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Learning How to Live: The Wonder of Wandering According to William Wordsworth and Ralph Waldo Emerson

by

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Acknowledgments

In the past few years, SKW has become part of my vocabulary. I have seen those three letters first thing in the morning, right before sleep, through watery eyes and after big laughs. So what does SKW mean? I can easily envision a brightly colored poster in a kindergarten classroom with SKW in big yellow letters and below, in purple italics, *Sensitive, Kind, Willing*. It's a terrific acronym that reminds children on the playground and at snack time to be SKW (pronounced "skew"). At other times, I say each letter out loud: S. K. W. It could perhaps be an abbreviation referring to Grand Funk Railroad's hit 70's song, "Some Kind of Wonderful," a tune that will undoubtedly get me to cheer up and sing out no matter what is going on. And so regardless of when I see it, I know that SKW means all of the above: sensitive, kind willing; some kind of wonderful, and someone who will undoubtedly cheer me up and get me going once more. Thank you so much, Professor Weiner.

And to the first days of spring that remind us that endings are really just the beginnings of something new…

Introduction

"Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge—it is as immortal as the heart of man," William Wordsworth writes in his "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802), explaining why ancient verses still move us, haunt us and teach us with explosive relevance (271). Transcending time, poetry speaks to every generation with contemporary sympathy and ageless gusto, inspiring souls with a divine awareness that this moment is simultaneously sovereign and unremarkable: sovereign because it is unique for the individual experiencing it, and unremarkable because this moment of disappointment, surprise, happiness or demise occurs within a larger circle and will inevitably return. And so our capacity for poetry pulses through our veins whether we know it or not, ready to ignite a primordial desire to learn.

If poetry is knowledge, what, then, is a poet? In the "Preface," Wordsworth believes a poet to be

> A man speaking to men: a man…endued with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind. (271)

Endowed with acute sensitivity and insight, the poet's eye sees beyond personal circumstances to a collective human experience, understanding that his private feelings and secret fears are undoubtedly common. This heightened consciousness is the origin of the power of the poet. The responsibility of the poet, therefore, is to expose the commonality of humanity and to educate people with the first and last of all knowledge. "Poetry is at bottom a criticism of life," Matthew Arnold writes, and

"the greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life, --[to] the question: How to live (33)." Again in a time of war, death and destruction, the responsibility of the poet today is the same as it was in Arnold's nineteenth-century England: To teach people how to live.

This definition of poetry and the poet's role arises at a specific historical moment and responds to a historically-specific need as disappointment and the decline of religion left a void in the souls of nineteenth-century Europeans. While this thesis focuses on the lasting responsibility of the Romantic poet and American Transcendentalist to teach people how to live, it is important to recognize the direct influence of Christianity on Romanticism and also to explore why, in the face of a failed revolution, the poets did not turn to established religion but instead discovered divinity in the natural world. Rather than undercutting Romanticism's originality, the movement's religious origins underline the subtle, smart additions and subtractions the Romantics made to create a Christian-inspired yet secular doctrine. Fusing the solemn morality of the Bible with the skepticism of the Enlightenment, the Romantics created a fierce new doctrine concerning how to live, and they themselves reigned with the authority of biblical prophets and the influence of contemporary icons.

The eighteenth-century Age of Enlightenment shed doubt on religion and turned instead to knowledge that could be proven with physical evidence. Faith, mysticism and the supernatural took a backseat to skepticism and science, and in the wake of the Enlightenment, religion lost its prominence in society. But when extreme disappointment shook Europe in the form of the French Revolution, the people once

again groped for strands of divine hope. They found it in the sanctuary of Romanticism.

From 1791 to 1792, a twenty-one year old Wordsworth lived in France and became passionately supportive of the French Revolution, believing it would be a "glorious renovation of the current society" (Norton 243). Young and idealistic, Wordsworth's enthusiasm was soon obliterated by the catastrophic events that ensued, leaving France in chaos and Wordsworth confused. For the rest of his life, Wordsworth would wrestle with the intense disappointment he experienced in the wake of the failed Revolution. Eventually, he found solace in the consistently ever-changing natural world and discovered the unparalleled depths of his own mind, which could not be touched by his social surroundings. Eager to share his testimony, Wordsworth set to work on his autobiographical epic poem, *The Prelude,* in which he candidly divulges his moments of utmost optimism and darkest despair. Citing his own life as an example of the human experience, Wordsworth encourages his readers to draw connections to their own lives and thereby find the same comfort in celebrating the holiness of nature and the mind everlasting.

Enlightened by his own experience, Wordsworth's decision to write autobiographically and with such candor appealed to the public. An ideal vehicle with which to convey the treacherous but ultimately rewarding road of self-discovery, autobiography invites readers to examine their own lives, ultimately raising personal consciousness to a higher level on a public scale. Although Wordsworth is often praised for his astonishing level of honesty, the first modern autobiography is St. Augustine's *Confessions*, written at the end of the fourth century. One of the most

influential religious texts, *Confessions* serves as the printed pulpit from which he admits to the temptations and sins to which he initially succumbed before finally accepting the Christian way of life. In *Natural Supernaturalism*, M.H. Abrams explains:

> Augustine's own experiences, together with the course of general human history, pose what is for him the central problem, "Unde malum?" " Whence then is evil since God who is good made all things good?" (VII.v.). The question is answered by his discovery that evil issues in a greater good, in his own life as in the history of mankind (86).

Believing that every tragedy ultimately leads to joy, Augustine survives hardship through his faith in just rewards. For Augustine, overcoming secular struggles secures him a place in heaven, and by circulating his private *Confessions*, Augustine does his part not only to spread the Christian gospel, but also to create an open forum of empathy. Through empathy, Augustine is able to reach others by understanding their daily difficulties. Through autobiography, Augustine is then able to show how these difficulties can promise an everlasting life, teaching the common person how to avoid God's wrath and how to live right according to Christian doctrine.

Much of Augustine's argument for leading a Christian life derives from the idea of the apocalypse, during which God will reward those who have honored the word of the Bible and punish those who have immersed themselves in sin. The French Revolution, in its own right, was apocalyptic as all the hopes for a new society crumbled in the shadows of terror. Just as Augustine suddenly realizes his life of sin

is meaningless in the garden at Milan, Wordsworth recognizes the fruitlessness of the French Revolution, and both are left in states of despair. Forced to seek a new life direction, Augustine devotes himself to Christianity with the greatest fervor, and, hundreds of years later, Wordsworth turns to nature with a parallel piety.

"We tend to think of Wordsworth more in terms of the gleeful dancing of daffodils," Murray Roston writes, "but beneath the surface of his longer poems there often lies the world of the Scriptures" (182). Although the Romantics pride themselves on their creativity, their connection to Christianity is undeniable:

> The idea of poetic 'creativity' developed by Coleridge, Wordsworth, and their successors in Victorian England, which is usually seen in purely aesthetic terms, was in fact a re-discovery and a re-application of a much older Judeo-Christian way of thinking about religious experience. (Pricket 7)

Rather than denying their religious roots, the Romantics recognized the efficacy of the scriptures and mimicked the style, structure and steadfastness of the Bible in order to achieve the same widespread reverence. Consequently, in the hopes of acquiring the same level of significance, "romantic poets acknowledged their debt to biblical forms even when the reader can perceive only the faintest resemblance" (Roston 172). Heavily influenced by the Bible yet left skeptical by the discoveries of the Enlightenment, the Romantics translate the Christian promise of heaven into a secular appreciation for the individual mind through the exploration of the natural world:

> Since they lived, inescapably, after the Enlightenment, Romantic writers…undertook to save the overview of human history and destiny, the experiential paradigms, and the cardinal values of their religious heritage, by reconstituting them in a way that would make them intellectually
> acceptable, as well as emotionally pertinent, for the time being. (Abrams 66)

While Augustine described moments in which God spoke directly to him, the Romantic poets maintained the power of epiphany but rejected the idea that divine beings manifest themselves physically. Augustine's interaction with God, which led to his conversion to Christianity, was revived and revised by the late eighteenth-century clearheaded contact with nature, which also led to a superior consciousness and greater knowledge. Similar to Augustine's moment in the garden at Milan is Wordsworth's realization atop Mount Snowdon in Book XIII of *The Prelude* (1805), in which he realizes that "Such minds are truly from the Deity / For they are powers; and hence the highest bliss" (XIII :112-113). While Wordsworth stresses the infinite mind rather than God's presence, the interaction and epiphany echo Augustine's moment of conversion. Injecting the discoveries of the Enlightenment with the zeal of Christianity, the Romantics attempted, "in diverse degrees and ways, to naturalize the supernatural and to humanize the divine" (Abrams 68). Thus by replacing God with nature, Romantic poets redirected the fervor of religion towards a more secular, immediate salvation. Poets became the new priests, and poetry became the new

psalm, but beneath the babbling Wye and below the towering Mount Snowdon, the whispers of religion still faintly sing.

By sifting through the major themes and structures of Christianity, Wordsworth and his contemporaries incorporated the goals of self-discovery, trial and faith into a new movement while simultaneously abandoning the structure of organized religion. The result was a new faith with altars of oak and one-person pews worshipping the holiness of the human mind. When Augustine wrote *Confessions* in the fourth century, his testimony was enough to persuade his readers. In the rubble following religious wars and the French Revolution, people were not so ready to give their lives to Christianity. Thus, Wordsworth and his peers sought to spread the same morality and high ethical standards of the Bible but without the religious context:

> For the romantic poet, the biblical ethos had been partially secularized. God had been largely replaced by the Spirit of Nature, the brotherhood of man by the pantisocratic society, and the messiah by the dawn of the New World (Roston 195).

Still wrestling with his disappointment with the French Revolution, Wordsworth atoned for his reclusive reaction by spreading the gospel of experience. It is in his role as a poet, responsible for educating the world about how to live, that Wordsworth finds solace. Wordsworth's successor, American Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson, would continue the Romantic reverence of experience in his essay, "The American Scholar":

> I do not see how any man can afford, for the sake of his nerves and his nap, to spare any action in which he can partake. It is pearls

> and rubies to his discourse. Drudgery, calamity, exasperation, want, are instructors in eloquence and wisdom. The true scholar grudges every opportunity of action past by, as a loss of power. (70)

First sermonized by Augustine, then secularized by Wordsworth and later emphasized by Emerson, the lessons we learn build upon the mistakes we make. Just like Augustine, Wordsworth confesses his regrettable decisions in order to showcase the human ability to reform at any time. And just as the initially lustful, sex-driven Augustine eventually acquires sainthood, the originally cowardly Wordsworth gains courage through the education of experience and the belief in his own holy destiny as a prophet-poet.

Wordsworth's self-perceived role as a prophet-poet serves as the springboard for this thesis, as the shift from religion to Romanticism marks a change in the responsibility of the poet. Having previously been able to focus on his artistry, the poet is now preordained to save souls from immorality, and puts on a new robe of authority proceeding from the destructive religious wars and revolutions, Wordsworth rediscovered joy once he accepted his fate as a poet who would not physically fight for but instead write his way into a new era:

> It was, in fact, the ethical quality of his work which entitled Wordsworth to feel that he was fulfilling the noblest task of the poet—that which made him the modern counterpart of the biblical prophet. (Roston 184)

Responsible for teaching people how to live, Wordsworth redeemed his earlier desperation through a lasting appreciation of the human mind. No longer a

discouraged young man but a knowledgeable poet-prophet, Wordsworth composed *The Prelude* to propel the imagination forward and the human consciousness higher.

Romanticism transcends the boundaries of religion and reveals the savior within the self by first engaging with the ebb and flow of nature. Citing the consistency of the seasonal changes as a reflection of the human experience, Romanticism provides comfort by exposing the normalcy of change and the undulating circle of life. Always on the edge of an apocalypse, Wordsworth recognizes that although "Nations sink together, we shall still / Find solace—knowing what we have learnt to know" (XIII/439-440). Like the seasons, society rises and falls with predictable unpredictability. The only thing to do is embrace the incessant change.

Ultimately, the poet's purpose to teach people how to live is to teach people how to live poetically. When 'drudgery, calamity, exasperation [and] want' take hold, the Romantics see those apparently unfortunate experiences as covert opportunities to learn. Had Augustine not initially basked in sin or had Wordsworth remained neutral about the French Revolution throughout his days, these men would not still receive so much scholarly attention. But Augustine and Wordsworth were mere mortals, as vulnerable to making bad decisions as the rest of us, and their reactions to their mistakes are what make them great and what make their works eternal. Through nature, Wordsworth sees the depth of his own infinite mind—its ability to adapt and its temptation to remain the same, rigid against the storm. Rebuffing security and rejecting consistency, poets are free to ride the wind and enjoy the twists and turns. An advocate of the Romantic and Transcendentalist intent on exposing collective

truths through individual discoveries, I encourage you, the reader, to embark on the following pages with a poetic mindset, and allow yourself to substitute Wordsworth's testimony with personal tales. Being a reader means living open-mindedly with the insight of a poet, and "being a poet *means* to live dangerously" (Prickett 277).

"The Wanderer"

Having finally reached the summit of the mountain, a lone traveler strikes his walking stick into the brown rock beneath his feet and gazes out into the infinite mist, only to find a reflection of his own mind's immensity. In "The Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog," an oil painting by the nineteenth-century German artist Caspar David Friedrich, he conveys natural beauty while simultaneously underlining human sovereignty through his placement of people within his works. Friedrich often portrayed his subjects appreciating a natural scene, and in doing so, Friedrich suggests that their ability to discover such a place of wonder and their capacity to

appreciate such beauty transcends the beautiful scene itself. With his back facing the audience, the Wanderer's dark silhouette and bold stance against the pale, fluid swirling winds demand the viewer's attention. As the eye focuses in on the details of the Wanderer's coat and windswept red hair, however, the pupil is then drawn outward to the greys, blues and pinks of the fog that has washed over the scene, creating an entirely new perspective. The faint traces of land, the outline of trees and the jagged rocks that poke through the blanket of fog represent the landscape of forms hidden beneath the domineering white sea—the obstructing yet untouchable presence that has rendered land and sky indecipherable. The viewer must zoom in and out of the painting, for just as the Wanderer's bold presence accentuates the surrounding vastness, the surrounding vastness frames the Wanderer.

His intrusion upon an aggressive sea of fog and his own position above this opaque layer of air expand the premise of the painting and provoke questions regarding man's relationship with nature and with himself. After his strenuous and sometimes dangerous climb up the mountain, the Wanderer becomes the Wonderer. He has fought through the grey haze and now, having discovered a new height, he must use this elevated perspective to consider the fog, the forms it hides and how, in hiding some things, the mist showcases an alternatively awe-inspiring scene. The Wanderer might have expected a clear view from the mountaintop so that he might see particular waves breaking into ridges of white foam below or a farmer's neatly planted rows miles away, but instead this elevated perspective permits him only to clearly see the ambiguity beneath him and the limitless landscape before him.

The Wanderer's physical experience atop the mountain—the scent of the moist air, the sound of hovering quiet and the feel of a morning chill sinking into his skin—overwhelms him. But the longer the Wanderer stands staring outward, the more the Wonderer begins to look inward. Bodily sensation gives way to mental realization as the Wonderer begins to understand the lucidity of the fog—its apparent stillness dissolves into fluid motion, and the longer he stares, the more the world moves. This is the experience of Friedrich's Wanderer, who has climbed a mountain and can now see clearly the once hazardous and unclear path that has led him to this peak. And although he now appears to have transcended the grey of his past, the Wonderer's internal gaze still wanders within the fog from the view of still higher mountain peaks. Each step reveals a superior view, thickening the wisps of his present reverie with an ephemeral sovereignty as the Wonderer continues to climb. But in this moment, Friedrich has revealed the magic of natural beauty and, perhaps more importantly, our own inevitable presence within such beauty. In recognizing our inability to escape our own perceptions, Friedrich emphasizes the unique view of the individual eye and the collective transcendence of the human mind.

Chapter I:
Schiller, Wordsworth and The Wonderer

"There have certainly been, even in our own age, greater poets than Wordsworth" wrote John Stuart Mill in his *Autobiography*, "but poetry of deeper and loftier feeling could not have done for me at that time what his did" (104). In a chapter entitled "A Crisis in My Mental History," Mill finds solace, happiness and hope in the poetry of William Wordsworth despite, or perhaps because of, the poet's relatively simple verses. Wordsworth's own struggles speak to Mill, while his insight inspires Mill "to feel that there was real, permanent happiness in tranquil contemplation (104). To attain this real, permanent happiness, Wordsworth depicts the beauty of the natural world only to ultimately illuminate the sovereignty of the human mind. In glorifying the human capacity for contemplation and proving that "even the grossest minds must see and hear/And cannot chuse but feel," Wordsworth transforms what Mill views as a curse—his intense emotions—into a power (*Prelude* XIII : 83-84). The ability to feel deeply, Wordsworth argues, is the ability to live truly.

So what does it mean to feel deeply? The German philosopher Friedrich Schiller breaks down the human faculties into three drives: physical sensation, mental contemplation and the ideal combination of the two. In examining these three drives, Schiller explains how the complex desires of humans lead us to feel various emotions unique to humanity. In addition, Schiller contends that art, which engages both physical feeling and mental contemplation, serves as the sole portal to the ideal combination of the two.

Part of the reason why Mill draws strength from reading Wordsworth is because Wordsworth experiences the desires that Schiller identifies even as he recognizes the potentially devastating effects of changing or failing to fulfill these desires. Upon reading Wordsworth, Mill realizes "that he too had had similar experience to mine; that he also had felt that the first freshness of youthful enjoyment of life was not lasting; but that he had sought for compensation, and found it, in the way in which he was now teaching me to find it" (105). The candid confessions in Wordsworth's autobiographical poems make his art appealing and accessible, but it is his grasp of fundamental human desires that makes his poems quietly brilliant. Thus because Schiller's three drives define these desires, Schiller serves as a perfect lens for understanding the simple yet rich poetry of William Wordsworth.

According to Schiller, the human psyche consists of three drives, the sense drive, the formal drive and the play drive. Each drive emphasizes a different faculty that ultimately distinguishes humans from the rest of the natural world. In this chapter, I begin by describing each of these drives and I then turn to the presence of the sense and formal drive in Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey." The poem helps explain why returning to a place is significant and why, without memory, "other faculties are rendered useless" (Schiller 85). I will then move on to develop the argument that Wordsworth experiences Schiller's ideal state of mind—the play drive—atop Mount Snowdon, in the final book of his autobiographical *Prelude.* In drawing these connections between Schiller and Wordsworth, I hope to explore Wordsworth's account of not only *why* humans feel and think but also *how* humans feel and think. In doing so, I show how Wordsworth's poems offer a reply to the

question that the poet and critic Matthew Arnold raises when he says that the responsibility of the poet is to answer the question "How to live?" (39). Using Schiller's three drives to illuminate Wordsworth's poetry, "Tintern Abbey" and *The Prelude* answer Arnold's question, highlighting the responsibility of the artist and the human power to find meaning from within.

In addition to Schiller, I will draw from the works of George Berkeley, John Locke and Edmund Burke to help explicate what Schiller viewed as the three human faculties and to show how in eighteenth-century Britain the idea of human perception became an overarching theme that inspired both political theory and personal thought, which prove to be inextricably linked. Berkeley's insistence that truth can only be found in that which is tangible supports Schiller's idea that nature informs the mind. Schiller then adds to Berkeley's thought and applies Locke's novel idea of consciousness to reveal how humans actually transcend tangible truths to reach even greater epiphanies. Also believing in the sovereignty of the mind, Edmund Burke supports Locke by exploring the wide spectrum of emotions unique to humans and, in conjunction with Berkeley, provides a fuller Wordsworthian landscape through which to navigate with the help of Schiller.

In his account of the individual mind, Schiller reveals how all minds share an appreciation for beauty discovered through personal inquiry. Examining the poetry of William Wordsworth through a Schillerian lens reveals the importance to Wordsworth's poetry and thought of his recollection of exploring and his exploration of recollecting. Wordsworth's poems elucidate Schiller's tenets and they shed light on the mind's capacity to change and to appreciate change. Furthermore, his poems

underline the importance of teaching each person to recognize their own mind's power to change, to grow. Peering down into the sea of foggy pasts, the individual, the Wonderer, must come to realize that perception is paramount. One's truth constructs and obstructs every view.

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It is no coincidence that Schiller first drafted *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* in 1793, at the height of France's Reign of Terror. Caught in a time of extreme political turmoil, the late eighteenth-century French people were trapped in a place of volatile danger and violence as the initial ambition of the French Revolution was disassembled and used for gunpowder. In the midst of this external chaos, Schiller recognized the dire need for internal peace, and through his writing he created a mental escape for the physically imprisoned people of France. Schiller's interest in the French Revolution stemmed from his larger concern for modern civilization and his desire to set it on a healthier path:

> No thinker was of greater consequence than Friedrich Schiller in giving a distinctive Romantic formulation to the diagnosis of the modern malaise, to the assumptions about human good and ill which controlled this diagnosis, and to the overall view of the history and destiny of mankind of which the diagnosis was an integral part. Schiller's mature thought on these matters assimilated the contributions of many predecessors and contemporaries. (Abrams 199)

Believing the human appreciation of Beauty, particularly in Art, to be the cure for the modern malaise, Schiller voiced a confident demand that the individual return to

nature. The Beauty of Art, inspired by the natural world, would remind people of collective pleasures rather than personal differences or patriotic endeavors. This appreciation would ultimately lead to a mental freedom that would conquer any physical imprisonment. Through Beauty, we can always be free.

Although Schiller was in Germany at the time of the French Revolution, the tenets that incited the national rebellion inspired him along with the British Romantic William Wordsworth. Both men initially wrote in awe of the movement, praising the French and lauding the moment of change. As the Revolution began to take an imperialist turn, however, and admirable aspirations mutated into greedy and gruesome machinations, Schiller and Wordsworth were appalled by the emerging face of humanity. Their youthful fervor dissipated into reclusive introspection and so the artists began to focus their studies on individual enlightenment rather than communal (especially national) energy. As with Friedrich's Wanderer, however, one person's contemplative stance can represent the stance of many and so Schiller's Romantic examination of the individual quickly spills into the realm of the collective. Indeed, Schiller's depiction of personal drives and his prescription for attaining a higher level of consciousness stems from his desire to avoid any future failure like that of the French Revolution. By asserting the authority of the individual mind, Schiller believes groups of every size—from family to fatherland—will benefit. But to reach this ambitious goal of collective enlightenment through heightened personal awareness, Schiller believes a faculty for artistic beauty must first be cultivated. And to cultivate an appreciation for artistic beauty, Schiller begins by showcasing natural

beauty. Consequently, a person's primordial desire to absorb the surrounding world through the senses is Schiller's first drive.

Schiller's Three Drives

For Schiller, all human experience originates from the life of the senses. "The physical existence of man," he argues, stems from "his sensuous nature" as we appreciate, from a very young age, the pleasure derived from physical sensation (79). Nature often feeds this sense-drive and enables humans to discover an appreciation for various physical experiences. From birth, humans become aware of how things feel, look, taste, sound and smell and our reactions shape our identity. Schiller asserts the sense-drive's vital role in molding identity when he writes, "It is this drive alone which awakens and develops the potentialities of man," and yet despite its exclusive power to awaken an individual to his own power, the sense drive also makes "complete fulfillment impossible" (81). Paradoxically, the sense-drive both inspires and inhibits a person's identity from blossoming to fruition. Without the ability to appreciate the physical world, humans would never develop and yet, with this appreciation, "personality is suspended…and swept along by the flux of time" (79). Hence the sense drive's dependency on time and reliance on the surrounding world ultimately stunts mental growth by locking it into a local context.

Schiller's second drive, the formal drive, aims to counteract the sense drive's appreciation for nature and "secure the Personality against the forces of Sensation." To retain individual personality, we must develop "our capacity for reason," which stems from a personal comprehension of ourselves inside and outside of our surroundings (87). The formal drive is the instinct that leads humans to make laws, define the necessary and deny the benefits of change. It is our tendency toward absolutism. Such rigid ambition asserts one's individualism but, if taken to the extreme, the formal drive constrains one's ability to adapt and to change, "because, in order to become manifest, the principle of permanence requires change and absolute reality has need of limitation" (89). Schiller explains that an absolute submission to the sense drive will lead a man to "never be himself," and an absolute submission to the formal drive will lead a man to "never be anything else" (89). In other words, the formal drive provides a person with personality backbone, so that when we bend down to breathe in the scent of a flower, we are able to stand up again and remember that we are who we are, and not the aroma we just inhaled. The balance of these two drives undulates with the rise and fall of emotions and epiphanies, and so it should come as no surprise that the sense-drive's appeal to nature and the formal drive's adherence to law culminates in an overt tension within human beings.

And yet, in another paradox, it is this internal discord, Schiller argues, that actually leads to the greatest satisfaction, for the collision of the two drives can eventually lead to the ideal third drive. The "play drive" strives to balance the sense and formal drives by scaling their heights to reach a new level of understanding. The play drive incorporates the experience of a material reality but does not succumb to

nature's delights so fully that the individual sense of self is lost. Similarly, the play drive attends to the absolutes offered by the formal drive, but only in order to declare that there can be no absolutes. Just as Wordsworth and Mill discovered that the "first freshness of youthful enjoyment of life was not lasting," humans will never find permanent satisfaction in the immersion in sensual pleasure (Mill 104). Eternally expanding, the human mind is too complex to quench its curiosity through simple saturation of the senses. Thus Schiller asserts, "personality must keep the sensuous drive within its proper bounds." At the same time, however, the mind needs stimulation from the outside world, and so "Nature must do the same with the formal drive" (93). While the sense drive depends on time and the formal drive denies it, the play drive transcends temporality entirely to recognize our cyclical yet ever-changing existence.

In combining the richest aspects of people's two instinctual drives, the play drive's ultimate purpose is to utilize time, sense and law only to transcend these entities to cultivate an awareness of consciousness. This consciousness is what distinguishes us from the natural world. In addition, this consciousness can only be reached, Schiller argues, through an appreciation of beauty. Schiller's disappointment in the French Revolution renders him reverent of the individual's loyalty to his own rationality and, because he still believes "there is no other way of making sensuous man rational except by first making him aesthetic," Schiller's emphasis on educating men in beauty stems from his larger intention to awaken men to the power of their own minds (161). As human consciousness develops and people reconsider previous perceptions, the play drive that evolves as a result of their newfound cognizance not

only alerts us to the authority of our own mind but also liberates us through this freshly conceived perception of power and control.

The human beings' division from nature and development of consciousness facilitates our ability to recognize and experience beauty, which leads to a collective freedom. Infused in each person's life, beauty is the only "mode of communication [that] unites society, because it relates to that which is common to all" (215). Thus when humans assert their unique identity through appreciating art, they affirm their tie to mankind through their very capacity to make such an assertion. The human ability to appreciate art is paramount because "the general validity of aesthetic judgments is thus due, not to any underlying concept, but to the fact that the same process of free play of cognitive powers takes place in all alike" (Miller 71). Thus these "cognitive powers" lead to an appreciation of art and it is through this shared appreciation that men are at once emotionally unified and mentally liberated.

Schiller's Sense and Formal Drives in "Tintern Abbey"

"Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," (1798) one of Wordsworth's most revered poems, first depicts Schiller's sense drive when Wordsworth is enraptured by the beauty of the natural world and later illustrates Schiller's formal drive when Wordsworth begins to translate sensual pleasure into mental inquiry. Revisiting the banks of the Wye River, Wordsworth reflects upon his earlier reaction to this haven of natural delight in order to illustrate the importance not only of journeying to new places to experience and grow as a person, but also of returning to familiar worlds to realize such growth. This growth manifests itself in

what Wordsworth describes as "feelings too/Of unremembered pleasure" (31-32). In realizing how novelty can originate from familiarity, Wordsworth's return to the Wye provides him with a new perspective as time and experience enable him to appreciate the textures of his own mind. Five years earlier, he explains, he was drawn to the Wye valley by the allure of nature, a complete immersion in his sense-drive. Once overwhelmed by his intense physical reaction to nature's myriad surfaces, sights and scents, an older, wiser Wordsworth now remembers:

> Their colours and their forms, were then to me
> An appetite: a feeling and a love,
> That had no need of a remoter charm,
> By thought supplied, or any interest
> Unborrowed from the eye. (80-84)

Wordsworth's youthful engagement with nature is devoid of intellectual curiosity; he is satiated without "any interest/Unborrowed from the eye." Enjoying his sense-drive, Wordsworth is "like a roe" (68) who has not yet developed an awareness of the transcendent powers that the sensual pleasures of nature activate in his mind. Without this awareness, Wordsworth has not separated himself from the wilderness because he accepts, rather than actively seeks, "a feeling and a love." The sense drive's close tie to natural beauty and physical pleasure makes individuals passive creatures devoid of their own identity. Living solely through their sense drive, humans do not exercise their minds but only their bodies, rendering them a part of the natural world. Thoughtlessly reveling in the delights of a beautiful and pleasurable scene, people engaging their sense drive fall back upon passivity because they are simply enjoying

rather than actively seeking satisfaction. R.D. Miller explains that "Schiller associates passivity with the sensuous impulse, and activity with the formative impulse, for the former is concerned to receive as many impressions of the world as it possibly can, and the latter's task is the active one of producing laws and asserting the freedom of the person" (111). Spreading out his fingers and soaking up the physical pleasures of nature, sense-driven young Wordsworth is passive and transparent. The grass tickles his fingers, the brook babbles in his ear and the sun warms his face and soothes his body. The passage's register of sensuality reflects Wordsworth's obsession with his body's response to the beauty of nature, an obsession that initially forbids him the gift of reflection; he submits to the sense-drive, which makes "complete fulfillment impossible" (Schiller 81). But, as we will see, the only way to rise above the sense-drive is, paradoxically, to plunge into its pleasure.

Burke's view of curiosity corresponds with Schiller's view of the sense drive in that the fulfillment of each leads to a fundamental pleasure but also an ephemeral satisfaction. In *Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* (1764), Burke asserts, "the first and simplest emotion which we discover in the human mind, is Curiosity" (31). Curiosity is "the most superficial of all the affections," Burke continues: "it changes its object perpetually; it has an appetite which is very sharp, but very easily satisfied; and it has always an appearance of giddiness, restlessness and anxiety" (31). Thus when Wordsworth describes his lust for "the tall rock/The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood" as "An appetite" (79, 81), it should come as no surprise that Wordsworth's hunger for the pleasures of novelty can never be sated.

Although the bliss Wordsworth initially derives from nature fades, his former absorption in his sense drive awakens him to the pleasure of beauty and enables him to recognize his formal drive, just as Schiller suggests. Wordsworth indulges his sense-drive until he is no longer satisfied with the novel exhilarations of nature:

> And all its aching joys are now no more,
> And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
> Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur: other gifts
> Have followed, for such loss, I would believe,
> Abundant recompence. (85-89)

Reflecting upon his youthful experience by the Wye and his lusty wrestling match with nature, Wordsworth voices an awareness of a change that proceeds from his sensual entanglement. Having thoroughly engaged his sense drive and satisfied his sensual curiosity, his "restlessness and anxiety" gives way to a feeling of stability. Hence, his developed sense drive leads to a cultivation of his formal drive. With a newfound consciousness, he seeks "real, permanent happiness in tranquil contemplation" and he uses his appreciation for natural beauty to relate to, rather than differentiate himself from, humanity (Mill 104).

As Schiller explains, the formal drive unites humanity through a shared awareness of human consciousness as "all limitations disappear, and from the mere unity of quantity to which the poverty of his senses reduced him, man has raised himself to a unity of ideas embracing the whole realm of phenomena" (83). The development of the formal drive demonstrates how the simple pleasures of the senses

yield to the complex thoughts of human minds. As a result, Schiller argues, "We are no longer individuals; we are species" (83), and so Wordsworth writes:

> We are laid asleep
> In body and become a living soul:
> While with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
> We see into the life of things. (46-50)

The enjambment of "We are laid asleep/In body" encourages just enough hesitation to evoke the unconsciousness associated with sleep. Thus the continuation of the line emphasizes the difference between body and spirit and the ability, if not the necessity, of laying the body to rest for the soul to thrive. Eyes closed, humans cultivate a true vision that sees beyond nature's wonders; rather, the darkness facilitates enlightenment as the formal drive grows and makes it possible to "see into the life of things." Wordsworth's recognition of this internal change reveals a beauty that conquers that of nature, even as he argues that without the beauty of nature such a change would never have been possible.

It is only upon his return that Wordsworth is able to see the cyclical movement of nature, his life, and humanity and, in doing so, to realize the triviality of time. In honoring the sense drive in his youth and developing the formal drive upon his return, Wordsworth's engagement with nature is secondary to his engagement with retrospection as past mingles with present and memory mixes with epiphany. By looking at himself in the past and remembering when he was "more like a man/Flying from something that he dreads than one/Who sought the thing he loved" (71-73),

Wordsworth can better comprehend his present self as an active seeker. It is only through his return to the Wye that he can clearly see where he has been and where he wishes to go, a dynamic that leads David Bromwich to suggest that "the weightiest word in the poem, more important than *nature* or even *thought*, is the simple word *again*" (86). Mentioned four times in the first stanza, "again" reflects the significance of memory and the past in creating a progressive present. Juxtaposed to the cyclical motion of nature, the human mind is forever expanding, infinitely growing and changing, even upon returning to the same place. Memory enables Wordsworth to see his own development and consequently not only to appreciate beauty but also to create it.

Wordsworth's ability to communicate his mental journey and current view underlines Schiller's claim that freedom can only be attained through rationality, which in turn relies upon beauty, for ultimately it is through the construction of his beautiful poetry—not his immersion in natural beauty—that Wordsworth discovers true liberty. After praising the "hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines/Of sportive wood run wild" (16-17), Wordsworth's admiration for a being's potential shifts to that of a being's mind. The sensual lust from his own sapling years has faded over time: the bank of the Wye evokes not only the pleasure of his youth but also "feelings too/Of unremembered pleasure" (31-32). This "unremembered pleasure" derives from Wordsworth's formal drive, which has set him free from sensual pleasures and allows him

> To look on nature, not as in the hour
> Of thoughtless youth, but hearing oftentimes

The still, sad music of humanity. (90-92)

In his newfound ability to hear humanity, Wordsworth's consideration for the collective surpasses all of the other pleasures that both nature and poetry inspire in him. No longer a roe running away from his disappointment in the French Revolution, Wordsworth now uses nature to see the reflection of man's many faculties. Through nature, Wordsworth finds beauty and then creates beauty through the creation of his poetry. And it is through his poetry that Wordsworth finds the ability to unify and liberate humanity.

The very creation of "Tintern Abbey" reflects Schiller's idea of freedom because Wordsworth recognizes that in limitation there is liberation, as in liberation there is limitation. As a form of beauty, art serves as a transition to a greater consciousness. Perhaps more importantly, Wordsworth creates an art that invites all humans to engage in mental transcendence. Just as the sense and formal drive compliment each other through their opposing aims, the form of verse within the realm of art provides the same discordant satisfaction. Just as Schiller creates the play drive as a compromise between the sense and formal drive, Wordsworth writes "Tintern Abbey" in free verse as a compromise between the spontaneity of nature and the traditions of art, for as M.H. Abrams explains in "Wordsworth and the Eighteenth Century," "the language of nature is not the language of poets as a class, but the language of mankind" (84). He is, as he writes in the "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), "a man speaking to men" in the "language really used by men" (272). This decision to compose in such a way that every person in England would be able to read

his poetry emphasizes Wordsworth's commitment to the collective through an art that illustrates the individual discovery in nature.

In the last third of "Tintern Abbey," Wordsworth addresses his sister and lifelong companion, Dorothy, to stress the significance of the mental process over the end result. Each step within the experience is crucial and adds to the human capacity for consciousness, for every individual must first indulge his sense drive in the "misty mountain winds" (137). Thus Wordsworth speaks in praise rather than in condescension when he confesses to Dorothy:

> …in thy voice I catch
> The language of my former heart, and read
> My former pleasures in the shooting lights
> Of thy wild eyes. (117-120)

Seeing his sister in the primary stages of discovering her own freedom, Wordsworth concludes the poem in praise of nature as well as Dorothy, for it is only nature that "can so inform/The mind that is within us" (126-127). Hence it is through immersing their sense drives in nature that humans acquire an appreciation for beauty. Furthermore, this appreciation for beauty leads to the development of the formal drive and, consequently, to an awareness of a person's own mental capacity. This consciousness of sense and psyche, as evidenced in "Tintern Abbey," can eventually lead to an ideal state Schiller calls the play drive. Wordsworth discovers his own play drive atop Mount Snowdon, in an episode of *The Prelude* to which I now turn, and rather than leading to a personal freedom, Wordsworth argues that such enlightenment eventually culminates in a collective liberty.

The Play Drive in The Prelude

In the thirteenth and final book of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth ascends Mount Snowdon in an act of individual exploration, exemplifying the personal journey he prescribes for everyone. The view from the peak inspires a mental climax as Wordsworth sees the endless sky as a reflection of his own infinite mind, and so *The Prelude* ends without an ending but instead with a beginning. The setbacks and strains proved essential for finally reaching the pinnacle, lacing the fog surrounding Mount Snowdon with validation and more subtly illustrating that the responsibility of the poet is to teach people how to live.

Embarking on their journey at night, "Hemmed round on every side with fog and damp," Wordsworth and the other two travelers possess a heightened consciousness as they do not sleep but seek in the dark (XIII:16). Soon the moon sheds light upon their path and in doing so reveals the sense drive at work. As the three men continue to climb, they absorb nature and utilize its beauty in their effort to reach the mountain's peak. Wordsworth then finds himself on the edge "of a huge sea of mist/ Which, meek and silent, rested at my feet" (XIII:43-44). This initial serenity of the ocean emphasizes human separation from nature—with the sea of mist now at his feet (before it was engulfing him), Wordsworth has accessed his formal drive and can appreciate the difference between himself and nature.

Wordsworth's impression of a "huge" yet "meek and silent" sea also serves as a contrast to the relatively small but loud human mind; juxtaposed to the calm ocean, an abyss in the distance thrashes. In recognizing the howling chasm, Wordsworth sees

not only people in nature but also nature in people and, most importantly, what separates people from nature. Unlike the placid ocean, uniform and ubiquitous, the abyss is alive and angry:

> A fixed, abysmal, gloomy breathing-place,
> Mounted the roar of waters—torrents—streams
> Innumerable, roaring with one voice!
> Heard over earth and sea, and in that hour,
> For so it seemed, felt by the starry heavens. (XIII:58-62)

The repetition of "roar" suggests an animalistic quality, an uncontrolled element, and yet when the waters "roar with one voice," the wilderness harnesses its power through unity. This is the symbol and sovereignty of a unified humanity. And so when Wordsworth reaches the peak of Mount Snowdon and stares out into the sea of mist, the infinite sea first overwhelms his senses before his mind recognizes its own reflection in the writhing abyss. Unlike nature, which simply exists, the human mind exists in order to contemplate, rendering the mind insatiable and truly infinite. Or so Wordsworth perceives it to be.

Despite Wordsworth's ocean extending "Far, far beyond" (XIII:48), Burke contends that "There are scarce any things which can become the objects of our sense that are really, and in their own nature infinite." But unable to escape one's own perspective, "they seem to be infinite, and they produce the same effects as if they were really so" (Burke 73). Perspective simultaneously strengthens and weakens the power of the mind, and so locked into their individual perspectives, human beings are simultaneously limited and liberated. If the mind knows no boundaries and fears no

end, it is through the mind that one can be absolutely free. On the other hand, however, if a human mind knows no boundaries and fears no end but nevertheless belongs to one man, that man is still confined to the convictions of his own mind. Perspective, therefore, shapes reality. Imagination creates infinity. Consciousness concocts truth.

Wordsworth has climbed Mount Snowdon and now stands at the peak of his own mind and in the pleasure of the play drive. Having begun the climb in darkness and found the summit by moonlight, Wordsworth was guided by his sense drive as the physical rigor of climbing a mountain challenged him:

> With forehead bent
> Earthward, as if in opposition set
> Against an enemy, [I] panted up
> With eager pace. (XIII:29-31)

Through his whole life up to this point, Wordsworth has seen nature as his comrade or combatant—never as a subordinate mirror of his own mind. But upon reaching the mountain summit and hearing the "roar of the waters," he is intimidated. He recognizes the sovereignty of humanity and thusly discovers his formal drive. Alone and yet surrounded, frozen in time and yet timeless, Wordsworth revels in nature, humanity and himself. The balance and interconnectedness becomes obvious to him, and his ability to recognize the common journey of humanity through his own private moment on Mount Snowdon coincides with Schiller's ideal existence. Through natural beauty and human consciousness, Wordsworth has reached the pinnacle—the play drive.

Wordsworth's experience of the play drive atop Mount Snowdon serves to inspire humanity through personal revelation. He grants the "mighty Mind" agency: by believing in the authority of the human mind, he conceives that it actually "feeds upon infinity" (XIII:69-70). Nature reflects and proves the power of the people as Wordsworth celebrates the human psyche:

> Such minds are truly from the Deity,
> For they are powers, and hence the highest bliss
> That flesh can know is theirs. (XIII:112-114)

Herein lies the beauty of Wordsworth's *Prelude*, for in transcribing his own experience he is attempting to incite a "roar of waters, torrents, streams/Innumerable, roaring with one voice." By exposing the power of perspective when examining one's surrounding reality, Wordsworth proves that the greatest influence is not the government but instead each person. The actions of a people are contingent upon the support of the individual. Hence in making human beings rational through beauty, Wordsworth also makes human beings autonomous through poetry.

As a poet, Wordsworth's responsibility lies in illustrating the immortality of the mind because, "too weak to tread the ways of truth/This Age [may] fall back to old idolatry" (XIII:431-432). In recognizing the natural ebb and flow of civilizations from the collapse of Ancient Greece to the recent failure of the French Revolution, Wordsworth wants to awaken the individual mind to see that "without infinite time we should never have any awareness of the moment" (Schiller 131). The sovereignty of the mind derives in part from its recognition of the circularity of time, for as history repeats itself, the mind grows to see beyond time to the current moment.

Comprehending the span and circle of time, individuals will see that this particular moment is spectacular because they perceive it as such—the tragedy and glory of their lives have been experienced before and will be experienced again. Wordsworth pays attention to the individual rather than his country because while be believes that "nations [will] sink together," he also asserts, "we shall still/Find solace in the knowledge which we have" (XIII:435-436). It is thus individual knowledge that makes humans infinite. Attained through the play drive, knowledge separates humanity from the natural world and is what enables humans to transcend time.

In addition to a healthy immersion in the sensual world balanced with an enlightened mental transcendence that together culminate in the desired play drive, Wordsworth also echoes Schiller in showing that memory also informs knowledge. Remembering at once both blurs and crystallizes time and thereby frees and freezes the mind. As an instrument of perspective, memory shapes one's conception of time because "time must have its beginning in the Person, since something constant must form the basis of change" (Schiller 75). It makes sense that time should be a construct of the mind given Schiller's belief that in balancing the sense drive with the formal drive, we are trying to balance a simultaneous adherence to and denial of time. And yet, upon reaching the play drive, "time, with its whole never-ending succession, is in us" (Schiller 83). Thus time is created by the mind and woven into memory.

As evidenced by Wordsworth's poetry, the mind is sovereign but it is specifically each human's ability to remember—to recognize change and distinguish between the past and present—that enables us to transcend the natural world. "Without memory," Berkeley wrote, "other faculties are rendered useless" (122).

When Wordsworth returns to Tintern Abbey, it is his return that creates a marked period of time that otherwise would carry on without periodization, for "in order to imagine a change in time, we have to divide up the totality of time" (Schiller 129). When Wordsworth reaches the summit of Mount Snowdon, it is the experience of having never before witnessed a sea of mist from that height that severs the past from the present. Memory and man's ability to return—either physically or mentally—is a gift of the mind. Recalling the past invigorates the present, illuminates the future and also separates humans from nature by intensifying our awareness of ourselves within and outside of time. Just as people will never reach a complete consciousness, we will also never grasp a full concept of time because "time, which reveals all other things, is itself not to be discovered" (Locke 146). But Locke's acknowledgment that humans cannot discover time showcases a mind "that feeds upon infinity" (Wordsworth 70). Through a heightened consciousness, humans can recognize their own limitations and, in recognizing limitation, humanity is liberated. "Thus," Schiller wrote, "it is only through limits that we attain to reality," and it is only through art that humans can learn to recognize limits and, consequently, reality (Schiller 129).

As Berkeley writes, "A bird's song improves, like the poet's, in part because it can build from yesterday's tune," and so memory is one of the poet's most crucial tools for composing (122). The ability to remember serves as a fundamental component in answering the question "how to live?" Wordsworth's *Prelude* sings a knowledge collected throughout his lifetime in the hopes that humans will listen and hear not only the voice of a poet but also the beauty and purpose of art.

In the hopes of not only transcribing his life lessons but also translating them in such a way as to make his verse accessible to everyone, the poet "must descend from this supposed height…in order to excite rational sympathy, he must express himself as other men express themselves," as Wordsworth writes in the "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* (249). The role of the poet, therefore, is to harness his faculties to such a degree that he can make the most abstract, ambitious thoughts comprehensible to the common person. This desire stems from the Romantics' wish to avoid future national failures by instilling each human being with a sense of true autonomy. Although he asserts that a poet has a greater awareness of his feelings and insights, Wordsworth also declares: "these passions and thoughts and feelings are the general passions and thoughts and feelings of men" (249). In creating a sense of self-control and empowerment, Wordsworth aims to prove that a greater consciousness "alone is genuine Liberty" (122). Hence poets must share their rich insight because "poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge," and yet they must also recognize that they are "singing a song in which all human beings join with [them]" (248). Poets must enlighten humanity but also possess humility—they must be at once extraordinary and ordinary to make their poetry both accessible and applicable.

Convinced that countries will inevitably "sink together," Wordsworth transcends the circularity of time through a higher consciousness and a memory for the future in which humans "shall still/Find solace in the knowledge which we have/Blessed with true happiness" (XIII:435-7). Aware of his inability to discover time, Wordsworth instead exposes the power of knowledge and liberty. People can overcome the world around them by recognizing that they shape the world, for "the

judgment of all minds is expressed through our own, the choice of all hearts is represented by our action" (Burke 79). Inspired by memory, human consciousness informs knowledge, broadens perspective and exceeds time. And in understanding "the Mighty mind," humans will see themselves as instigators, not bystanders, in their life events. The pain and pleasure of experience will melt into a sea of mist, an abyss of the infinite mind. The poet will show the people how to live and the people will live bigger, bolder and freer. The seasons will continue to change, nations will rise and fall, but the human mind will transcend the boundaries of time.

The Responsibility of the Poet

"Poetry is at bottom a criticism of life," wrote Matthew Arnold, "the greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life, --to the question: How to live" (Arnold 33). When Wordsworth composed *The Prelude*, he attempted to answer this question by exploring his own life and, in translating his past into poetry, he reveals the universality and authority of autobiography. Wordsworth's ability to recognize his own "luminous moments" makes him human, he tells us, and his ability to commit those fluid memories to paper makes him a poet. Wordsworth not only perceives beauty—he conceives it.

Using "the mode of communication [that] unites us all," the everyday vernacular, Wordsworth wrote *The Prelude* to understand himself, humanity and how to live (Schiller 215). Having composed "Tintern Abbey" in free verse to negotiate the "dizzy raptures" of nature and the "sober pleasure" of the mind in an effort to make his poetry accessible to all of humanity, in *The Prelude,* rather than freezing

and juxtaposing two moments of his life, Wordsworth investigates his entire time on earth. The consequently lengthy endeavor resulted in thirteen books (and approximately two hundred and fifteen pages of poetry), in which he advocates for the pleasures of process, the pleasures of exploration. Recounting his greatest disappointments, his clearest epiphanies and his happiest moments, Wordsworth unifies humanity through the commonality of experience. The threads of grief, joy, excitement and anxiety that run through every life begin and end in an entangled knot in which Wordsworth, as a poet, is both integral and separate. *The Prelude* paradoxically includes and excludes Wordsworth from the collective by weaving him into the tapestry of humanity through his experience and distinguishing him from the rest of humanity in his ability to express this experience in verse.

It is important to look at *The Prelude* not only as an autobiographical poem full of individual moments but also as an artist's attempt to create something beautiful. In the "Preface to Lyrical Ballads," Wordsworth dedicates a section to answering the question "What is a Poet?" and, before plunging into *The Prelude*, it seems worthwhile to first see how Wordsworth sees himself. Often criticized for his egoism, Wordsworth unsurprisingly spares himself no glory when he writes that a poet is a man who is "endued with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind" (246). This overt praise of poets, however, emerges as a result of Wordsworth's effort to elucidate and validate a lifetime of inner turmoil. Haunted by the fervor and failure of the French Revolution, Wordsworth relives each phase and, as Stephen Gill writes, "no single work of art

registers as well as *The Prelude* does the hopes and disappointments of an individual then, or reveals as nakedly the turmoil which the collapse of hope entailed" (4). Wordsworth sings with a poet's sensitivity and it is this acute awareness of himself, the world and his place within it that makes Wordsworth worth reading, as John Stuart Mill argued so eloquently in his own autobiography. *The Prelude* delves into the mind and then comes up for context, balancing the external with the internal and connecting the most intimate emotion with the most universal expression—language—for as Edmund Burke remarks, "The proper manner of conveying the affections of the mind from one to another, is by words; there is a great insufficiency in all other methods of communication" (60). Hence, it is not that Wordsworth sees poets as greater humans but that he insists they are more aware of the trials humanity must endure and so, with his astute awareness, Wordsworth is more qualified to find the answer to how to live.

Despite Wordsworth's regard for poets, he reserves his highest reverence for humanity. The art a poet produces does not compete with the reality his art aims to mimic, just as a poet's expression of emotion cannot contend with the actual experience of emotion. Wordsworth makes his position clear when he argues, "whatever portion of this faculty we may suppose even the greatest poet to possess, there cannot be a doubt but that the language which it will suggest to him, must, in liveliness and truth, fall far short of that which is uttered by men in real life, under the actual pressure of those passions" (246). It is ultimately for humanity, not himself, that Wordsworth writes. Aware of the play drive, Wordsworth aims to lift up humanity through his own ability to create beauty through art. Just as Schiller

believed that "there is no other way of making sensuous man rational except by first making him aesthetic," Wordsworth believed that "the poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time" (248). Thus Wordsworth sees it as a responsibility rather than a mere talent to tell his own story and to convey the "infinite complexity of pain and pleasure" (248) for "whatever therefore is terrible…is sublime too" (Burke 57). Through its conviction and its confession of both disappointment and hope, *The Prelude* encapsulates Wordsworth's greatest ambition for his poetry. Through time and introspection Wordsworth discovers his play drive and consequently the ideal balance between sensuality and mentality. Having found "real, permanent happiness in tranquil contemplation," Wordsworth writes down his own experience to praise the process and to promote each person's ability to attain his own play drive. Singing the only song he knows to be true—his own life—Wordsworth creates a beautiful work of art in the effort to enlighten his fellow humans by illuminating the present pleasure in past pain.

Chapter II:
Emerson's Eternal Present and Presence

He'd read everything Wordsworth had published and he had even memorized his favorite poems. Like a love-struck teenager or a star-struck fan, Ralph Waldo Emerson recited Wordsworth's verses as if they were mantras and wrote about them with an enthusiasm that bordered on giddiness. "This style is bloodwarm," Emerson wrote of Wordsworth's personal poetry in "The American Scholar": "Man is surprised to find that things near are not less beautiful and wondrous than things remote" (78). When Emerson made his transatlantic voyage to finally meet Wordsworth, however, he realized that some things are better from a remote view. Walking with Wordsworth, Emerson discovered new distance between the aged Romantic and himself as Wordsworth spouted cynicism and yearned to argue what he had argued years before in his various works. Coming face to face with Wordsworth's shortcomings, Emerson remembered Wordsworth as "sadly isolated…repellant and embittered" (Porte 38). While the immediate aftermath of the interaction left Emerson thoroughly disappointed, it was this disenchantment with Wordsworth that enabled Emerson to revel in his own power. By casting Wordsworth to the world of the past, Emerson was free to formulate new theories on nature, art and the mind.

"The true poem is the poet's mind; the true ship is the ship builder," Emerson states in "History," revealing his fundamental belief in individual insight, innovation and ingenuity (80). This emphasis on the process rather than the product is essential to understanding Emerson's view of the poet and of himself. It is the power of the mind to create and it is the responsibility of the poet to convey those moments of mental clarity. Thus, Emerson's effort to enrich his mind and the minds around him is

just as important as the prose that result from that effort. Just as the builder must first visualize a ship before nailing two pieces of wood together, the poet must also conceptualize an idea before putting his pen to paper.

The ability to communicate personal revelation through written illustration, as poets strive to do, reflects the mind's unparalleled power to reach new heights of understanding. Furthermore, to experience more than one epiphany is to prove the necessity of change, of mental plasticity, for as more recent revelations come to overshadow previous opinions, the capacity to create ideas outshines the ideas themselves. While change may seem like an organic part of life, an unavoidable occurrence rather than an objective, Emerson recognized that the appeal of the familiar could threaten creativity. As an American successor to the British Romantics, Emerson had memorized parts of Wordsworth's *Prelude* and often quoted Coleridge's motto, "quantum scimus sumus" ("we are what we know"). Art and the knowledge inherent in art can liberate the mind, but the appreciation of another's art to the point of forgetting one's own potential defeats art's purpose, which is "for nothing but to inspire" (Emerson "Scholar," 67). When a poem or a painting soothes the soul instead of inciting the spirit, art has demeaned itself and deprived the mind of the change it craves. And so artists, as creators of art, must never settle with their current beliefs but constantly challenge them as if they were rocks to be overturned. No one believed this more than Emerson when he declares: "I unsettle all things. No facts are to me sacred; none are profane; I simply experiment, an endless seeker with no Past at my back" ("Circles," 176). This almost seems like a direct address to

Wordsworth, who was haunted by the decisions he made in his youth and unable to move forward without first looking backward.

Perhaps Emerson's insistence on incessant change made disappointment inevitable, for his fervor for transformation could only be matched by his expectations for himself and those he loved and admired. Wordsworth's stale observations bored Emerson: he could have stayed at home in Massachusetts and read the same thing that Wordsworth recited on their walk. Instead, he was forced to confront the reality that one of his favorite poets' minds had turned rigid, his limited insight painfully symbolized by the goggles he wore to fend off "a perpetual threat of blindness" (Richardson 149). It is important to remember that at the time of their meeting, Wordsworth was sixty-three and suffering from a general state of poor health while Emerson had just turned the sharp age of thirty. Nevertheless, the physical condition of each man in 1833 reflects the movements they represent. Having crossed the ocean to meet Wordsworth (along with Thomas Carlyle, Coleridge and Walter Savage Landor), Emerson had paid his respects to the kings of Romanticism and was now ready to create a wave of change on the other side of the Atlantic.

Appreciating the rawness of life, Emerson despised revision and instead devoted his life to discovery. Constantly searching for pure experience, Emerson "made an effort to recall and write down dreams, to record first impressions, not second thoughts" (Richardson 190). Emerson's unquenchable thirst for novelty derived from his belief that "the one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul" ("Scholar," 68). Rather than think about what he had or had not done or what he did

or did not know, Emerson lived for the next idea, "for the best part…of every mind is not that which he knows, but that which hovers in gleams, suggestions, tantalizing, unpossessed, before him" (*Journal Entry*, 406). Like a child trying to capture a night sky full of fireflies, Emerson yearned to cup each idea in his hands before releasing it to capture a new one.

In this chapter I will examine how Emerson had to abandon his initial passion for the Romantics in order to discover the potential of his own spirit and pen. Having realized that "nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind," Emerson was able to develop new ideas about nature, create the concept of "the active soul," engage with others but rely on himself and, perhaps most importantly, use his gift as an essayist and lecturer to make the world more poetic ("Self-Reliance," 149). By examining not only Emerson's essays but also his journal entries and actions, it becomes clear that Emerson exemplifies the ideal poet of the nineteenth-century, according to Matthew Arnold's definition that poets must teach people how to live. Just as Wordsworth showed people how to experience a personal freedom in the wake of the French Revolution, Emerson spoke of individual liberty to an America that was about to rupture over the issue of slavery. Undoubtedly inspired by Wordsworth and his British contemporaries, Emerson molded the general beliefs of Romanticism so that they specifically applied to American society. As such, it is important to view Emerson's works as both an expansion of British Romanticism and as an entirely original beast. Through his opinion of nature, the mind, the importance of others and the sanctity of the self, Emerson sheds a new light on a familiar scene. From his prose

I will move on to study how Emerson put his prose into action, for "words are also actions, and actions are a kind of words" ("The Poet," 225). Particularly on the subject of slavery, Emerson was slow to voice his influential opinion, drawing much criticism and several attempts to dismiss his works as "a gospel of selfishness, illogic, optimism, and parochialism" (Richardson 233). When considering how optimistic Emerson could be considering the death and loss that surrounded him, however, his idealism almost cancels out his apparent self-absorption. Indeed, this idea of balance proves to be significant, for Emerson sincerely believed in "Compensation": the belief that the good of the world equals the evil: and thus through Emerson's faith in the present, he performs the role of the Poet by teaching people how to live in the moment and for the future.

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Having been enlightened and later disappointed by the British Romantics, Emerson's active soul led him to recognize the importance of the ideas of experience, circles, history, politics, skepticism and crisis, all of which became essays that sometimes contradict each other but always divulge a deep faith in the power of the mind and the strength of the human spirit. Emerson often transformed these essays into lectures he delivered around New England and across the country, the most controversial, if not also the most famous, being his "Divinity School Address."

Despite having graduated from Harvard Divinity School as a Unitarian Minister, Emerson's lecture resounded with his current belief in self-reliance and self-discovery rather than with the expected reverence for the institution of religion, "Let me admonish you, first of all, to go alone; to refuse the good models, even those

which are sacred in the imagination of men, and dare to love God without mediator or veil" (113). While individual conviction is certainly important in the Christian faith, the Harvard monarchs believed Emerson was pushing his own agenda at the school's expense when he continued:

> Courage, piety, love, wisdom, can teach; and every man can open his door to these angels, and they shall bring him the gift of tongues. But the man who aims to speak as books enable, as synods use, as the fashion guides, and as interest commands, babbles. Let him hush (108).

Believing every man to be his own leader, Emerson stressed the power of revelation and condemned the influence of others, which got him into trouble not only with Harvard but also with the entire Christian community.

In an attempt to salvage the relationship, Emerson wrote a letter to Harvard faculty member Henry Ware, Jr., who had also served as Emerson's mentor. The letter addresses the various instances of cited abuse but ultimately reveals Emerson's humility and humor when he admits that he did not consider himself "esteemed near enough to the institutions and mind of society to deserve the notice of the masters of literature and religion" (*Journal Entry* 116). Charming and lighthearted, Emerson's letter does not even hint at the personal anxiety the public controversy caused him—a common conflict throughout Emerson's life is how his published passion for the ideal battled his private struggle with the tragedies of real life. In the heated debates over the Divinity School incident, Emerson always kept his composure in letters and

essays while releasing his worry in his journal entries. On the same day that he wrote so jestingly to Ware, Emerson tried to encourage himself in his journal when he wrote, "Steady, Steady! When this fog of good and evil affection falls, it is hard to see and walk straight" (*Journal Entry* 119). While his public documents convey Emerson's truths, it is in Emerson's journals that we find his most raw energy and most honest insight.

Acknowledging the inevitable challenges of reality, Emerson's journal serves as a record that reflects his own worries and, more importantly, proves him to be exceptionally human—the very trait Wordsworth reserves for the Poet. Looking back to Chapter I, Wordsworth's worship of the Poet derives from the Poet's ability to enlighten humanity while maintaining a level of humility—poets must be at once both extraordinary and ordinary to make their poetry both accessible and applicable. The same can be said of Emerson. Having demonstrated the power to enlighten a large and long-lasting audience about nature and the power of the mind, Emerson's influence has the same effect as Wordsworth's. Sharing the esteem Wordsworth has for the Poet while simultaneously inciting an enthusiasm characteristic of poetry through his prose, Emerson invites us to reconsider the definition of a poet.

As I noted in Chapter I, Matthew Arnold defines poetry as "a criticism of life," adding that "the greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life, --to the question: How to live" (Arnold 33). Wordsworth's *Prelude* and "Tintern Abbey" exemplify this idea of teaching people how to live as Wordsworth cites times in his own life of struggle and illumination to inspire others to search for their own truths. Poets share personal testimonies and "far from

narrowing us, this perception opens the gates" (Richardson 190). By speaking specifically, poets transcend the physical world and reach people universally. Motivated by the verses of Wordsworth and the other Romantics, Emerson recognizes the infinite power of communication in "Circles":

> Therefore we value the poet…he smites and arouses me with his shrill tones, breaks up my whole chain of habits, and I open my eyes on my own possibilities. He claps wings to the sides of all the solid old lumber of the world, and I am capable once more of choosing a straight path in theory and practice (174).

In "Tintern Abbey," as a mature Wordsworth looks fondly to his younger sister Dorothy, still reveling in the physical beauty of nature rather than seeing it as a reflection of the mind's infinite possibility, he conveys the pricelessness of the process. Rather than appreciating the final product or condemning the past, Wordsworth emphasizes the eternal gift of growth—this is the power of poetry. More significant than the tangible lines a poet produces are the images and inspiration he evokes through the experience. Hence when poets fail to grow or forget to progress, their poetry contradicts their form.

Emerson's prose imitates poetry as much as it echoes certain values of British Romanticism. Despite his literary connection to Wordsworth, Coleridge, Carlyle and others, however, Emerson's emphasis on forgetting the past rings of pure Transcendentalism: "The use of history is to give value to the present hour and its duty" ("Crisis" 370). Although autobiography is important, introspection should be

controlled rather than a controller. In "Self-Reliance," Emerson wants humans to see the sacredness in their own active soul and in the moment:

> But Man postpones and remembers; he does not live in the present, but with reverted eye laments the past, or heedless of the riches that surround him, stands on tiptoe to foresee the future. He cannot be happy and strong until he too lives with nature in the present, above time (157).

Frustrated by our constant reflection, Emerson emphasizes, "An everlasting Now reigns in Nature" ("Crisis," 368). For Schiller, Nature is the catalyst for an individual's development of the three drives. For Wordsworth, Nature serves first as an inspiration for and later as a subordinate representation of the mind. For Emerson, however, Nature is the blood in the trees and the leaves in his veins. The valleys, rivers and mountains are not for examination but for entertainment. Emerson branches out from his Romantic roots when he claims his soul to be a part, rather than a superior of nature, and again condemns the soft palms of the scholar: "You must treat the days respectfully, you must be a day yourself, and not interrogate it like a college professor" ("Crisis," 371). With a grass-stained soul, Emerson uses the muck and beauty of nature as a physical representation of the human experience. Hence, his insistence that "Nature does not like to be observed, and likes that we should be her fools and playmates" ("Experience," 257) stems from his belief in experiencing everything and reserving nothing, for "there can be no greatness without abandonment" ("Crisis," 372). Emerson's view of the role of nature lies somewhere between the sense drive and the play drive, as he believes we should always engage

with nature and not "interrogate it like a college professor." At the same time, however, he appreciates nothing more than the active soul. Hence, rather than seeing nature and the mind as individual forces, Emerson sees them as inextricably linked and overlapping, and so to be free in nature is to be free in ourselves. This balance results in the play drive, but to acquire it, Emerson does not hold back but instead dives in, living life to the fullest by quenching both his physical and psychological curiosities.

Forgetting formality and neglecting revision, Emerson viewed poetry as a natural entity—a thing to be experienced and played with rather than polished and analyzed. Like nature, poetry also weaves between the internal and external world. While Wordsworth viewed poetry as proof of the mind's power, Emerson believed:

> Poetry was all written before time was, and whenever we are so finely organized that we can penetrate into that region where the air is music, we hear those primal warblings and attempt to write them down, but we lose ever and anon a word or a verse and substitute something of our own, and thus miswrite the poem. ("The Poet," 224)

Hence the Poet is not able to make something out of thin air, but rather to extract "those primal warblings" and, with a "more delicate ear [to] write down these cadences more faithfully" ("The Poet," 224). This idea of primordial poetry is not revolutionary, as Wordsworth often emphasizes that poets do not have a special ability, only a sharper and more sensitive ability. In Book XIII of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth reminds us of our collective experience and power by stating "that Men least sensitive see, hear, perceive,/ and cannot chuse but feel" (85-86). Similarly

stressing the universal human ability to sense nature's sacredness, R.D. Miller writes, "the language of nature is not the language of poets as a class, but the language of mankind" (84). Although Wordsworth and Emerson share this view of a universal language of nature among humans, they react in opposite ways. Through his individual excursions in nature and in his notebook, Wordsworth seeks to channel nature through his mind. Meanwhile, Emerson, like nature itself, "is wild or he is nothing" (Richardson 229).

Emerson's reverence for nature never dulls, not even when he compares it to the genius of his own mind. When Wordsworth looks back on his life and sees how nature initially informed his mind, he stands from a higher view and realizes that his mind now informs nature. Emerson too recognizes the education that nature and humans derive from each other, and he will never climb a mountain peak tall enough to convince his soul of the absolute sovereignty of the mind. "People wish to be settled," he writes in "Circles"; but "only as far as they are unsettled is there any hope for them" (177). With the "primal warblings" whispering softly in his ear and with an enthusiastic spirit in his step, Emerson's insistence on incessant change and individual discovery proves the man known for his lectures and essays to be undeniably poetic.

"I was born a poet," wrote Emerson, but the world disagreed. While Emerson's verses are still usually tucked away in the back of his collected works, untouched by the high school students, scholars and CEOs who have all read "Self Reliance," it is Emerson's personal actions and impact that make him poetic. Acknowledging Emerson's poetic impact despite his lackluster poetry, Peter Field

explains, “Emerson’s poetry never rose to the level of greatness to be sure, but his prose occasionally soared in large measure because of his intuitive sense of the comeliness of everyday speech and imagery” (Field 483). Although wishing to be a hermit as Wordsworth often was, Emerson wrestled with his simultaneous desire for company. After all, “what right, cries the good world, has the man of genius to retreat, and indulge himself?” (“Transcendentalist,” 201). While Wordsworth devoted much time to regretting his youthful decision to leave France during the Revolution, Emerson does not concern himself with past choices. Instead, he searches for the next adventure and scolds all who let their pasts hold them back. Addressing each reader, Emerson asks, “But why should you keep your head over your shoulder? Why drag about this corpse of your memory?” (“Self-Reliance,” 152). Aggressively wishing for every person to revel in the moment, Emerson’s message reaches out from the pages and shakes the reader. Emerson’s vehement prose teaches people how to see beyond their immediate, physical surroundings using testimony, sympathy and insight to transcend the contemporary and pervade the present. As such, Emerson assumes the responsibility of Arnold’s Poet, as he urges the world to experience more, one page and person at a time. In revealing how “the true poem is the poet’s mind,” Emerson proves his ultimate goal is to teach people how to live (“History,” 80).

Unrehearsed and unconditional, Emerson’s drive to inspire personal revelation though interaction was a natural, unstoppable force, for he believed that “the meaning of human life is individual education” (Richardson 80). While helping others to find their own intrinsic truths is expected of poets, it is inherent in Emerson. Despite his background as a minister, Emerson despised the idea of preaching, of claiming access

to a higher, absolute knowledge, for "Preaching is a pledge, and I wish to say what I think and feel today, with the proviso that tomorrow perhaps I shall contradict it all" (*Journal Entry*, 137). Celebrating the sovereignty of the self, Emerson "never wrote for groups or classes or institutions; his intended audience was always the single hearer or reader" (Richardson, xii). As a different element of nature, people, Emerson believes, are another source of inspiration. In fact, it seems as though Emerson's enthusiasm for nature and for people intertwine as he strives for collision and seeks confrontation at every avenue.

When Emerson delivered his lecture, "The American Scholar," to Harvard's graduating class of 1837, he spoke with a mature wisdom that captivated and inspired his young audience. One senior in attendance who was particularly enthralled by Emerson and even followed his advice to keep a journal was none other than Waldon Pond's greatest advocate and Emerson's future good friend, Henry David Thoreau. Emerson and Thoreau's enduring friendship provides further evidence of Emerson's poetic impact, for rather than limiting the power of inspiration to poets, he encourages scholars "to cheer, to raise, and to guide men by showing them facts amidst appearances" (73). In doing so, Emerson enlarges the number of transcendent minds and, consequently, the number of active souls. For unlike Wordsworth, who saw the mind's infinite potential, Emerson believed the human soul—the all-encompassing essence of every individual—could flourish beyond the boundaries of time.

In the effort to illuminate the necessity of education through experience, Emerson emphasizes the ephemeral and eternal component of both nature and the soul. Paradoxically, one must recognize the sovereignty of the moment while

appreciating the circularity of time, as "an everlasting Now reigns in Nature" ("Crisis," 368) and yet "the world of any moment is the merest appearance" ("Scholar," 73). This theory of time's simultaneous obsoleteness and significance provide a clear springboard for his ultimate ambition to encourage the individual and to provoke the sleeping soul:

> If there be one lesson more than another which should pierce his ear, it is, The world is nothing, the man is all; in yourself is the law of all nature, and you know not yet how a globule of sap ascends; in yourself slumbers the whole of Reason; it is for you to know all; it is for you to dare all. ("Scholar," 79)

It does not require much thought or imagination to understand why high school students not only read, but also affectionately remember, the words of Emerson. In his own time, Emerson urged his listeners and readers to think above the daily grind to a greater consciousness and as Richardson points out, "Transcendentalism did not transform American life, but it did change—and continues to change—individual American lives" (Richardson 250). Thoreau, one of Emerson's most avid followers, went on to establish himself as another leading mind, whose ideas continue to reveal themselves in new forms and different forums over the years. During the 1960s civil rights movement, Martin Luther King Jr. credited Thoreau's essay, "Civil Disobedience," as his first exposure to the idea of non-violent resistance. King's own "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" overflows with Transcendental ideology, including the concept of an imprisoned mind. Indeed, Transcendentalism has become so entwined with modern mainstream ideals that it is

now hard to extricate Emerson and Thoreau from the flourishing garden of modern thought as their work still teaches individuals and

> Goes on tying things together, diminishing anomalies, discovering roots running under ground whereby contrary and remote things cohere and flower out from stem. ("Scholar," 78)

Connecting minds, time and nature, Emerson's ideas in "The American Scholar" ring as true as ever. My confidence in Emerson's legacy was further verified just last night when I happened to catch a glimpse of a tattoo on a boy's wrist. Looking more closely, I read the familiar line, "Live the life you've imagined." Thoreau. The boy told me he had been in an accident three years ago and when he had recovered, he got the tattoo as a reminder "of exactly what I want to do for the rest of my life." Nearly two hundred years after Emerson had inspired Thoreau on his graduation day, and over fifty years since Thoreau first stirred the soul of Martin Luther King Jr., a twenty-year old boy serves as living proof that Transcendentalism has inspired generations of people who embody "all the ability of the time, all the contributions of the past, all the hopes of the future" ("Scholar," 79).

Craving interaction with nature, with poetry, with his colleagues and with himself, Emerson exemplifies the true, inexhaustible poet. Having given hundreds of lectures to thousands of people in his lifetime, Emerson wielded influence not only in New England but also up and down the coast. Divinely driven, Emerson "lived for ideas," as Richardson writes in *A Mind on Fire*, "but he did so with the reckless, headlong ardor of a lover" (xi). This ardor developed into a lifelong affair with the individual reader, as Emerson's passion still ignites minds with a sense of

simultaneous vulnerability and invincibility. Nearly two hundred years later, his works are still often included in high school and college curriculums, proving Emerson to be as influential as Arnold's Poet and his impact to be nothing short of epic.

Like the "mind" of the poet, the work of the poet must be elastic; the message must be able to stretch with time and to remain relevant and inspiring ("History," 80). In order to teach us how to live, the poet must recognize the changes that inevitable occur through life. Just as the ship builder must make a ship sturdy enough to survive storms yet light enough to stay afloat, the poet must create a poem that is grounded in the moment and yet transcendent of time. I read "Self-Reliance" for the first time in my eleventh grade English class and, caught in the deluge of college searching and transcript comparing, I will always remember the relief Emerson evoked when I read, "I am ashamed to think how easily we capitulate to badges and names, to large societies and dead institutions" ("Self-Reliance, 150). As I now prepare to graduate, I can look back and see how Emerson's essay has consistently pushed me through moments of academic strife ("Do your work, and you shall reinforce yourself"), identity crisis ("envy is ignorance…imitation is suicide") and immobilizing uncertainty ("obey thy heart"), only to reveal new angles and avenues every time.

The plasticity of "Self-Reliance" derives from its inspiration from and emphasis on nature, for Emerson believes, "my book should smell of pines and resound with the hum of insects" (153). Indeed, Emerson conveys not only Nature but also himself through ink, and his readers appreciated this refreshing approach as an enthusiastic reader confessed in the *New York Times*, "Emerson—the man, and

Emerson—the book, are one. No such identity is observable anywhere. It is a soul and body union—the reconciliation of letter and spirit that was once deemed impracticable" (Sinclair 2). With the woods as his muse, Emerson then applies natural flexibility to the human mentality, suggesting that our minds can expand eternally if we only allow them to do so. His belief in the sovereignty of the moment reflects the duty of the Poet to teach people how to live, as Emerson instills in his readers a sense of unparalleled importance, and empowers them with the freedom of mental plasticity:

> A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds…with consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do. He may as well concern himself with his shadow on the wall. Speak what you think now in hard words and tomorrow speak what tomorrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict every thing you said today ("Self-Reliance," 153).

No longer restricted to past beliefs, Emerson's readers are encouraged to challenge everything and swear to nothing. No longer prohibited by previous promises, they are free to feel deeply and live truly.

Emerson's concern for "a great soul" is a theme threaded throughout his works, and it is his appreciation for not only the mind but also the entire human entity, the active soul, that enables him to offer his readers a way of life. A key component of the active soul, Emerson contends, is not only human engagement in nature but also humans engaging with each other, for "the point of greatest interest is where the land and water meet" (*Journal*, 185).

Emerson struggled to find a balance between benefiting from the company of others and finding time for himself. As a founding member and host of the Transcendental Club, Emerson opened his home to discuss ideas and to "protest against the arid intellectual climate of Harvard and Cambridge" (Richardson 245). In addition to the club, Emerson was close friends and spent much time with Thoreau, Amos Bronson Alcott, Margaret Fuller and Charles and Elizabeth Hoar, among several others. As a writer and later the editor of the Transcendental Club's periodical, *The Dial*, Emerson helped to circulate and publicize his ideals in a medium even more accessible than his lectures and prose.

Having grown up with four brothers, Emerson learned early on of the irreplaceable pleasure of surrounding oneself with admirable souls. The difficulty was not separating but coexisting in society and oneself:

> It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude. ("Self-Reliance," 151)

Emerson's insistence on not only his self but also on every other self invites the reader to join in his effort to make a more poetic world by creating a worldwide community striving for infinite, individual wisdom. Despite his aggressive stance in "Self-Reliance" and other texts that stress the sovereignty of the self,

> Part of the power of Emerson's individualism is his insistence, at crucial moments, that individualism does not mean isolation or self-sufficiency. This is not a paradox, for it is only the strong individual

> who can frankly concede the sometimes surprising extent of his own dependence. (Richardson 88)

Most often seeking support in times of grief, we usually discover on whom we can rely when at our very lowest. Emerson had several grief-stricken moments, and thus multiple moments to learn about depending on others and true friendship. Waldo's father, William Emerson, died during Waldo's early childhood, leaving the boy heartbroken and instantly closer with his brothers William, Edward, Charles and Bulkeley. Emerson's life was to be full of early deaths: his eldest brother, John, died when Waldo was four; his first wife, Ellen Tucker, died at age nineteen within two years of their marriage; Edward died at age twenty-nine and two years later Charles died; and in 1836, Emerson's first born son, Waldo, died at age six. This seemingly endless barrage of tragedies is enough to paralyze a survivor, and indeed, sometimes Emerson did succumb to moments of despair. In his essay, "Experience," he writes, "I grieve that grief can teach me nothing, nor carry me one step into real nature" (256). But, characteristically of Emerson, he cannot despair for long as he forces his persevering soul to push through the pain and with the last bit of strength he asserts, "never mind the ridicule, never mind the defeat; up again, old heart!" (273). Having lost his father, two brothers, lover, first child and best friend (Thoreau died in 1862 from tuberculosis), Emerson transcended his pain to see his life's greater purpose.

Remembering those he lost, Emerson used their love to help define his most important principles, as "the memory of Charles became transmuted into his personal principle or archetype for friendship" (Richardson 224). Thus Emerson's tragedies enriched his insight and strengthened his arguments, ultimately leading him to believe

that “our life is not so much threatened as our perception” (“Experience,” 255). Thus, rather than regret past decisions or time ill-spent, Emerson pledged his loyalty to the everlasting present. Emerson also does not wish to erase or forget his past but does aim “to make a place for the future. The more cherished our history, the more oppressive it tends to be” (Neufeldt and Barr 100). The idea of moving on from memories is difficult and the actual action is arduous—nobody knew this better than Emerson.

Biographer after biographer describes Emerson’s relationship with his first wife, Ellen Tucker, as nothing short of fairytale magic, two active souls threaded through one eye. The two were engaged when Ellen was seventeen and already suffering from tuberculosis. Having followed the doctor’s every suggestion—moving to the country, taking long carriage rides—the disease overcame their efforts within the first year of their marriage and Ellen died having just turned twenty. More than a year after Ellen’s death, Emerson went to her tomb and opened her coffin. At the time, as his professional career began to disintegrate, he was still writing to her in his personal journals. This scene, though unique, is strangely familiar as we all can recall our own moments of complete devastation chafing against the looming presence of desperation. While we sympathize with Emerson’s sorrow, Richardson admits, “We do not know exactly what moved Emerson on this occasion, but we do know that he had a powerful craving for direct, personal, unmediated experience” (Richardson 3). Ironically, the author of “Self-Reliance” proved time and time again the human need for interaction and support.

Emerson's journal entries reveal the writer's acute sensitivity to the world within and around him, ultimately qualifying him as a prose-writing poet. Emerson's emphasis on experience validates his extreme idealism. In "Emerson and the Stream of Experience," Ralph L. Rusk explains:

> He was clearly a poet, but, though he saw even its unsubstantial quality, he rightly believed that experience had had great importance in his thinking, underpinning his airy Transcendental arches and pinnacles with foundation and walls of stone. (187)

Without his grief-laden life, Emerson's words would be nothing more than hollow vessels of empty promises. Instead, Americans flocked to hear Emerson speak and "between 1833 and 1881, Ralph Waldo Emerson delivered some 1,469 lectures in 283 cities and towns in twenty-two states—and in Canada and England as well" (Nickels 116). What made Emerson extraordinary was his apparent ordinariness and what made Emerson an indirect poet was his direct appeal to the American people. Living in a time of declining Christian faith, Emerson filled the religious void with his belief in "the active soul," and thus saved the American people from despair through his contagious worship of the natural world and the mind. Instilling in his audiences a sense of power, faith and untapped potential, Emerson sought to answer the question, "How to live," thus meeting Arnold's definition of the poet. As a successor of Wordsworth, Emerson used his own experience to illustrate universal truths; as a creator of Transcendentalism, Emerson branched outside of history to see above time, and looked outside of himself to address the universal "You."

Despite the evidence proving Emerson's influence and tangible ability to help teach people how to live, Matthew Arnold, the critic who first proclaimed it is the poet's responsibility to do so, did not consider Emerson talented. Rather, "Matthew Arnold's view of Emerson as a mediocre writer and philosopher but a first-class 'friend and aider of those who would live in the spirit' summarize[s] the reigning balance between admiration and disdain" (Smith 20). One cannot help but think back to John Stuart Mill's claim, "There have certainly been, even in our own age, greater poets than Wordsworth…but poetry of deeper and loftier feeling could not have done for me at that time what his did" (104). Indeed, Arnold and Mill's visceral reactions to Emerson and Wordsworth override their intellectual reservations, suggesting that the concept of art and the purpose it should serve in society does not rest on the shoulders of the upper class or the designated artists but writhes within the heart of all humanity.

> We mark with light in the memory the few interviews we have had, in the dreary years of routine and of sin, with souls that made our souls wiser; that spoke what we thought; that told us what we knew; that gave us leave to be what we inly were. Discharge to men the priestly office, and, present or absent, you shall be followed with their love as by an angel. ("Address," 113)

Reminiscent of Wordsworth's view from atop Mount Snowdon, Emerson is equally fixated on how his view both obstructs and constructs the world around him, but he seeks the wisdom of other "active souls" in addition to nature's innate knowledge. This idea of autobiography is significant in that it emphasizes the inescapability of

our own perspective and rather than denying it, Emerson embraces the mind's ability to shape the past, present and future. Thus it is important to obtain a positive, broad perspective, for "the only sin is limitation" ("Circles," 171). Emerson argues that it is our perspective, not our situation, that dictates our emotions. By mastering the view of experience as a passageway to wisdom and pain as a necessity to pleasure, we will convert our previous sorrows into present joys. Having recognized the limitations of his mind, Emerson subverts those boundaries into a freedom so that "Everywhere and nowhere, the secret of fulfillment lies hidden in plain sight" (Smith 33).

The idea of perception, personal experience and collective souls harkens back to the responsibility of the poet and consequently underlines Emerson's role. By first celebrating the individual soul and then the spiritual commonality of all humanity, Emerson asks each individual to discover their own internal power and then utilize it in the outside world. There is a direct call to action in Emerson's prose, an incitement that pulses through the pages and electrifies the reader with a sense of empowerment, control and urgency. The fears that detain us, Emerson asserts, are only more reason to make ourselves mobilize:

> I do not see how any man can afford, for the sake of his nerves and his nap, to spare any action in which he can partake. It is pearls and rubies to his discourse. Drudgery, calamity, exasperation, want, are instructors in eloquence and wisdom. The true scholar grudges every opportunity of action past by, as a loss of power. ("Scholar," 70)

The lessons we learn through experience are what simultaneously distinguish and unite us. Furthermore, experience allows us to explore the depths of our

emotional and spiritual capacity. The greatest teacher of all, Emerson asserts, is sorrow, for it "makes us all children again, --destroys all differences of intellect. The wisest knows nothing" ("The Transcendentalist, 208). The universal exposure to tragedy that every person endures strips us of titles, social class, stereotypes and name tags, to reveal our vulnerable flesh and to seek a saving grace, for "as long as I am weak, I shall talk of Fate" (*Journal*, 209). As creatures conscious of our weaknesses, humans often strive for strength, for solutions. Emerson blesses the individual with experience; through experience, we learn to live, and "if we live truly, we shall see truly" ("Self-Reliance," 152). The ability to see things for what they are, to expand our horizon, is to transcend the secular world and enter the sacred realm of the soul.

Hence, Emerson urges each person to bundle up and to climb their own Mount Snowdon. "People forget that it is the eye which makes the horizon," he writes, and so to discover our own depths, we must reach new heights ("Experience," 269). This is particularly pertinent when it comes to translating Emerson's inspiration into personal action.

Morally opposed to slavery, Emerson found himself speaking publicly about the sin of enslavement as the shadow of the Civil War loomed. The Fugitive Slave Law enraged him into action. Although Emerson was at first hesitant to engage in politics, the Fugitive Slave Law "jarred him to the core of his moral being" (Whicher 354). Through his journal entries it becomes clear just how invested Emerson became in his cause, as he wrote in the spring of 1851, "There can never be peace whilst this devilish seed of war is in our soil. Root it out, burn it up, pay for the damage, and let us have done with it" (*Journal*, 354). Using communication as ammunition, Emerson

made two public addresses about the immorality of slavery, and, in a letter to Oliver Wendell Holmes, who had accused New England abolitionists of being traitors to the union, Emerson wrote, "The 'Union' they talk of is dead and rotten. The real union, that is, the will to keep and renew union, is like the will to keep and renew life" (*Journal*, 357). Emerson's faith in a unity among all of humanity also led him to believe that enslaving some of its people not only tortured those enslaved but also condemned the entire nation.

While Emerson's actions usually mirror his beliefs, it is important to acknowledge Ehis critics who say that his impact was great but could have been much greater had he not been so afraid to soil the active soul with "the messiness of ordinary politics and social causes" (Mencken 680). H.L. Mencken "dismissed Emerson as hopelessly unworldly" and believed his idealism to be irrelevant to, if not ignorant of, his country's collective experience (680). Idealistic visions do seem to temporarily blind Emerson when he says that he "had other slaves to free than those negroes" (Keane, 47). Although Emerson's delayed response is undoubtedly disappointing, he did eventually speak to the issue and when he did, his teeth were sharper and his mind, for once, was decided. Delivering a lecture in Boston on the eve of John Brown's execution, Emerson called Brown "a new saint…awaiting his martyrdom" (Mencken 681). While Emerson's focus on the active soul and the current moment did, in this case, detract from the most important event at hand, he did come through. And instead of drowning his journals in self-loathing and bitter hindsight, Emerson does what he can in that moment, for "be it how it will, do right now" ("Self-Reliance," 154).

One need not travel back to the nineteenth-century and sit in a New England college lecture hall to hear Emerson's persuasive words wield his audience into action. Rather, Emerson's prose resonates in an infinite present, projecting his intentions with a clear voice over one hundred years later. Having underlined why Emerson did not become a great poet, it is important to understand why he did become a great essayist and lecturer. In his essay, "Transformation of Genius," Peter S. Field explains the appeal of prose:

> The simple style of plain prose worked because it was the best and only means to communicate with the diverse audiences on the lecture circuit. Lecturers and all intellectuals needed to seize upon the rudimentary toughness of the vernacular and use it to advantage or all their efforts would come to naught" (484).

Just as Wordsworth decided to forego the former expectation of lofty language in poetry to reach a greater audience, "Emerson's manner also reflected his deep conviction concerning the splendor of everyday language" (Field 483). Writing in the second person to grab both his present audience's and future reader's attention, Emerson is not sentenced to a life of prose but rather is preserved in literary immortality through his most direct approach to his fellow human beings. Customizing his language to correspond with that of his listener, Ralph Waldo Emerson's genius lives in his ingenuity.

In his essay, "Spelling Time: The Reader in Emerson's 'Circles,'" David Wyatt argues that Emerson's decision to focus on prose reflects his ultimate ambition to not only engage the reader, but also motivate the reader to act. The experience of

reading excites the active soul, which is intensified by the direct address and idea of prose. Like Emerson's belief in remembering in order to move on, in using the past solely to enhance the present, his essay's form mirrors his message:

> Its sentences repeatedly ask us to complete, while at the same time to extend, a syntactic and argumentative motion, as if to enact the basic pattern which is its subject: spiraling and staying. (145)

Utilizing the more universal and understandable form of prose, Emerson does not resign himself to the more straight-forward style but rather recognizes its potential to have a lasting effect on his reader. Indeed, nearly two hundred years later Emerson is still quoted on greeting cards and at the beginning of business meetings. While Emerson's message is perhaps more applicable, it is hardly less poetic than that of his predecessors. Through a close examination of Emerson's "Circles," it becomes clear that while Emerson had to initially reject Wordsworth in order to discover his own ideas, he ultimately reaches the same conclusions in an epiphany of timeless brilliance, illuminating the Atlantic with promises of a rising poet.

"The eye is the first circle," Emerson declares in the beginning of "Circles," "the horizon which it forms is the second; and throughout nature this primary figure is repeated without end" (168). With his words as his wand, Emerson empowers his reader with the authority of perception before drawing a larger ring outside of time to unite us all. Circles are all-encompassing and never-ending. The discoveries we reach tomorrow will breach the conclusions we made today—up close, we are contradictions; a step away, we are simply in step with the cyclical forces of nature as Emerson claims that "there is no sleep, no pause, no preservation, but all things

renew, germinate and spring" (176). With the excitement of each idea breaking our original beliefs and rippling outward from our mind to our fingertips, "the result of today, which haunts the mind and cannot be escaped, will presently be abridged into a word" (170). The only thing to prove eternal is change: seasons, impressions and intentions. Through Emerson we are reminded of the reassuring yet petrifying concept that "Permanence is but a word of degrees" and so joy, like pain, will ebb and flow in an ever-revolving circle (168). "The extent to which this generation of circles, wheel without wheel, will go," Emerson explains, "depends on the force or truth of the individual soul" (169). Having divulged this secret to his reader, Emerson has put the power to rise above expectation and to see through personal strife to a collective human experience, in the palm of his reader's hand.

A double-edged sword, Emerson's promise of all things coming to pass only to return, like the first sign of spring bursting through a bleak New England winter, simultaneously overwhelms us with both skepticism and faith. This was his goal entirely. Poking his pen into every argument, Emerson fuses cynicism with optimism: "Nothing is secure but life, transition, the energizing spirit. No love can be bound by oath or covenant to secure it against a higher love" (177). Emerson's skepticism regarding the longevity of secular relationships is overshadowed by his greater celebration and faith in the human instinct and thirst for "a higher love." Every romantic wound we attain, therefore, strengthens us and propels us forward towards a more intense connection, a transcendent love:

> The one thing which we seek with insatiable desire is to forget ourselves, to be surprised out of our propriety, to lose our sempiternal

> memory and to do something without knowing how or why; in short to draw a new circle. (178)

Emerson disenchants the sanctity of marriage because it traps the active soul into a state of stale comfort, blockading our individual journey. Without the individual ability to grow, one does not experience the exhilaration of the seasons changing or the mind expanding to encompass greater and greater circles of understanding. It is through change that we develop but through circles that we grow. A hungry mind, a flexible mind, brings about these changes and makes us not only more complex beings but, as Wordsworth argued so long ago, makes us poetic as well. As beings who "cannot chuse but feel," every person is capable of stretching not only their mind into eternity, but also their spirit (XIII:86). Emerson's belief in an active soul encompasses the whole person, including the flexible mind, the bruised knees, the calloused hands and the "flames and generosities of the heart" ("Circles," 178). A man first, a scholar second, Emerson is not so intoxicated by the scent of his growing fame that he can overlook the struggle of every day experiences. This is why he writes in prose. This is why he talks to "You." This is why he neglects his own work to help cultivate the minds around him. A true poet, Emerson seized moments of interaction to help enlighten and encourage those around him.

As previously mentioned, Emerson's genius lives in his ingenuity. In his effort to teach people how to live, Emerson rejected notions of high art to reach a greater number of individuals, and by acknowledging the human need for interaction, Emerson pushes people further by first pulling them in through sympathy. Just as Wordsworth addresses his good friend Coleridge in "The Prelude," Emerson speaks

to “You,” thereby empowering the reader with the grand potential of the poet. Recognizing that their eyes decide their horizons, Emerson’s readers are welcomed to partake in Transcendentalism simply by seeing the greater, ever-growing rings beyond their own peripheral vision.

Transforming prose into poetry and pain into pleasurable experience, Emerson proves to be more than an admirable lecturer or an exceptional human. Ultimately, Emerson is an unsung poet, inverting adversity into opportunity and time into eternity: “Through all the running sea of forms, I am truth, I am love, and immutable I transcend form as I do time and space” (“Crisis,” 182). Using one of his favorite symbols, the transparent eyeball, Emerson refuses to accept limitation and instead seeks to join greater circles by causing the initial ripple. Amorphous and always on the move, “Emerson is a dangerous man to pigeonhole” and a difficult man to pinpoint (Richardson 411). Boasting of his freedom to contradict himself, Emerson makes it impossible to criticize him for hypocrisy, for he has already drawn a circle around us, illuminating the irrelevance of the past and the sovereignty of this moment. And so as the enthusiasm of summer fades into fall and decays into winter before budding back into spring, Emerson too revisits his once rejected idol with a fresh appreciation, proving the promise of constant renewal and eternal return.

Writing in the uncertainty of a looming Civil War, Emerson confesses, “I am of the opinion of the poet Wordsworth, that there is no real happiness in this life but in intellect and virtue” (“Crisis,” 370). Through individual “intellect and virtue,” one can transcend society’s stifling politics with the authority of an active soul. Having initially admired Wordsworth before dismissing him as a relic, Emerson’s final return

to Wordsworth underlines the Transcendental connection to the Romantic and, even more significant, the collective goal of poets. As acutely conscious people rather than as designated artists, poets all share the responsibility to reveal a new reality for a world of individuals. Society holds nothing for us while the active soul hurls rocks into stagnant waters, breaking the surface with one small circle that multiplies into many. Wordsworth remembers the past and forecasts the future when he writes,

> As the tide ebbs, to ignominy and shame
> By Nations sink together, we shall still
> Find solace—knowing what we have learnt to know,
> Rich in true happiness…(XIII:338-441).

Rather than an intrinsic ability, true happiness requires acquired understanding through transcendence of society. We must be at once both open to novelty and aware of circularity, believing in ourselves and the wisdom that arrives in the wake of experience. Comprehending these virtues, we rise above not only sorrow but also time, and we come to see, as Emerson and Wordsworth both believe that, "We ask for long life, but 'tis deep life, or grand moments, that signify…moments of insight, of fine personal relation, a smile, a glance, --what ample borrowers of eternity they are!" ("Crisis," 370).

Conclusion

Let us return to the Wonderer. Standing on a mountain summit, the Wonderer sees the outstretched sky as a reflection of his own infinite mind, and he suddenly comprehends the inextricable tie he has to the rest of humanity. Through our unique ability to feel, people are bound to each other by the all-encompassing collective human web of experience. Our fears are common, our ambitions universal. Staring out into the thick fog, the Wonderer clearly recognizes the certainty of uncertainty as an imperial grey settles upon his head and shoulders like a matching cap and scarf. Ambiguity does not cloud reality—it comprises it, and rather than attempt to avoid the unknown, the Wonderer seeks it, relishes it, needs it.

Without the perpetual fog of his environment, the Wonderer would never see the sovereignty of his own mind. Like a knife across a canvas, the mind's eye cuts across the grey sky with the alacrity of a lightning bolt, creating light as it slices through the haze and illuminating the Wonderer's internal world while the fog continues to writhe around him. Even from the summit, the Wonderer can hear the fearful world below: babies crying, bombs exploding, the terrifying gush of oceans overflowing. And so the Wonderer takes one last look out towards the indistinguishable horizon, picks up his staff, and begins his trek down the mountain.

Returning to his community with a higher sense of self-awareness and a broader view of the human experience, the Wonderer bears the responsibility to share what he has learned. Like a prophet, the Wonderer tells the people what is to come based on what he has seen. He composes lines that promise the continuous rise, fall and rebuilding of society, but more importantly he conveys the eternal victorious

reign of the individual mind will always reign victorious. The Wonderer sings out his insight with a prophet's solemnity and a poet's eloquence, electrifying his audience with revelatory ideas regarding their own power, their own paramount mind and place in the world.

And so the Earth continues to spin on its axis while society continues to cycle through its stages of demise and resurrection: politicians are voted in and out of office, wars are waged, wounds are healed, loved ones are born and buried. Personal experiences can overwhelm us and so it is the responsibility and gift of the poet to show humans that life *means* struggle, fear, disappointment and dejection. Indeed, it is these experiences that make us human and make us able to savor those heavenly moments of anticipation, elation, passion and satisfaction. Just as a grey sky is needed to see lightning, difficult times are needed for enlightening. The poet teaches us to celebrate the dark and inspires us to seek the everlasting in the ephemeral:

> We ask for long life, but 'tis deep life, or grand moments, that signify…moments of insight, of fine personal relation, a smile, a glance, --what ample borrowers of eternity they are! ("Crisis," 370).

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