what those sense experiences are, or, to know what they mean. The more complex the ideas--the experience that we are trying to explain--the more we rely on physical images in order to explain those ideas, but the cognitive process for all thinking, or making of meaning, is the same.

This is also, importantly, the process by which we know ourselves and create our identity; it is this function of our language that makes us able to be conscious of ourselves and the world we live in. But before exploring this notion further, it is necessary to establish a few principles to support this linguistic theory of understanding. According to S. I. Hayakawa, the crucial difference in the way animals and humans respond (neurologically) to the world is that animals can only have a "signal reaction" to an object. For example, a chimpanzee can be conditioned to understand that when it sees a red light it is supposed to stop; for the chimp, the red light is literally the motion 'stop,' and there is no difference between the two. The red light is stop for the chimp. This is a form of knowing that is limited by pure denotation, lacking the possibility of connotation, or variation of meaning through symbols, and thus the relationship is non-symbolic. For a human, on the other hand, the reaction to a red light is "symbolic" in that the red light signifies the action stop. There is nothing inherent in the light that means stop; it is only within the relationship that the red light has this meaning (14). Only humans have the capacity to make symbols of the physical world and use those symbols for communicating abstract ideas and feelings. It is a relationship whereby an arbitrary sign comes to stand for, or represent, another thing, idea, or action. Importantly, it must be made clear that we do not

have a choice to think symbolically; we cannot but "think" about what we perceive through the symbols of our language. This theory of meaning is nearly identical to the theory put forth by I. A. Richards, when he states: "Words, as everyone knows, mean' nothing by themselves, although the belief that they did . . . was once equally universal. It is only when a thinker makes use of them that they stand for anything, or in one sense, have any 'meaning.' They are instruments" (140).

All acts of knowing then, including self-knowledge, according to a "semiotic" theory developed by philosopher Charles Peirce, are based in a tripartite relationship between humans, signs, and the objects (or thoughts) those signs refer to. As paraphrased by Thomas Gouge, Peirce's theory of semiotics holds that all signs are part of:

a triadic relation, involving a sign itself (e.g., a physical object, image, quality, thought, etc.), what the sign stands for (its object), and the equivalent sign or interpretant which the first sign creates in the person apprehending it. This second sign is the representation 'to which the torch of truth is handed along.' (139)

What a person construes as meaning, as Hayakawa and Richards also suggest, is created by the sign used by a person to represent a given object or idea. Without the sign, be it a sign physically in front of us, or a thought in our head, it can be argued that there is no meaning or understanding.

This theoretical perspective, as essayist and novelist Walker Percy asserts, undermines the two most prevalent paradigms in our culture used for understanding man: the first is the Greco-Judeo-Christian paradigm, where humans are split dualistically into mind-body beings, and the second is the traditional scientific-behaviorist paradigm, equally dualistic, that perceives humans as similar to all other organisms that exist within an environment. This latter view, the scientific-behaviorist one, inadequately accounts for human language and culture as being functions not qualitatively different from the behavioral adaptations other organisms must make to their environment for survival of the species (110-13). Percy shows that the limits of our understanding of ourselves, our minds, and how we know (which are caused by these limiting paradigms) have prevented a relevant, workable theory of man, a theory which must account for language and human self-consciousness. He terms this mentality "diadic" (borrowing the term from Pierce), which Percy describes as a limited, dualistic way of perceiving ourselves in the world only as a mind contained within a body, a separate subject in opposition to the objective phenomenological world. This perspective does not account for the third dimension to understanding: the three dimensional, "triadic" relationship created by language, which creates our understanding of what it means to be conscious of ourselves.

It is quite possible that the critics who read Wordsworth's poem as an embodiment of a higher, symbolic-organic unity, or as a means of escape from temporal experience into a state of mystical union with the cosmos, are reading the poem "diadically," with a thinly concealed idealism not unlike the type of dualistic idealism found in the Judeo-Christian world view. Conversely, those critics who read the poem as merely a highly wrought, poetic but nonetheless ideological, political, or moralistic polemic, suffer from an equally deterministic, diadic paradigm, in which the forces of history or culture inextricably reduce the poem to its predetermined contextual meaning. Because the nature of language is such that it creates a tripartite relationship between a subject (knower), an object (known), and a sign (word) that is used to think about that object, all acts of understanding must take into account the transaction that occurs between these three elements, even if the object to be known is the self in the act of knowing, i.e., self consciousness. Such a triadic understanding of language and consciousness is important to grasp the strange and puzzling nature of the language in the "Intimations Ode."

To explain this "triadic" view a bit further, let us consider what Jaynes has written regarding his conception of language as the basis of human consciousness. Jaynes states that language is more than just a means of communication, where person A talks or writes to person B and meaning is

exchanged; language, according to Jaynes, "is an organ of perception" (50). Language is our mind's capacity to use an image, or sign-image, of the world derived from perception to describe the object we perceive, which enables us to build "abstract concepts whose referents are not observable except in a metaphorical sense" (50); so, the images we perceive of objects represent not only the world but also constitute our ideas. The entire history of consciousness, Jaynes argues, is the history of the human ability to conceive of ideas extracted (or "excerpted") from our experience, via the faculty of language, so that thought in itself is not a thing but an active experience that generates consciousness.

It is this mental imagining of our experiences--through the metaphors of language--that enables us to perceive ourselves in the world; thus, in order to think about and know something (including ourselves), we cannot but use language, and thus metaphor. According to Jaynes, in order to use language to create thoughts and ideas and so understand experience (i.e., consciousness), we must (1) create a metaphorical mind-space (spatialization) in which we can imagine the thoughts or actions we wish to think about as existing in a space within which we can "see" our ideas; (2) imagine the pictures of our thoughts as existing within a sequence of time (excerption); (3) create a metaphor of an "I" that exists within this time-sequenced mind space (which is a metaphor of our experience) and is the actor of those

experiences; (4) create a metaphor of the "me" that imagines the "I" doing its actions (moving, thinking, etc.); (5) select and arrange the facts of our experiences as having some logical cause--for example, if we see a lost dog we imagine an owner looking for it, and the home it came from (narratization); and (6) conceive of the selected narrations as being part of an entire story, which we combine with other stories to make up what we understand as our life up to the point of now--for example, childhood events, school, marriage, job, etc., all of which makes up our life story (59-66). In other words, the pictures in our mind which enable us to see the world is a spatialization of the physical world, of the images and pictures that we gain from sense experiences, so that what we see in our minds--our thoughts and ideas--thus becomes a representation, or analog, of the physical world. Thus our thoughts are inescapably connected to the words we use and the images those words represent, and our consciousness is based upon how we introspect, or see, those words and images in our minds.

What makes Jaynes's theory interesting, and most relevant to this discussion, is that he uses the structure and function of language to describe how human consciousness interacts with the world that it perceives. For example, that which we understand as happening inside our heads, what Jaynes call subjective (or self) consciousness, is "an analog of what is called the real world. It is built up with

vocabulary or lexical field whose terms are all metaphors or analogs of behavior in the physical world" (55). What this means is that when we try to describe and understand, verbally or in thought, our own mind (self-consciousness) it is impossible not to use a linguistic framework of words which derive from the physical world. Subjective consciousness is much like a system of mathematics, says Jaynes. In order to understand something we cannot see or physically know--ideas and meaning beyond experience--we must use a conceptual framework that will stand for, or represent, what is otherwise unknowable. In the case of subjective consciousness, we must use a system of metaphor to build a conceptual, metaphoric mind space based upon linguistic symbols derived from experience, in order for us to "see" or imagine ourselves thinking.

According to Jaynes, consciousness is much like a map we use to chart unknown territory. But unlike a map, where we expect that the symbols on the map specifically and unalterably refer as closely as possible to the land we wish to travel upon, consciousness, because it is based in language, is not limited to strict denotations of meaning. Consciousness, according to Jaynes, is much more like poetry, in that the metaphors we use to represent our thinking minds, the words of our language, are rich with connotations and nuance. The words we derive from the physical world can suggest multiple meanings, and so our consciousness is as

rich and expansive as the metaphors we use to represent it. So according to this view, as we develop our self-consciousness, we build up our own map, or conception of ourselves based upon the linguistic metaphors of our own experience. The map is our self-consciousness, and traversing land is our experience, which is consciousness (or simply being awake and perceptive). But just as maps (and words) can be used in many different ways, so too can maps be created and changed depending upon the types of symbols we use and the types of land we wish to represent. Our consciousness and self-consciousness is constantly being generated, shaped, reconstituted, and changed according to the experiences we have and the words we use to describe and represent those experiences. Consciousness, then, is like a rich and variegated poem that we are constantly writing (experience), rereading (memory), and imagining possibilities for change (future or speculative thought) (59).

From Jaynes's and Peirce's theories, we can see that self-consciousness is a function of language that enables one to create the perception, or linguistic imagining, of oneself as a distinct, separate being, a "symbolic" self that in self-consciousness perceives itself moving about as a discrete entity in a world of equally separate objects: Of course this ability is necessary to sanity, for without a clear, consistent conception of self, of the "I" acting in the world of separate objects, a person might experience

schizophrenia (Jaynes 419), the acute feeling of separation from reality. Yet a temporary loss of the sense of "I," if only briefly, might lead one to a somewhat mystical experience, where all separateness seems to slip away and create a feeling of overwhelming unity. This is not unlike the description we see in "Tintern Abbey," whereby the perception of the unified landscape makes the speaker recognize "a sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused (95-96) . . . A motion and a spirit, that implies / All thinking things, all objects of all thought, / And rolls through all things" (100-102).

But there is also a danger of subjectivity, or even of solipsism, if one becomes too attached to one's linguistically created self-identity, if one believes too strongly that this "I" is a stable, unchanging thing, which perhaps might stem from too strong a desire for unity with all things. Wordsworth himself noted to Elizabeth Fenwick that as a child he was unable to imagine the external world as being separate from his own mind, describing himself as a youth communing with "all that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own immaterial nature. Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality" (qtd. in De Selincourt 463). Part of the sense of doubt that leads up to the uncertainty we see in the first four stanzas of the "Intimations Ode" perhaps stems from Wordsworth's

faltering belief in the permanence of his own identity, and his waning ability to feel connected to nature.

Central to the conflict seen in the beginning of the "Intimations Ode" is that the poet is trying to balance these two views: that all things are connected and unified, the self included, as we see in Wordsworth's earlier poetry, and the terrifying notion that the unique and separate self is ultimately doomed to non-existence. Both views are based upon a feeling of loss in relation to time: present recognition of loss of the past and present knowledge of impending loss in the future. The source of this sense of loss is created by the limits of language. What makes Wordsworth vacillate between these two extremes is that both views fail to take into account that self-consciousness is an active, constantly dynamic function of perception based in language, created by the metaphors we use to create our sense of self and the experiences we have. The feeling of loss can derive from an insistence on an impossible stasis of identity. If one imagines that the self is permanent and unchanging, that it is not based upon an ever-evolving linguistic interplay between images and ideas and experience, then it is possible to imagine that this self is physically separated from the world it perceives, and that this self has a limited existence.

Wordsworth's Ode ultimately shows, however, the speaker realizing that we can only know or be conscious of ourselves

in language, and thus what we perceive and know, including the world and how we see ourselves in it, is always going to be changing, different, and ultimately completely unknowable, be it the self in the past, present, or future. Language permits self-knowledge, but at best gives us only a temporary approximation of our experience of ourselves.

It might become temptingly easy to believe, while looking back at the vague but simple memories of childhood--the "I" in the present viewing the pictures of a much simpler "me" in the past having a trouble-free time in nature--that life was better and much simpler then, because we had not yet developed our ability to think and abstract our experiences into ideas about our experience. Thus from the adult perspective, childhood may start to look very appealing in its lack of self-consciousness, as it does to the speaker in the Ode. This facet of consciousness--remembering--is, as many philosophers and poets and writers and religious thinkers have postulated, recognition of the separation we feel from nature, from that direct experience, from that "visionary gleam" we had when we were children, that seems to fade away each year and each day, as Wordsworth described it, "into the light of common day" (78).

The paradoxical nature of language and consciousness creates the thematic conflict in the Ode, as well helps account for the varied critical reactions, and is what makes the poem hard to fully understand. Wordsworth's use of

ambiguous, disorienting, vague, and enigmatic language is a natural result of his trying to grasp linguistically what is beyond linguistic comprehension: ultimate self-knowledge. The vague and non-referential phrases and words of the poem refer to and represent the very limits of language.

v.

Application of Jaynes's Theory to the "Intimations Ode"

Certainly the "Intimations Ode" is about perception, and the loss of a way of seeing. Both Helen Vendler and Lionel Trilling discuss the poem as being about perception: Trilling defends the Ode from criticism that saw the poem as a farewell to imaginative poetic powers (in childhood and youth) and instead reads a message about maturity and growing up. Vendler argues against Trilling's assertion that the poem provides only a moral message, that such a reading "detaches the sentiments of the Ode from the only medium in which they can live, the medium of language" (67), and so ignores the poem itself as the complex, rich, and metaphoric linguistic achievement of the "being of the poem" (68-9). According to Vendler, the poem is more than just its content, or what it says, but is also an object, which has what we might call a linguistic existence, the words on the page, so to speak. It is by this double function of language is how the "Intimations Ode" is best understood: it both refers to the "message" of the development of perception and language as an isolating experience, and it also refers to itself as an example, or instance, of how this isolation occurs, through language--which is the especially metaphoric, non-literal language of poetry, but also the language we all utilize to create consciousness. To put it another way: the

poem represents its meaning (what it refers to about perception) and itself (its linguistic, syntactic being), as a representation of the language faculty we use to think; this dual representation embodies the problematic relationship between experience and how language separates us from that experience.

Before looking directly at the poem, we must briefly address Magnussen's argument, which describes a certain textual ambiguity as to the exact nature of the vision that is described in the first four stanzas. Magnussen has shown (278-89) that although many critics have traditionally seen the first four stanzas as referring to the childhood of the speaker, there is nothing in those stanzas by themselves to indicate that the time referred to in the opening lines refers to childhood. Magnussen is correct when he states that the "visionary gleam" that the speaker has lost indicates a loss of Wordsworth's poetic abilities to create, through language, a beneficial, symbiotic relationship with nature. But even though, as Magnussen shows, the first part of the poem is not necessarily about childhood per se, the final publishing of the poem in 1804 does present an answer, thematically at least, that does place the "time" the speaker refers to as being in the past. This is a past that is now lost, a past that at least is made analogous to childhood by means of juxtaposing the feelings of loss in the speaker and the joy the speaker seems to be familiar with and wishes he

could enjoy, as do the children and animals he refers to in the poem.

Further, the later full title and epigraph ("Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood") obviously suggest that the theme of the Ode is about what has been lost from childhood, and learned about the relationship between childhood knowing and adult knowing, even though the theme could also be about, as we have seen, waning poetic powers. Whereas Magnusen's argument focuses specifically on the first four stanzas only, this thesis will focus on the poem in its entirety. The completed version of the poem corresponds more closely to the time and ideas expressed in the "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface," which indicates that the complete poem as we have it today represents Wordsworth's transitional period. Thus we do not have to, like Trilling did, see the poem only about the oncoming moral maturity of the adult speaker, nor do we have to, like Magnusen, see the poem only about the loss of poetic powers. The ambiguously described loss can refer to both of these things: the absence of his childhood vision and his adult perception. He is lamenting both the loss of his childhood perception and his adult awareness that he is unable to continuously remember how he used to be able to see as a child. But the question that we must now ask is: what is the nature of that childhood perception?

In the first stanza the poet/speaker describes the dream-like and glorious light that seems to have "appareled" all common sights, and realizes that "the glory" is gone. But he also clearly states that it is not just the glorious perception of how the things looked that is gone but also the actual things that are not visible any more: "the things which I have seen I now can see no more" (9). It is very important that not only is an aspect of his vision gone but so are the things that he could see. This could mean that those objects are gone, literally, and it could also mean that the "things" he saw when he was a child are not the same objects; perhaps they have changed as well. But where did those "things" go? Those objects he saw in his past are gone in the sense that he does not experience them directly as an older person, but is only able to imagine them in the mind space where he (the "I") pictures himself (a younger "me") as he experienced the "meadow, grove, and stream" (1), as if they had "the glory and freshness of a dream" (5). The reason they had this glory is that he was not able to think about them; instead, he experienced them directly, that is, without reflective thought.

He was able to experience them in the past, to react to them in a "signal reaction" manner more as an animal would react to an object that it is unable, neurologically, to perceive in the semiotic system of language, as Hayakawa describes in the above quote. That is, the seemingly

"glorious" vision is actually that of a much more literal, denotative understanding, before the full effect of abstract thought enables a child to conceive of things through the sign system of language. The objective here is not to depreciate (too much) the wonderful "celestial light" that the author used to enjoy by making the childhood vision merely animalistic and dumb. Rather, the point to be made is that this type of childhood vision is a much different mode of perception than that of an adult, and is perhaps closer ontologically to an animal's way of perceiving. This child-like perception is a mode of knowing which is less capable of symbolic and abstractive capabilities; the child exists in a symbolic world, yet is not conscious of those symbols as symbols: the child is not able to think abstractly yet, as an adult can. Wordsworth makes quite clear the connection between the children and animals that he is witnessing on this "sweet May morning." All are referred to as "Creatures"(36), suggesting that the children are more in harmony with the animals and the natural scene than with the thoughts about nature that bring sadness to the speaker.

The things he could see in stanza one "seem" from his adult vantage point to have lost their "gleam" because all he can do is imagine (or remember) what that direct, thoughtless experiencing of nature was like in the past. Stanza two changes to what Vendler calls a very simple type of perception: the world seen by the "naturally aesthetic eye

which sees only natural forms; at best this eye, a non-creative one, uses personifications well worn into cliché" (72). But is this eye really non-creative? The perceptual shift in this stanza is from the appearance of things in the past (in stanza one) to statements of how things "are," now in the present. The rose "is" lovely, the sunshine "is" a glorious birth, waters "are" beautiful and fair. The things he can see now (which, because of the present tense, suggests that they are seen in the "now" of the adult state of the poet/speaker) are inextricably bound to the understanding of them created by adjectives he gives them and the repeated use of the verb "to be" to define them. "Lovely" is the quality ascribed to the rose, the word that represents the feelings and thoughts of the speaker who perceives the rose, but which has little to do with the rose by itself, apart from it as an object of human perception. The "natural" eye that Vendler believes to be non-creative is actually very creative: it is enabling the seer to understand his relation to the flower, although it is in this relationship that the distance between the perceiver and the object perceived is created. This is why the speaker knows that a "glory" has passed away from the earth: the glory of direct, language-less experience. His memory of his past is glorious because his perception then was not bound up in the suggestive connotations of meaning which a child is not fully capable of.

In stanza three, the mode of perception of the previous two stanzas changes from sight to hearing, a change which will later prove to be significant in relation to the greatness the speaker ascribes to the child as being a "Mighty Prophet, seer blest" (114). While the speaker describes hearing the things now that he used to see clearly as a child--the birds singing a "joyous song," and the "young lambs" who "bound as to the tabor's sound"--he says that to him alone "there came a thought of grief" but that quickly "a timely utterance gave that thought relief" [emphasis mine] (19-24). McGann believes this contrast between sight and sound functions to set up a "distinction between a world of the indefinite and unseen on the one hand, and a world of visible particulars on the other"; consequently, the "sense of universal joy--his insight into the life of things--has resulted in his loss of the concrete and particular" (89). Instead of particular things, the items listed in stanza two, according to McGann, are really a "recitation of generalities recalled from particular past experiences" (89). This is fairly accurate. McGann goes on to argue that this loss of immediacy sends the speaker into the consolation of the "the mists of consciousness" and so the poem "annihilates" its own history by making a record of it in "pure consciousness" (90). McGann uses this idea to support his theory that the making of poetry represented a need for Wordsworth (and also a larger cultural need) to escape the realities of existence--

-time, history, politics, death--by displacing his own feelings into the "Bastille of his consciousness" (91). This poem, according to McGann, is thus a record of how an ideology is born out of things which "literally cannot be spoken of" and which represents the romantic ideology of escapism: that "poetry, or even consciousness, can set one free of the ruins of history and culture," which is "the grand illusion of every romantic poet" (91).

Interesting as this may sound, it is difficult to see how any and all function of thought is not a loss of the particular, direct experience of nature, that time in our own history (both personal and as a species) before language enabled us to abstract ideas from sense experience and to organize them into complex ideas. The process of ignoring what McGann dramatically calls the "ruins of history" is the process by which consciousness, in order to gather any sense experience into meaningful thoughts, must spatialize time (put it into a before-and-after sequence) in order to think about it. McGann is critical of Wordsworth (and all Romantics) because this loss of direct experience is turned tragic, or is invested with the pathos of emotions, but McGann fails to understand that all consciousness is thought mixed with, perhaps often generated by, feeling and memories, and is inevitably a separation from direct experience. Ideology is one way of understanding consciousness, or one type of metaphor that enables us to think about our ideas: it

is a metaphor that says all thinking and all consciousness are processes determined by unavoidable forces of culture and history. To think otherwise, as McGann says Wordsworth does, is to desire to escape reality.

This line of reasoning, which can be seen as "diadic" (to borrow from Pierce), wishes to make a limited, ideological, and ultimately denotative understanding of consciousness apply to all consciousness, which is actually founded in evolving, dynamic, and connotative structures of meaning. According to McGann's view, all consciousness contains and is formed by the current historical political views of the society a person (poet or otherwise) lives in. Thus consciousness is fixed, or fated, by the forces of history, culture, and politics. To try to ignore this and hide from it within poetry, in the case of Wordsworth and other Romantics (and some Romantic critics), is to unknowingly, and even ignorantly, assert a "Romantic Ideology." But if we are to say those structures of meaning are influenced and shaped by culture and history, then we can say that the opposite is also true: our language and structures of meaning can shape, to an equally important extent, our conceptions of history and culture. To believe, as McGann does, that thought cannot extricate itself from culture, ideology, or belief, is to believe that thought and language are "diadically" fixed by the environment they exist within, which is similar to asserting that humans are limited

like the chimpanzee in Hayakawa's example, which can only understand a red light as literally being the action of stopping.

Also, having a sad emotional reaction to loss is not necessarily a bad thing, and the speaker of the Ode, as Trilling believes, does come to a recognition and understanding of the loss, rather than a desire to escape it. Romanticism in some instances may be a tendency to build a poetic shrine out of memory of a better past and ignore the difficult present, but for Wordsworth escapism is just the opposite of what he's describing: "the Child is the father of Man" (epigraph) because the man remembers through the child a way of experiencing nature in which he was not disconnected by the illusion of reality that thought creates. The "Intimations Ode" speaks of what is common to all people as they learn to think, regardless of the emotional delivery in the poem. McGann would do better to blame the educators and critics in the nineteenth century, as Eagleton shows, who attempted to make this idea of a transcendent organic aesthetic object the substitute for, or escape from, history and politics (20-22).

The most important aspect of the third stanza, where the sense of sound plays a leading role, is that the speaker experiences a thought of grief and then an utterance (the sound of speech) gives that thought relief. It would be impossible to really know what the utterance is, or what it

refers to. Many critics try to attribute it to another poem, or to the epigraph at the beginning of the poem; others just move right on past it and are satisfied that the speaker found some relief. But because we have no way to be certain what that thought or utterance was, we can see the thought of grief is merely that: a thought of grief. Does grief have to be about something? Or, to make a guess: is the thought of grief a result of thought itself? Perhaps thought itself creates grief (which means that the conceptualization of thought is a metaphor of our grief) because thought disconnects us from the objects we see. It is quite important that it is an utterance that gives the speaker relief from grief, because it is the nature of thought that we hear what we think: we hear the voice of language in our thoughts. Of course we can "see" (visualize an eye looking) images, faces, trees, objects, perhaps abstract shapes in our minds, and even sentences, but when we think we add thought to those images so we can say something about them. The timely utterance is the voice of thought that enables the speaker to think about the things he sees in his mind. Although thought separates him from the direct experience of nature (both the cause and metaphor of grief) the timely utterance is the sound of human language, which is "timely," perhaps, because language is how we express time and how we are able to conceive of it.

The rest of the stanza indicates the role that sound will play in his adult perception, when thought and language become the means of knowing the world, and suggests that his ability to perceive and experience the world is actually becoming greater, in that he begins to realize that he will not be able to "see" things as he did when he was a child. The speaker exclaims that the grief of thought will no longer "wrong" the seasons because he can hear the sounds of nature: the "Echoes" that rush through the mountain and the winds "that come to me from the fields of sleep" (28). Wind, as Abrams has well shown, is a central metaphor in romantic poetry for spirit, creative energy, and goes back even farther to the idea in the Bible that the Lord God is a spirit, or breath of wind (36). Abrams also states:

The wind is not only a property of the landscape, but also a vehicle for radical change in the poet's mind. The rising wind, usually linked with the outer transition from winter to spring, is correlated with a complex subjective process: the return to a sense of community after isolation, the renewal of life and emotional vigor after apathy and deathlike torpor, and an outburst of creative power following a period of imaginative sterility." ("Correspondent Breeze" 26)

In stanza four the sense of sound is celebrated even further: the speaker hears the sounds of the "blessed Creatures" calling to each other; he is able to "see / The

heavens laugh" (38) with the children and creatures, which means he is able to entertain the idea that heaven, which suggests holiness and purity, is enjoying the celebration in laughter. He says that his heart is with them, and that he can feel the "fullness of your bliss" (38-41), which means he is able to remember the joy he feels by hearing and watching the festival of thought-less creatures. He then laments, "Oh evil day!" (42) that he might be "sullen" during all this natural earthly celebration. That he makes this "curse" at the "day" is important, because a day is emblematic of the movement of time of an entire human life span; it is something that marks an interval of experience that must begin and end, and the speaker's knowledge of this is distressing, for to think of such a thing during a joyous spring day is to not be able to fully enjoy the festival of spring. Even though he says he can hear, with joy, all of the happiness of nature, he cannot help but notice that "there's a Tree, of many, one, / A single Field which I have looked upon" (51-2). These single things indicate that he is able to perceive things separately through the names he has given them, that while all of the creatures of the earth are celebrating the joy of spring, he "hears" the tree and field speak of something that is gone; even the "Pansy at [his] feet" says the same thing (54-5). These singular objects do not literally speak to him, but his perception of them, his thought of them, and his naming of them, informs him that he

is unable to experience them directly: to know them in language separates them from himself. This notion of separation sounds in his head and asks: "Whither is fled the visionary gleam / Where is it is it now, the glory and the dream?" (56-7).

At the end of the fifth stanza, the entire poem turns, and it is well documented (De Selincourt 464-65, Magnusen 279) that there were at least two years between the writing of the first four stanzas and the rest of the poem. But as important as this biographical information is, essential to the poem is that the tone and theme change, and the poet attempts to answer what happened to the vision of a previous time. If unity and connection with all things is impossible, and leads to "the abyss of idealism" (see quote from Fenwick note above); if holding onto the physical world with the idea that the external world very well may exist quite separately from us, without our really knowing what that world is like except from a memory, then the only way out of this dilemma for the speaker, as Alan Grob believes, is transcendental faith (233).

This is the path Wordsworth's speaker seems to take, where he introduces the notion of the pre-existence of the soul. Even though he denies believing literally in the existence of our soul before birth, he tells Fenwick that he entertained the idea because it seemed to have been common enough in many world religions that he could explore the

notion poetically: "When I was impelled to write this Poem on the Immortality of the Soul, I took hold of the notion of pre-existence as having sufficient foundation in humanity for authorizing me to make for my purpose the best use of it I could as a Poet" (qtd. De Selincourt 464).

Whether or not the older Wordsworth apologizes for earlier beliefs and recants his youthful ideals, it is no detriment to our critical purposes--understanding the role perception plays in creating the problem of belief--that we take the poet at his word and assume he was entertaining the idea for the purpose of exploring the theme in a poem, the possibility of immortality. The question as to whether or not we are to take the poem as an actual assertion of actual belief, as "fact," is not important; what is important is that we have a poetic exploration of human existence which attempts to make sense of a seemingly unanswerable question: does the self exist before birth, and if so, where does it go when we die?

Grob traces this change from an aesthetic empiricism to transcendentalism in Wordsworth's thought as embodied in the Ode, stating that before he finished the "Intimations Ode," Wordsworth had maintained a "philosophical naturalism" that was mainly empirical in nature, and felt man was shaped by the external world acting upon the mind, which determined his moral and spiritual character (6-7). By seeing that nature was not only beautiful and powerful but also instructive,

Wordsworth felt that nature was the example that man and society could follow to transform the world into a better place (7). As indicated above, this is the ideal that informs most of his poetry before 1802--including such poems as the first two books of "The Prelude," "The Ruined Cottage," "Home at Grasmere," "Lyrical Ballads" (6)--when he began to write the "Intimations Ode."

But after 1802, Grob states, this empirical philosophy is gone: "nowhere . . . is there any suggestion that the external world has actually determined the character of the self that responds to it" (9). Apparently Wordsworth's own "indomitableness of spirit," as he called it in the Fenwick note, did not subside, for by 1802 we see in Wordsworth's thought a philosophy that places great importance on the remembrance of childhood. Now, childhood's

passions are perceived as possessing an intrinsic value and providing an ultimate source of spiritual and, perhaps, even moral authority for conduct of the whole of life. Recollection, thus, becomes a means not of measuring growth but of seeking continuity, since it is upon the power to preserve contact with his earlier past and to renew the emotions he had known in childhood's most intensely felt moments that the adult Wordsworth now believes his happiness and well being depend. (9)

Is this a regression, as McGann would have it, to clinging onto the past, a refusal to face up to the "ruins of history

and culture" (91), or is it, as Trilling sees it, a movement toward adult maturity and responsibility, a mournful but tough realization that childhood is gone, but remains in memory to inspire us through the seriousness of adulthood as we move into a "sense of reality" (148) and closer toward death?

Though each critic argues convincingly, we can achieve a larger understanding of the conflicts in the Ode by looking at how language, as a mode of perception, enables us to conceive of and understand the world. Vendler is correct in saying the language of the poem is as important as its message, for as argued earlier, the poem is both what it says literally (syntax-level meaning) and what it refers to (its suggestive meanings). What the language of the poem reveals is how language attempts to speak about what is beyond the physical world, but in order to do so, that language becomes almost completely metaphorical; that is, it relies almost entirely on concrete images used figuratively.

The first four stanzas pose the notion that our mind is formed only by our interaction with the forms of nature, as we see in Wordsworth's earlier poetry. In this view, all of the sensory data of physical (empirical) world provide the metaphors the human mind uses to conceive of itself. The stanzas ask: If nature has shaped me, then why do I feel that I am distant from it, and why can I not perceive it as I could before? The speaker reacts to the isolation he feels

from the world which forms him, which he was connected to as a younger person by positing the notion of a soul (59) in stanza five, which is an attempt by the speaker to conceive of his Self as beyond the physical world. Our birth is not an awakening but "a sleep and forgetting" (58), and the conception we have of ourselves stems not from the physical world but from "elsewhere," from the transcendent "God, who is our home" (65). That Wordsworth utilizes the "transcendental" notion of a soul apart from and beyond this world in the fifth stanza shows the process of the mind struggling with the difficulty of understanding itself beyond the limits of language, beyond the metaphors language derives from the physical world.

Thomas describes this as Wordsworth's "dialectical argument," a struggle to accommodate both empirical and transcendental modes of knowing. The empirical way of knowing (such as is seen in "Tintern Abbey") "turns the object, nature, into a subject so that it can constitute the self as a subject," while "transcendentalism counters (but repeats the process) by having the self as subject constitute the object--and constitute it as a subject" (18). Similarly, in order for a person to be self-conscious, that person must use the objects of experience in language to represent the mind thinking about itself. The external world, as Jaynes has stated, is represented through language as a metaphor for the mind. But the idea of a soul beyond this world (though a

metaphor) reverses this mode of knowing, where the mind of man, human consciousness, constitutes, or gives, the meaning of the natural world. According to Thomas, the "Intimations Ode" illustrates this empirical/transcendental dialectic where the forms of nature shape the mind and the mind also shapes its own perception of nature. Jaynes's theory of consciousness (and, indirectly, Peirce's theory of semiotics) suggests that consciousness is the constant interplay between mind and nature and the possibility of the mind knowing itself and nature through the metaphors of language.

The turn in the poem between the first four stanzas and the rest of the stanzas represents a metaphoric exploration of the mind seeking to know itself beyond the metaphors of language derived from the physical world, seeking to know itself because it is able to perceive a vague memory of former bliss and yet is haunted by the portent of non-existence. But knowing itself is actually quite impossible, because the mind is an organ of perception; as Jaynes states, it is like trying to experience immediate experience itself (53), which is impossible, for once one stops to think about what it is one is experiencing, that thinking becomes the experience, and only generates a copy of the experience one tries to "see."

If the physical world is indeed merely something that is temporary and our bodies mortal, a receptacle for the soul and spirit, then the mind is a metaphor of what is spiritual,

or ideal within the natural world (this notion, as Wordsworth admits in the Fenwick note, is very Platonistic). The mind in the act of remembering, which knows that there was a glory (because it cannot forget), is the only grounds for believing that we have a soul, because we can imagine, usually quite emotionally, something more than only our physical existence. In the poem, the physical world is merely an image, or a weak representation of the "Soul's immensity" (108-09), not the other way around. Nature is a metaphor the mind creates, an imitation, an image of what is real, or everlasting. The soul is "our life's Star" (59) and the world he is born into gradually becomes darker and darker, as "shades of the prison-house begin to close / Upon the growing boy" (67-8), as he moves from youth to adulthood, when the glorious light he saw as a child fades into "the light of common day" (76). The natural course of a life from childhood into adulthood, the course of a common day, and the course of light and life from east to west, all these movements symbolize the course of the soul as it travels through the earthly time of our existence. The natural progression of nature is now a metaphor for the course of the soul.

The idea that the mind and its construction of reality within consciousness are merely emblematic, a metaphor called the soul, is further elaborated in the sixth stanza, where earth is depicted as a foster mother, even a "homely Nurse" who by her own natural instincts makes her "Inmate Man /

Forget the glories he hath known, / And that imperial palace whence he came" (81-4). Stanzas seven and eight have often been criticized because of their seemingly contradictory nature, where the child of the poem is at once of "a pigmy size" in stanza seven (86) yet is also the "best Philosopher" (109) in stanza eight; he is a little actor who "cons" or fakes the parts of the adult he wishes to imitate (103), but who in the next stanza is called a "Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!" (114). This, as Vendler shows, is not a weakness of the poet but a deliberate centerpiece, or dual tableau, of the poem that sets up the difference between the two types of perception that the poem deals with (76). Brooks sees the difference between the child who strives to be like his father in stanza seven by imitating him and the prophet-child on whom the truths of eternity rest as the difference between that of "analytic reason and that of the synthesizing imagination" (133), a reading of the poem which I agree with partially.

But more specifically the comparison is between a consideration of nature as the shaper of the mind and its thoughts (empirical) and a consideration of the mind as the creator and shaper of our understanding of nature (transcendental). It is only within the interaction between mind and nature, through the metaphors of language, that consciousness is possible: nature gives us the objects or vehicles by which we use as signs to carry our thoughts;

conversely, the mind in thinking puts those images of a person excerpted from reality into a metaphoric mind-space, making the mind space represent real physical space. For example, the child attempts, by "some fragment of his dream of human life" (91), to fit himself--"shaped by himself"--into the forms and patterns of human life. He is trying to understand himself in relation to what he sees in the world of humans around him, though he is unaware that the "little plan or chart" at his feet (90) is only that, a chart, or map, only an imitation, and not what is real, his soul, or mind.

In stanza eight, the speaker knows that this process is an imitation, or merely a collection of metaphors by which we can reconstruct experience, and wishes he could tell the child that in youth he is really the true philosopher because he is not yet separated from the immediate joy of childhood by the symbols of language and thought, the "dialogues of business, love, or strife" (98). The child is an "Eye among the blind" (111) because he is not yet able to use language to think, which will inevitably lead to the loss of direct experience; and the child is deaf and silent for the reason that he is not subject to hearing the internal sounds of language in his thought that the adult speaker hears in the beginning of the poem. The child has access to the truth (unspoken) that adults spend all their lives looking for in the memories of youth. Immortality "broods" over the child,

"not to be put by" (120) or avoided, like the same "Day" that the speaker curses in stanza four, because it enables him to think about and know that he will follow its same course; day is the darkness of the prison-house of time (67) and the "darkness of the grave" (117). The perception of adulthood is like a grave, or a bed where we sleep without sense or sight (the pure sight of childhood). It seems to make no sense to the adult that the child should desire so earnestly to become a part of the world of thought where the customs of life weigh so heavily upon us; the speaker asks: "why with such earnest pains dost thou provoke / the years that bring the inevitable yoke?" (127-8).

Where does this leave the adult, who can sense his own loss of the joy of childhood and watch as other children follow the same path? Because all the mind has is knowledge of itself from the perceptions of the world, by creating a picture of that world in its mind, the mind also learns that the pattern of life and growth and death it sees in the world is one it must eventually follow: from glory to darkness, from birth into death. This is the ability of the mind to conceive of itself as not existing. Yet the mind is also able to remember the glory of childhood, the last remaining proof we have of the glory of our soul, that now replaces (or better, it symbolizes) the loss the adult feels looking back at a time of unity with all things. The child becomes the "Father of the man" by the man's remembering, however

vaguely, the bright radiance of childhood vision, when everything seemed to be covered in celestial light. What the adult mind has learned to do is to look at itself in a past time, or, to imagine the metaphor of "me" looking back at the "I" in a state of gloriousness. which is "glorious" because it is cognitively unclear.

The speaker has realized that his mind is something more than just a function of the body, for it is within the mind that the speaker can imagine that there is more to this world than its purely physical being. The perception of nature, even an appreciation of its beauty, is to the thinking speaker an isolating occurrence (Grob 235), but the consolation the speaker has is that in memory there "Is something that doth live / That nature yet remembers / What was so fugitive" (133-36). This thought of past years breeds "benediction" or blessing because it enables him to believe in the existence of his soul. He raises a song of thanks and praise not for the simplicity and pure perception of childhood, because he knows they are gone, but for the very uncertainty his perception gives him: "obstinate questionings / Of sense and outward things" (145-46), or, what is the unbreachable distance between him and the objects he "sees." He gives thanks for the "fallings from us, vanishings; / Blank misgivings of a Creature / Moving about in worlds not yet realized, / High instincts before which our mortal Nature / Did tremble" (147-48). He ends up coming to

terms with his loss by putting his faith into those things he cannot know: direct experience without thinking about it, the doubts about a world he can never know entirely through the limitations of thought, and the instincts that he is born with that frighten him because to be aware of his past is to know that he will die.

But even with this knowledge of death, the mind has the capacity to make metaphors out of experience, not only from its perception of the physical world, but also from the mind's remembering the past. We can "have sight of that immortal sea / Which brought us hither . . . And see the children sport upon the shore" (167, 170), and actually see the children and their joy, which reminds us of the joy we had; and we can also see that they represent something in us that is lost--the direct, thought-less experience of nature--and so we can see them both as children and as symbols of what we were once and what we will become again through death. Or, we can say the children represent both themselves (their literal meaning as perceived and understood by the speaker viewing them) and they represent metaphorically the cycle of the human soul (mind) as it passes through the temporary artifice of time.

According to Vendler, this ability of perception belongs to the special powers of the poet. She asks:

[I]f the Ode represents the acquisition of the power of metaphor; that to rest in either the splendor of sense

or in blank misgivings is not to be a poet; that to join the external world of sense experience with the interior world of moral consciousness is to become an adult; that to express that juncture in metaphor is to become a poet--then all Wordsworth's great poetry is a result of the process of the humanizing of sense and the symbolizing of interior experience described by the Ode.

(84)

The "misgivings" the speaker praises in stanza nine are "blank" because he cannot know them completely, and so this knowledge leaves him with no other choice but to have faith in the limited capacity to know the world and our mind through the metaphors of language. But to know this means to be not only a poet, as Vendler states above, but also to be a conscious human being. Perhaps we could say that the poet is especially aware and extra-conscious, but this ability is not something beyond the capability of all humans. It is the lot of the adult to be able to join the children and nature at spring time only in thought--"we in thought will join your throng" (175).

If we wish to make sense out of our inability to know nature as we did as children, and make sense out of our awareness of death, Wordsworth suggests that we not rue the past but rather find

Strength in what remains behind;

In the primal sympathy

Which having been must ever be;
 In the soothing thoughts that spring
 Out of human suffering;
 In the faith that looks through death,

In years that bring the philosophic mind (182-90).

Language and thought may cause us grief because it makes us cognizant of our own mortality; yet to be aware of our own past and present and future is to be fully alive and fully conscious of the constantly changing, constantly growing and dying, nature of our own material existence. Wordsworth calls such an awareness "faith" because it is an acceptance of the limited nature of our own linguistic understanding of ourselves as conscious living and growing and dying beings. Rather than term this knowledge "moral," "mature," "ideological," or "religious," the more apt terminology would simply be fully conscious and fully accepting of our own temporality and our limited ability to know ourselves through the metaphors of language.

Vendler, in opposition to Trilling, sees the "philosophic mind" the poet achieves by the end of the poem as that which enables the creation of poetry, by its use of metaphor to represent the experiences of nature (68). But the knowledge this "philosophic mind" possesses is not necessarily the product of the specially creative mind of the poet, but rather is something we all experience and inevitably must face, as death approaches. Yet poetry does

give us the clearest example of how consciousness creates a metaphor of the world--and our existence in it--through language. The thoughts that derive from human suffering are all we know of that suffering, or we could say that it is the capacity of thought, which disconnects us from direct experience, that causes our human suffering. Faith in this sense means realizing that we can never fully know who we are, or what death really is, but that we can look through the thought of death because we will not really know what death is until we experience it, apart from its function as a symbol for a process we perceive in nature, and know will someday apply to our own being.

If the speaker with the philosophic mind knows anything it is this: that he has no other choice but to love (or else be terribly miserable every spring) the "Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves" (191) because he can still feel their power, which moves him because he knows they are more than just beautiful objects: they represent in their beauty the transitory nature of their own and his own existence. The speaker, with the philosophic mind, can love the "Brooks which down their channels fret" (196) because he knows that they are beautiful not just in and of themselves but also in the fact that they represent a time when he "tripped lightly as they" (197). Love is, in this respect, something that he has learned to experience because of the awareness of loss that he (and nature) will inevitably experience. The only

way to enjoy the beauty of life is to trust his "human heart" which enables him to know and love "the meanest flower that blows" only in thoughts that "lie too deep for tears" (206-7); it is in the recognition of limitation that he finds strength and faith.

Conclusions

As stated earlier, the "Intimations Ode" is about perception and language, and how the perception we have of ourselves as conceived through language creates the sense of loss and isolation that we find in the poem. But questions inevitably arise: does the poem resolve this problem of perception? Is there at the heart of the poem an aesthetic unity, as Brooks argues, that brings together all discordances? Or does the poem merely indicate the alienation language causes us to feel from the world and each other? Or, does the poem simply reflect ideological beliefs and a shunning of history, or serve as a religious soap box for critics? Whether or not what Wordsworth created can be considered "art" should not be not our primary concern; nor should we be too concerned that certain political or religious belief can be gleaned from the language. What has been made clear is that the poem represents something common not just to the poet but to all of us: how language creates our knowledge of the world and of ourselves in it. Certainly, it may take the poet to understand language and human thought well enough to be able to point this out to the rest of us. The "Intimations Ode" describes, in effect, a self seeking to know itself, the aspect of consciousness whereby the individual becomes aware that by being conscious

he or she is disconnected from the joy experienced in childhood, when no such conception of selfhood existed.

The poem illustrates that it is by metaphor that the mind can conceive of and understand itself in the world. But to think and make metaphor is only to know what reality is like, but not what it is, which is impossible to know apart from language. In trying to know our being we gain an awareness of the creative yet limiting nature of language. Understanding the metaphoric nature of our self and our memories of childhood gives us the ability, as Wordsworth expresses in the "Intimations Ode," to "look through death" rather than trying to know what death is like. And so perhaps we can with this understanding, like Wordsworth, give "thanks and praise" (144) for the "obstinate questionings" and the "fallings from us, vanishings" (145, 147), which serve as "the fountain light of all our day" (154) and create the "soothing thoughts that spring / out of human suffering" (187-8).

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