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*William Wordsworth ódája a
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William Wordsworth's Immortality Ode

Témavezető:

Dr. Ferencz Győző
egyetemi docens

Készítette:

Kiss Kristóf
Anglisztika MA
Angol irodalom szakirány

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Abstract

The present thesis deals with William Wordsworth's pseudo-Pindaric *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*. Firstly, the research explains the definition of the poem's genre, gives the history of the poem's composition, and introduces the questions and aspects of the poem that will be discussed. The research will mainly rely on the interpretations of Lionel Trilling, Cleanth Brooks, Harold Bloom, Stanley Cavell, and will also illuminate some problems through ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger. The main focus will be on how the poet overcomes a crisis, a loss that is presented at the beginning of the poem, through thoughts, through the workings of his reflective mind, through the process of recollection. After the discussion of the poem's first part, where the nature of the loss will be investigated, a chapter will be devoted to present the meanings of important notions in Wordsworth's thinking through the discussion of some passages from his Preface written to the *Lyrical Ballads*, mainly relying on interpretations of James Chandler, Paul Magnuson and Zsolt Komáromy. These ideas about notions, such as "feelings," "thoughts," "habits," "recollection," will be central in interpreting the Ode, in tracking down the process how the poet manages to overcome his crisis, how he manages to recapture joy.

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Introduction

The present thesis will deal with William Wordsworth's poem entitled *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*. The first part of the paper will give a definition of the pseudo-Pindaric Ode, a genre of which Wordsworth's piece is a famous representative. Subsequently, the history of the Ode's composition will be presented, and the main themes and problems of the paper will be highlighted through giving the main ideas of some critics who have analysed the poem.

The second part of the research will analyse the first part, the first four stanzas of the Ode. The first part will be important, because, on the one hand, it contains the primary imagery of the poem that Wordsworth will continuously develop through the poem. On the other, through the interpretation of the first four stanzas, the nature of the loss that appears in the poem can be precisely described. The speaker will try to overcome his loss (through an emotional process), but will ultimately fail in doing so.

The third chapter of the paper will be devoted to clarify some concepts and notions in Wordsworth's thinking, such as "nature," "feelings," "thoughts," "habits" or "recollection." This will be important in terms of interpreting the Ode because it makes use of these notions. Before the focus would be turned back on the Ode, the application of these notions will be presented through Wordsworth's poem entitled *Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey*. This will be helpful not only in terms of seeing the workings of these notions in another poem of Wordsworth, but also because there are some similarities between "Tintern Abbey" and the Ode.

In the fourth section, the second part of the Ode, from stanza V to VIII, will be discussed. The second part of the Ode is mainly about the child appearing in the poem. This part, on the one hand, gives a precise description of the child, his relationship and the

development of his relationship with nature, with the world. The features of the child, relying mainly on the explication of the images Wordsworth's uses, will be discussed in this chapter of the thesis.

The fifth part of the thesis will be concerned with the remaining, three stanzas of the Ode. In this, the relationship of the child and the speaker, the man will be discussed. This part of the ode will heavily rely on the process of recollection, and processes based on thoughts as opposed to emotions. Through discussing the ideas about thoughts and recollections, it will be possible to present and trace down how the poet manages to finally overcome his loss, to gain a perspective from which he can gain relief. After the last chapter, a summary will be given of the presented analysis. As mentioned, the first section of the thesis will begin with discussing the Pindaric ode.

1 – Form, Genesis, Main Themes

The ode form usually denotes a ceremonious, formal, and remarkably organised lyric text. It is a form used for public occasions, like birthdays, weddings, funerals, or the dedication of important public persons, monuments. But odes can, besides celebrating public events, also be about private matters and occasions of crisis and joy. The evolution of the ode in the history of literature can be lead back to two major classical influences: that of Horatio (representing a more regular, measured and recurring stanza form, a balance in tone and feelings), and that of Pindar (representing a regular or irregular triad, elevated and variable tone). The focus, in the present research, will be on the Pindaric tradition. In Greek literature, the odes of Pindar “were designed for choric song and dance.”¹ Only the words have survived from which we can reconstruct the connection of the two art forms. Structurally, Pindar’s odes were built up the following way: it consisted of a strophe, a complex metrical structure. The length and pattern of the heterometric lines in strophes varied from ode to ode. The strophe represented a dance-pattern. The pattern of the strophe was repeated in an antistrophe, which means that the dancers repeated the same steps but in the opposite direction. After the strophe and the antistrophe, the pattern was closed by an epoch, a pattern different from the previous ones in structure and length. The Pindaric ode is built up through the regular repetition of this triadic pattern.²

These odes were performed in Dionysian theatres, or maybe even in the Agora. Although it was claimed that these odes are incoherent in their brilliant use of imagery, and are characterised by abrupt shifts in themes, modern criticism was able to point out

¹ “Ode,” in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, eds. Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) 855.

² Ibid.

dominating images, connections between the elevated and exalted emotional states and its subjects.³

The genre, in England, gained real popularity with the publication of Abraham Cowley's *Pindaric Odes* in 1656. Cowley wanted to make the spirit and tone of the Pindaric odes available for the English language and audience, rather than to provide a transcription of the original Pindaric pattern. He was not sure if the odes of Pindar were regular in form. It was proven by the writings of William Congreve (1706) and Gilbert West (1749) that the pattern of Pindar's odes was regular. Thus, who wrote Pindaric odes in the manner of Cowley (which fashion, nevertheless, faded after the proof of the regularity of the Pindaric odes) are termed pseudo-Pindaric odes.⁴

"The romantic ode in English literature is a poem written on the occasion of a vocational or existential crisis in order to reassert the power and range of the poet's voice;" and this tradition starts with two odes, S. T. Coleridge's *Dejection: An Ode* and William Wordsworth's pseudo-Pindaric "*Ode: Intimations of Immortality*", the later said to be the greatest English Pindaric Ode.⁵ That Wordsworth wrote a pseudo-Pindaric Ode, following the tradition created by Cowley, in which the Pindaric odes that are already, by their nature, exalted in their tone, and which are even deprived of their regular structural pattern in Cowley's tradition, can explain the rhapsodic, dramatic nature and atmosphere of Wordsworth's poem. In the following, the history of the composition of this great Pindaric ode will be presented.

The precise evolution of the poem is unknown. It was composed between March, 1802 and 1804. H. W. Garrod presents the genesis of the Ode through Dorothy Wordsworth's *Journal*. In the evening of 26th March, Wordsworth writes the *Rainbow (My Heart Leaps Up)*.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 856-857.

⁵ Ibid., 857.

On the following day, 27th March, “Wm. wrote part of an Ode.”⁶ Wordsworth writes the first four stanzas of the Ode in 1802, and a two year interval follows before he completes the poem, i.e., writes the remaining seven stanzas. (Bateson adds to this that the writing of the opening stanzas expanded probably to June, as Dorothy notes in her journal for 17th June: “Wm. added a little to the Ode he is writing”.⁷ The poem, in its entirety, first appeared in 1807, with the title: *Ode (‘There Was a Time’)*. It always had an important and distinguished place among the poems of Wordsworth. When it first appeared in *Poems in Two Volumes*, it served as the culminating poem. The title was changed in the 1815 edition to *Ode: Intimation of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*.⁸ The present thesis will discuss the “ultima manus,” the 1815 version of the poem. Concerning the 1815 edition, Garrod remarks that it is important that the Ode was started after the day on which Wordsworth has written the *Rainbow* poem, because the last three lines of that poem were fixed as a motto to the Ode:

The child is father of the man
And I could wish may days to be
Bound each to each but natural piety.⁹

In the third stanza of the Ode, we are told that

To me alone there came a thought of grief:
A timely utterance gave that thought relief.¹⁰

According to Garrod’s interpretation, “the timely utterance may very well be the *Rainbow* poem itself. Secondly, the conception of human days bound together by natural piety is the clue to the interpretation of the *Ode* in its entirety.”¹¹ It will be indeed important to read the Ode together with the motto, to realize the wish of human days “Bound each to each by

⁶ Dorothy Wordsworth quoted in H. W. Garrod, *Wordsworth: Lectures and Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927) 112.

⁷ Dorothy Wordsworth quoted in F. W. Bateson, *English Poetry: A Critical Introduction* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1957) 201. This, for Bateson, explains why Wordsworth is writing about a May, and not a March morning in his Ode.

⁸ *William Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 764.

⁹ William Wordsworth, “My Heart Leaps Up,” in *The Collected Poems of William Wordsworth* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2006) 91.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 701.

¹¹ Garrod, *Wordsworth*, 113.

natural piety,” but concerning the “timely utterance,” there are interpretations that differ from Garrod’s.¹² Nevertheless, the essay written by Garrod is an important one. Later critics (e.g.: Lionel Trilling, F.W. Bateson, Geoffrey Hartman) often refer to his ideas to discuss the problem of “timely utterance.”

Another important topic that Garrod addresses concerns how neo-platonic ideas about pre-existence appear in the poem. Garrod claims that Plato’s way of thinking is not congruous with Wordsworth’s, thus he is critical about the validity of ideas about pre-natal existence being present in the poem. This question will be dealt with later in the thesis. In the following, summarizations of the works of other critics will be presented, pointing out the main ideas in their works, the problems they face concerning the interpretation of the Ode. With this, the topics of the present thesis will be enumerated. The first critic whose views will be discussed is Lionel Trilling.

The aim of Trilling’s essay was to call in question an assumption about the Ode. According to this interpretation, the Ode is “Wordsworth’s conscious farewell to his art, a dirge sung over his departing powers”, and Trilling is after refuting this interpretation of the Ode.¹³ He wants to prove that the poem is so much so not a farewell to “departing powers,” that it is, in fact, “a dedication to new powers.”¹⁴ According to Trilling, the Ode “is a poem about growing; some say it is a poem about growing old, but I believe it is about growing up.”¹⁵ This means that it is about giving up an old habit of seeing the world in a way (from nature’s perspective) for a new habit, for putting man into focus, which is, according to

¹² The „timely utterance” can refer (besides the “Rainbow”) to the poem entitled *Expostulation and Reply* (this idea is cherished by other critics, such as Trilling, Bateson), or it can be also interpreted as the Ode itself (an idea suggested by Geoffrey Hartmann). The later interpretation will be discussed in the thesis.

¹³ Dean Sperry quoted in Lionel Trilling, “The Immortality Ode,” in *English Romantic Poets*, ed. M. H. Abrams (London: Oxford University Press, 1988), 149.

¹⁴ Trilling, “The Immortality Ode,” 151.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Trilling, a moral step fulfilled by Wordsworth that is achieved by acquiring the “philosophic mind.”¹⁶

Wilson Knight, in his reading of the poem, lays heavy emphasis on the child (and the images that can be connected to him) saying that “the poet envisages life victorious in terms of the child. This is our approach to immortality,” and arguing that the child can be interpreted as an expression, as a symbol of life.¹⁷

In Harold Bloom’s interpretation, “the manifestation of the wish-being-realized [to recapture the “visionary gleam” that has fled] is the liberating occasion of the poem.”¹⁸ Bloom also lays a heavy emphasis on the child, claiming that he is the “Natural Man” in the Ode with whom the “Imaginative Man” will be able to reunite through recollection.¹⁹

Cleanth Brooks, in his essay about the Ode claims that it is a poem that contains many paradoxes. Brooks tries to resolve these paradoxes in the poem by tracing the connection of the images that appear in the Ode, claiming that it has a rather consistent symbolism in terms of the imagery.²⁰ Nevertheless, according to his interpretation, not all the ambiguities that are presented through the images are solved, thus the Ode, “for all its fine passages, is not entirely a successful poem.”²¹ Nevertheless, Brooks will claim later, comparing Wordsworth’s Ode with W. B. Yeats’ *Among Schoolchildren*, that what the two poems have both in common and what can be seen as the primary feature of the two poems is the way both poets go into the self-dramatization of the problem they present. The problem is our human characteristic of wanting to transcend, overcome the natural, but the “supernatural and natural are intermixed –

¹⁶ Ibid., 166.

¹⁷ Wilson Knight, *The Starlit Dome* (London: Methuen, 1959) 39, 45.

¹⁸ Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971) 173.

¹⁹ Ibid., 176.

²⁰ Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (London: Methuen, 1968) 102.

²¹ Ibid.

the human situation...is inevitably caught between the claims of both natural and supernatural.”²²

The interpretation of F. W. Bateson is similar to that of Brooks in terms of the overall successfulness of the poem. According to his views, “Wordsworth returned to the nature mysticism of his youth...he worked out a technique of an emotional recollection of early childhood.”²³ The purpose of this technique and the writing of the Ode is “the attempt to prolong adolescence artificially.”²⁴ The poem was a success, but only a superficial one. Wordsworth, after writing the experimental poems in the *Lyrical Ballads* (because they are said to be experimental in the Advertisement of the *Lyrical Ballads*), may have thought that he has matured into a great poet. The Ode serves as an evidence for that he has found out that this is not the case. With the rhetoric or technique Wordsworth created for himself and with which he has written the Ode, he cheers himself up and almost convinces himself of the “successful” achievement accomplished with the writing of the Ode.²⁵ What is interesting, concerning Bateson’s views is that four years later in another book, where he briefly discusses the Ode again, he seems to be less critical about the achievements of the Ode, and about the technique it uses. According to the argumentations in this writing of Bateson, the solution Wordsworth offers for the crisis experienced in the Ode is the recreation of childhood experience within oneself.²⁶ “The process, which is similar to that recollection of emotion in tranquillity he had already described as the source of all poetry [in the Preface written to the *Lyrical Ballads*], is described allegorically in the poem.”²⁷ Furthermore, his poetry “from “Tintern Abbey” onward is *par excellence* the poetry of memory. The conflict between his

²² Ibid., 174.

²³ Bateson, *English Poetry*, 204.

²⁴ Ibid., 205.

²⁵ Ibid., 206-207.

²⁶ F. W. Bateson, *Wordsworth: A Re-interpretation* (London: Longmans, 1956) 161.

²⁷ Ibid.

past and his present emotional life provided during these years the tension that seems to be the prerequisite of all great poetry.”²⁸

To sum up this short section of summaries, the following topics arise when discussing Wordsworth’s Ode: the role and position of the child and the relationship of the child and the man; the (possible paradoxes that are presented through the) interwoven imagery; the state and importance of memory, recollection (which is said to be the source of Wordsworth’s poetry); the self-dramatization of problems; the question of “timely utterance;” the ideas about the platonic pre-natal existence; and a supposed moral step that has to be taken. There is one more general idea that should be added to this summary. Trilling makes a remarkable observation about the Ode (which he does not explicate specifically later in his essay, but) which will be central concerning the interpretation of the Ode given in the present paper. Trilling’s remark goes as following: “Wordsworth tells us how he made poetry; he says he made it out of the experience of his senses as worked upon by his contemplative intellect...”²⁹ This excerpt from Trilling’s essay is meant to demonstrate that in order to comprehensive understanding of the Ode, Wordsworth’s thoughts about poetry and writing poetry (which Wordsworth has formulated in his Preface written to the *Lyrical Ballads*) will also constitute a part of the present research. However, before doing so, the first part of the Ode will be interpreted. “The two-year gap after the composition of the Ode’s first four stanzas can perhaps be taken as a measure of the challenge it posed to him.”³⁰ The following part of the thesis will discuss the challenge that the first four stanzas pose.

²⁸ Ibid., 163.

²⁹ Trilling, “The Immortality Ode,” 154.

³⁰ James Chandler, “Wordsworth’s Great Ode: Romanticism and the Progress of Poetry,” in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romantic Poetry*, ed. James Chandler and Maureen N. McLane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 136.

2 – Ode: First Part

I

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it has been of yore; –
Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.³¹

The Ode opens with stating a loss. The claim is that elements of nature, of the ordinary world were clothed, “apparelled in celestial light.” The word apparel is important in the stanza. With this, we make a distinction: this implies that things are in themselves normally void of celestial light.³² It is important that if we analyse lines 4 and 5, it is the “celestial light,” that is referred to as “a dream” in the following line that had the qualities of “the glory and the freshness.” Thus, if the celestial light or dream illuminated the things of the world, everything had the qualities of glory and freshness. The loss, the disappearance refers not to the things themselves, but refers to the “celestial light,” the dream that apparelled them. It is a way of seeing the world the speaker “can see no more.”

II

The Rainbow comes and goes,
And lovely is the Rose,
The Moon doth with delight
Look round her when the heavens are bare;
Waters on a starry night
Are beautiful and fair;
The sunshine is a glorious birth;
But yet I know, where'er I go,
That there hath passed away a glory from the earth.

³¹ William Wordsworth, “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood,” in *The Collected Poems of William Wordsworth* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2006) 701-704.

³² Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn*, 103.

The second stanza reinforces the statement presented in the first stanza. Here we have the world “glory” that comprises “celestial light” and “dream”. The stanza can be seen as an expansion of the previous one in terms of imagery, new images appear: rainbow, rose, moon, heaven, water, stars, and sunshine. It is interesting how it is connected to the previous stanza in its imagery. The moon is said to look around her with “delight.” The word “delight” contains the word light, and rhymes on the word “night,” as it is associated with the moon. Light, “delight,” and “night” can be connected with the images that were introduced in the previous stanza: “celestial light” and “dream.” But Wordsworth equates his imagery, next to the moon, that is connected with night we have “sunshine” which is a “glorious birth.” With the adjective “glorious” we can also connect the “sunshine” to the “celestial light,” to the “glory,” and “birth” rhymes with “earth,” thus we have, just as we did in the first stanza “night” and “day” in the second stanza as well. Wordsworth reflects on the loss he presents both temporally (“night,” “day”) and spatially (“starry night,” referring with this to the “sky;” “earth”), and reinforces the loss presented in the previous stanza: “there hath passed away a glory from the earth.”

There is a further point to make in connection with this stanza. In the first line, we already have the image of the “Rainbow,” and we could easily interpret this as referring to the “Rainbow poem,” which is in connection with the lines that will appear in the following stanza: “To me alone there came a thought of grief: / A timely utterance gave that thought relief,” and claim that the words of the “Rainbow poem” give the poet relief. This is the interpretation of H.W. Garrod, as it was already mentioned. But even if one would agree with this interpretation, there is a problem with the “Rainbow,” namely that it “comes and goes.” This may not be easy to notice at first reading, as this line is connected with the following one in terms of structure, they create a couplet with “and lovely is the Rose.” This simple, iambic, even nursery-rhyme like structure turns the reader’s attention away from the content of the

lines to its music, especially if we consider that the previous line was the following: “The things which I have seen I now can see no more.” After such a line, one could even argue that it is the melody of the first two lines of the second stanza that gives the poet relief. But it would be hard to accept something as a relief that “comes and goes,” that is not permanent, an ephemeral apparition. Furthermore, the utterance itself is said to be “timely,” which reinforces the idea that it is ephemeral in its nature. With the mentioning of sound and melody, we turn to the following stanza and will see how Wordsworth connects technically these stanzas in terms of content and structure:

III

Now, while the birds thus sing a joyous song,
And while the young lambs bound
As to the tabor’s sound,
To me alone there came a thought of grief:
A timely utterance gave that thought relief,
And I again am strong.
The cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep,
No more shall grief of mine the season wrong;
I hear the Echoes through the mountains throng,
The Winds come to me from the fields of sleep,
And all the earth is gay,
Land and sea 30
Give themselves up to jollity,
And with the heart of May
Doth every Beast keep holiday; –
Thou Child of Joy
Shout round me, let me hear thy shouts,
thou happy Shepherd-boy!

In stanza III, focus is turned from visual images to sound.³³ As the speaker cannot manage to see the world the way he did, presented with the pictorial devices of “celestial light” and the “glory” illuminating it, now he makes an attempt at recapturing this way of perception through phonic perception. It is important, as Brooks remarks, that there is a dramatic change in mood starting from this third stanza which will eventually culminate in the

³³ Ibid., 109.

following, fourth stanza: “the poet seems to be straining to work up a gaiety that isn’t there”³⁴

Besides the appearance of sounds, the stanza is important, on the one hand, because it is the first one where the “Child of Joy” appears. On the other, it contains the already highlighted problem of “timely utterance.” The “Rainbow poem” is important, because, as Geoffrey Hartman argues, “the poem is remarkable as an utterance, as a speech act that falls somewhere between vow and passionate wish.”³⁵ This wish can be interpreted as a wish for there to exist a bond between the Being on earth and the “celestial,” between God, which bond is created *through* natural piety. But natural piety (the definition and acquiring of it) will be presented not in the “Rainbow poem,” but in the Ode. It is in connection with this that the appearance of sound is important in this stanza. The “timely utterance” can be interpreted as the poem itself.³⁶ In terms of sounds, the central image is the echoing of the “timely utterance”: “The Cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep,” goes together and rhymes with “The Winds come to me from the fields of sleep,” and before this specific line, we have “I hear the Echoes through the mountains throng.” The “timely utterance” will be echoed, the poet cannot but hear the projections of the “timely utterances” because they are carried along and multiplied with the echoes. The word “throng” is especially telling in this sense, the sounds will fill the environment, sounds will be suddenly everywhere.³⁷ The “timely utterance” can be also seen as the poem itself if one considers not only the completion of the first part of the poem, but the fact that Wordsworth was able, after a two year gap, to write the Ode in its entirety, so the act of writing and completing the poem can be itself seen as something that gives the poet “relief.”

The dramatic movement of the poem is important and in connection with its form.

³⁴ Ibid., 110.

³⁵ Geoffrey H. Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 156.

³⁶ Ibid., 155.

³⁷ Ibid., 154.

These Odes, puzzles of literary history, are interesting epiphanic abortions. Whether we turn to Collins or Wordsworth or Holderlin or Coleridge or Shelley, the pseudo-Greek Ode is a linguistic monster, sometimes merely a linguistic machine, to liberate or steal back a language that discloses Being.³⁸

It is worth discussing how Wordsworth represents the Being and his relation to the world through his language. As it was already mentioned, the themes of Pindaric odes were usually of crisis or joy, and this duality is clearly present already in the first part of Wordsworth's ode: there way a joy, and there is the crisis of having lost it. There is another duality in the representation of Wordsworth's language. This will be illuminated through some ideas borrowed from Nietzsche, who presents a duality in terms of the composition of art:

We shall have gained much for the science of aesthetics when we have come to realize, not just through logical insight but also with the certainty of something directly apprehended that the continuous evolution of art is bound up with the duality of the Apolline and the Dionysiac... Their two deities of art, Apollo and Dionysos, provide the starting-point for our recognition that there exists in the world of the Greeks an enormous opposition, both in origin and goals, between the Apolline art of the image-maker or sculptor and the imageless art of music, which is that of Dionysos. These two very different drives exist side by side, mostly in open conflict, stimulating and provoking one another to give birth to ever-new, more vigorous offspring in whom they perpetuate the conflict inherent in the opposition between them, an opposition only apparently bridged by the common term "art"... In order to gain a closer understanding of these two drives, let us think of them in the first place as the separate art-worlds of dream and intoxication.³⁹

Art is created through the opposing workings of the image-based dream world of the Apollonian, and the imageless world of music and intoxication of the Dionysian. Nietzsche, relying on the thoughts of Schopenhauer explicates his description about the Apollonian and Dionysian. The Apollonian is "the most sublime expression of imperturbable trust" in the divine image that he represents, in the "principium individuationis."⁴⁰ The Apollonian represents the dreamlike, the imaginative, and the individual. As opposed to this, the

³⁸ Ibid., 206.

³⁹ F. W. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, trans. Ronald Speiers, eds. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speiers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 14.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 17.

Dionysian stands for the imageless, for music. Furthermore, as opposed to the calm and trust in the individual that appears in the Apollonian, the essence of the Dionysian can show itself most through horror. This happens through the breakdown of the “principium individuationis,” the loss of the individual self, through music, through the ecstasy of intoxication.⁴¹

The distinction of Apollonian and Dionysian can be also seen as present in Wordsworth’s Ode. The first two stanzas contained visual images, were dreamlike, and even though they already discussed a loss, they were calmer. With the third stanza, sound appears, and a dramatic tension enters the poem. The dramatic atmosphere will be even more ecstatic and recognisable in the fourth stanza:

IV

Ye blessed Creatures, I have heard the call
Ye to each other make; I see
The heavens laugh with you in your jubilee;
My heart is at your festival,
My head hath its coronal,
The fullness of your bliss, I feel – I feel it all.
Oh evil day! if I were sullen
While the Earth herself is adorning,
This sweet May-morning,
And the Children are culling,
On every side,
In a thousand vallies far and wide,
Fresh flowers; while the sun shines warm,
And the Babe leaps up on his Mother’s arm: –
I hear, I hear, with joy I hear!
– But there’s a Tree, of many one,
A single Field which I have looked upon,
Both of them speak of something that is gone:
The Pansy at my feet
Doth the same tale repeat:
Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

The ecstasy, the whirl of feelings will have their source in sounds, in calling and laughter. Furthermore, the identity of the individual will get dissolved in the Dionysian

⁴¹ Ibid.

festival that is described in this stanza. The aim for the speaker is to become one with the joyous, ecstatic atmosphere described. What is interesting concerning the sensory impressions is that first, the speaker describes phonic sensations, and concludes with “The fullness of your bliss, I feel—I feel it all.” After this, the poet gives a visual description of the joyous, playful activities of children, and a description of the natural spring scene which surrounds the children. After this description, one would expect, as Brooks argues, an exclamation which would be: “I see, I see, with joy I see!”⁴² Instead of this, emphasis is again laid on hearing: “I hear, I hear, with joy I hear!” It seems that the ecstasy of the speaker’s experience takes the control over his identity through the Dionysian music, but not for long. Concerning sense impressions, Wordsworth structurally equates his stanza with laying, after the previous exclamation, the main focus back on visual impression: “But there’s a Tree, of many one.” It will be visual images, things, elements from the ordinary world, a “Tree”, a “field”, and a “pansy” that will “the same tale repeat,” that will make him face the realisation of the loss he had suffered: “Whither is fled the visionary gleam? / Where is it now, the glory and the dream?” Concerning the Apollonian-Dionysian distinction, the speaker turned from the ecstatic, sound-based world, where his identity dissolved in the experience’s atmosphere to the image based world of the Apollonian, where the attention of the speaker was returned to his self-identity, which has ultimately led him to face the loss that had been already described in the first and second stanzas: losing a kind of perception of the world, where ordinary things were illuminated and connected with “glory,” with a “celestial light.”

It is strange that ordinary things from a natural scene start to speak to the poem’s speaker, yet, at the same time, it is also an important aspect of the poem. It is constructive concerning the present interpretation to consult with the thoughts of Stanley Cavell on this matter. Cavell interprets the Ode alongside with one of Martin Heidegger’s essay entitled *The*

⁴² Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn*, 110.

Thing. Heidegger's essay opens with the following sentence: "All distances in time and space are shrinking."⁴³ The problem with this is that although the distance is shrinking, "the frantic abolition of all distances brings no nearness."⁴⁴ The question arises, how we can get to know the nature of nearness? "Near to us are what we usually call things. But what is a thing?...What in the thing is thingly? What is the thing itself? We shall not reach the thing in itself until our thinking has first reached the thing as a thing."⁴⁵ This means that in order to be able to approach the thing as a thing, we have to make "a step back" in our way of thinking, so have to change the way we think.⁴⁶ Heidegger, close to the end of his essay, argues thus: "Thinking in this way, we are called by the thing as the thing. In the strict sense of the German word *bedingt*, we are the be-thinged, the conditioned ones. We have left behind us the presumption of all unconditionedness."⁴⁷ The recognition of humans as mortals must come from satisfying the conditions of humans as being things of the world. "The redemption of the thing of the world is the redemption of human nature, and chiefly from its destructiveness of its own conditions of existence."⁴⁸

In the context of the present argumentation, things from nature, the tree, the field, and the pansy will be the things that retell and remind the speaker of his conditionedness as a human. But then, these are also kinds of utterances, just as the ones that gave relief to the poet. These utterances probably make the speaker face the following questions: "why is it, or why was it, when we were children, *natural* to us [to see the world "apparelled in celestial light," why is there] an ordinariness which a new ordinariness must replace?"⁴⁹ Cavell's line if thinking also goes together with Trilling's already presented ideas. Trilling claims that the ode is about a moral step, about giving up an old habit of seeing the world in a way (from

⁴³ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Perennial, 2001), 163.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 164-165.

⁴⁶ Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Scepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 66.

⁴⁷ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 178-179.

⁴⁸ Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, 66.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 71.

nature's perspective) for a new habit, for putting man into focus. So there seems to be, in the Ode, a change of perspectives, a change in the way of thinking in order to define the human condition, human existence. It is important to highlight the words the two critics use (in connection with later parts and speculations of the research): ordinary (or ordinariness) and habits.

Concerning the timely utterance, or utterances, if things (tree, pansy) can speak to the speaker of the poem, they also make utterances, but there seems to be a difference concerning these utterances. In stanza III, there comes “a *thought* of grief,” thus the timely utterance that comes and gives relief it gives relief to a thought, thus it is a thought-based process. This is different in stanza IV. Here there were visual and phonic sensations and descriptions, of which the speaker could *feel* the bliss. When things start to speak, at the end of stanza IV to the speaker, this process is (especially in the light of the dramatic nature of this stanza) based on feelings. So then, thoughts give relief to the poet, and feelings give way to crisis, to loss. However, this may sound striking in a poem by Wordsworth, who is generally considered as a poet who, in his poetry and theory of poetry makes “a revolt of feeling against form” to defend natural responses and attitudes in poetry, as James Heffernan argues.⁵⁰ Furthermore, in the interpretation of M. H. Abrams, Wordsworth's poetry represents “the spontaneous and genuine, not the contrived and stimulated, expression of the emotional state of the poet.”⁵¹

The present analysis, however, will claim that Wordsworth's solution to the problem of how to overcome the loss, how to apparel things again with celestial light, will be based on thoughts and not feelings. As previously mentioned, an unelaborated idea of Trilling will be important concerning the present analysis of the poem, namely that in the Ode, “Wordsworth tells us how he made poetry; he says he made it out of the experience of his senses as worked

⁵⁰ J. A. W. Heffernan, *Wordsworth's Theory of Poetry: The Transforming Imagination* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1969), 30.

⁵¹ M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (London-Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 102.

upon by his contemplative intellect...” Trilling’s phrasing also speaks of a thought-based process. It is in the Preface written to *Lyrical Ballads* where Wordsworth writes about his ideas about poetry and writing poetry. In order to enrich the present interpretation of the Ode, and see why thoughts and thought-based processes are important for Wordsworth, some details from his theory of poetry presented in the Preface will be discussed in the following section of the thesis. Considering the fact that Wordsworth started to compose his Ode in 1802, two years after he has written his famous Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* (and in 1802, he was probably still preoccupied with what he has written in the Preface, as he made some changes to the 1800 edition of his text), it can be considered reasonable to think that what he has written in the Preface can be beneficial in terms of interpreting the Ode. So far, the following notions appeared during the discussion of the Ode, which will be clarified in the following chapter: feeling, thought, habit, and ordinary.

The present research will follow, so to speak, the Ode’s line of composition. Wordsworth made a pause after he had finished the previously discussed first four stanzas. The research will now similarly have a pause in terms of discussing the Ode. The following section will give an interpretation of the previously mentioned notions in Wordsworth’s way of thinking. This is going to be carried out through analysing some passages from his famous Preface written to *Lyrical Ballads*. After the presented ideas, firstly, the interpretation and appearance of the discussed notions will be presented in Wordsworth’s poem entitled *Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey*. Secondly, some similarities and parallels will be highlighted between “Tintern Abbey” and the Ode. The discussion of the Ode will continue after these speculations.

3 – Habits of Meditation, Recollection, Thought

There is a tradition in Wordsworth criticism, established by M.H. Abrams, to think that Wordsworth's moments of insight and natural feelings come, like Rousseau's, when deprived of habitual, conventional customs, which Abrams sums up "when he says of Wordsworth's poetic enterprise that its 'prime opponent-power is custom.'"⁵² Rousseau in the Second Discourse (from *Discourse on the Origin and Foundation of Inequality*) makes an absolute distinction concerning the nature of human feelings and actions, investigating man both as subject and object in his discussion. In case of the subjective aspect, Rousseau claims that our habits, our education make us unable to see naturally, prevent us from "going back to the state of nature."⁵³ Concerning the objective analysis of the natural man, he will "himself be as nude as we can make ourselves in the act of reconstruction", meaning with this that Rousseau's natural man is "naked" in the sense that he is deprived of all civil habits and codes, thus being able to represent a natural state, where nature is deprived of social conventions. "Rousseau represents the states of nature and civil society as two...absolutes... [that] represent opposing extremes that brook no compromise."⁵⁴

It is possible to call in question Abrams' assumption and to ascribe for Wordsworth another source of inspiration, not Rousseau, but Edmund Burke. As Chandler sums it up, in Burke's system, feelings take priority over theory, as when "our feelings contradict our theories...the feelings are true, and the theory is false."⁵⁵ Furthermore, feelings take priority also over reason. If this is true and feelings take priority over reason, how can we tell when our feelings are "right" and when they are not? A Burkean answer would be that "the

⁵² James Chandler, *Wordsworth's Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics* (Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 74.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 69-70.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

Englishman's reliable sentiments are his natural entrails; he has a natural heart of flesh and blood. The feelings that can be trusted must therefore be the natural ones."⁵⁶ But the question is then how one can distinguish the natural from the unnatural feelings. A passage from Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* will probably get us closer to the nature of this problem. Burke says about the "nature" of the Englishmen that

...instead of casting away all our old prejudices, we cherish them to a very considerable degree; and, to take more shame to ourselves, we cherish them because they are prejudices...Many of our men of speculation, instead of exploding general prejudices, employ their sagacity to discover the latent wisdom which prevails in them. If they find what they seek, (and they seldom fail,) they think it more wise to continue the prejudice, with the reason involved, than to cast away the coat of prejudice, and to leave nothing but the naked reason; because prejudice, with its reason, has a motive to give action to that reason, and an affection which will give it permanence... Prejudice renders a man's virtue his habit, and not a series of unconnected acts. Through just prejudice, his study becomes a part of his nature.⁵⁷

We can claim that, although Burke argued in favour of feeling over reason, he implies here that one must have a rational criterion, reason, especially when one has to distinguish good prejudice from bad prejudice.⁵⁸ With Burke, the use of the word "nature" is just as ambiguous as "feeling", "reason", or "prejudice." Chandler compares the previously quoted passage with another from Burke's *Reflections*: "All the superadded ideas, furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns and the understanding ratifies, as necessary to cover the defects of our naked, shivering nature, and to raise it to dignity in our own estimation, are to be exploded, as a ridiculous, absurd, and antiquated fashion."⁵⁹

As Chandler argues, "the 'coat of prejudice' from the later passage would seem to be an item from the moral imagination's wardrobe. But the garments in the earlier passage clothe 'our naked...nature' whereas the coat of prejudice clothes the 'naked...reason.'"⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Ibid., 63.

⁵⁷ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. W. B. Todd (New York: Holt Rinehard and Winston, 1962), 105-106.

⁵⁸ Chandler, *Wordsworth's Second Nature*, 66.

⁵⁹ Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 92-93.

⁶⁰ Chandler, *Wordsworth's Second Nature*, 67.

Furthermore, with the phrase “our nature” in the second excerpt, Burke refers to something that simultaneously comprises both our reason and our clothes or prejudices, both reason and habit. Thus, nature, in the second excerpt comprises both our naked, shivering “nature” (which was described first through feeling, then through reason which we have to apply because of our prejudices); and our “second nature”, which manifests itself as we create a habit out of our prejudices. Consequently, it is an inherent feature of Burke’s philosophical system that “there is Nature and there is a second nature which is at once within Nature yet parallel to it. Second nature is at once metaphorical and metonymous with Nature.”⁶¹

As opposed to Rousseau’s ideas that are attributed to Wordsworth via Abrams (that Wordsworth would also maintain a sharp distinction between nature and custom), Burke’s system is one that does not work with extremes, his doctrines represent a transitional place, a place amid extremes, and the function of his theory of second nature “is to compromise the absolute extremes of a writer like Rousseau by occupying the medium between them.”⁶² And Wordsworth’s use of “nature,” “feeling,” “thought,” and “habit” is more akin to the way Burke handles these notions. Wordsworth will not contempt habits, conventions and thoughts, furthermore, he bases his poetic theory on thoughts and habits. His creative process is also a process that is of habitual nature. In the following, we turn to Wordsworth’s theory of poetry, through which we will question another of Abram’s assumptions.

According to Wordsworth’s famous doctrine, “poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.”⁶³ In Abrams’ interpretation, this formulation of Wordsworth’s literary pronouncement makes him a representative of cultural primitivism.

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

⁶¹ Ibid., 67.

⁶² Ibid., 71.

⁶³ William Wordsworth and S. T. Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, eds. R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones (New York: Routledge, 2005), 237.

thought and feeling and a spontaneous and ‘unartificial’ mode of expressing feeling in words.⁶⁴

Abrams claims that spontaneity, with Wordsworth means the “spontaneous and genuine, not the contrived and stimulated, expression of the emotional state of the poet” so that the language he uses and the feelings he describes are natural, because extemporaneous.⁶⁵ According to Paul Magnuson, however, we have reason to give another interpretation to the word “spontaneous”, with which we can question the assumption of Abrams and later critics (such as James Heffernan or W.J.B. Owen) of Wordsworth’s poetic theory, who (alongside with Abrams) interpreted spontaneous as natural. Eighteenth century dictionaries contain definitions of “spontaneity” that can probably more closely reflect the Wordsworthian meaning of the word. According to these definitions, “spontaneous” can mean “voluntary”, “without constraint”, and “of one’s own record or free will”. These meanings first appeared in the scientific discourse of philosophy and biology in the eighteenth century. In its philosophical context “spontaneous indicates freedom, and in its biological context it indicates self-generation.”⁶⁶

In what follows, the argument will be that Wordsworth’s poetic theory can be seen as an autogenous one that does not rely exclusively on outside stimuli but works in a self-generating fashion, and that this process is based on, besides feelings, thoughts and habits. The following observations will hopefully shed more light on Wordsworth’s habits of meditation.

According to Wordsworth, a purpose of his poems is to make the readers able to receive “from ordinary moral sensations another and more salutary impression than we are

⁶⁴ Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, 105.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁶⁶ Paul Magnuson, “Wordsworth and Spontaneity,” in *The Evidence of the Imagination: Studies of Interaction Between Life and Art in English Romantic Literature*, eds. D. H. Reiman – M. C. Jaye – B. T. Bennett (New York: New York University Press, 1972), 103.

accustomed to receive from them.”⁶⁷ The purpose is to “to illustrate the manner in which our feelings and ideas are associated in a state of excitement...to follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature.”⁶⁸ To put in in another way, the purpose will be

to define ‘general truth’, the norm of human emotional behaviour, and to show that particular incidents are congruous with it. The obscure passage...is meant to show how mental habits are formed in the poet such that, when his feelings have been ‘strongly excited’, they have *ipso facto* been excited by something which has inevitable connections with general truth.⁶⁹

What are the mental habits that make Wordsworth able to write poetry in a way that they carry along with them a purpose? It is not, as Wordsworth argues, “that I always began to write with a distinct purpose formally conceived”, but “my habits of meditation have so formed my feelings, as that my descriptions of such objects as strongly excite those feelings, will be found to carry along with them a *purpose*.”⁷⁰ Wordsworth is again talking about a *habit*, the habit of meditation, and it is due to the fact that this process got habitualised that it will consequently carry along with it a purpose.

After the first time Wordsworth formulates his doctrine (“poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”), he continues thus: “but though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached, were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility had also thought long and deeply.”⁷¹ And when pages later he formulates his theory for the second time (“I have said that Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”), he adds that

it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, similar to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind.⁷²

⁶⁷ Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, 238-239.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 238.

⁶⁹ W. J. B. Owen, *Wordsworth as Critic* (Toronto-Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1969), 38.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 237.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*, 251-252.

So Wordsworth describes a poetic theory that is based on retrospection, meditation. There is no timespan given concerning how much time should pass before a past experience, a past emotion can undergo a process of contemplation until it will subside into thought.⁷³

The purpose is “to follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind”, because “our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings.”⁷⁴ So what Wordsworth implicates in this passage is that the feelings that subside into thoughts, which very thoughts can direct our feelings, are “the representatives of all our past feelings”, in other words, they are memories. It is the habit of meditation that gives purpose, shape to the feelings that arise. If past feelings turn into thoughts in memory, then recollection comprises a past emotional reaction and a reflection adjoined to this.⁷⁵ And indeed, “as by contemplating the relation of these general representatives to each other, we discover what is really important to men.”⁷⁶ So the habit of meditation, recollection, through which powerful emotions overflow will not mean a “spontaneous”, an impromptu reaction to outside stimuli, but denote a consciously used and practised process which operates with mental constructions. And it is through “the repetition and continuance of this act” of recollection in meditation that “such habits of mind will be produced” that can be followed “blindly and mechanically” by the poet.⁷⁷ So then, in other words, the poet will have to practice the consciously used technique of recollection (the habit of meditation) in which one contemplates the connection of past experiences until it becomes an automatized process.⁷⁸

⁷³ Magnuson, “Wordsworth and Spontaneity,” 102.

⁷⁴ Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, 237.

⁷⁵ Zsolt Komáromy, “Emlékezet és retorika Wordsworth poétikájában: a Lírai balladák Előszaváról,” in *Forradalom és Retorika: Tanulmányok az angol romantikáról*, eds. Bálint Gárdos and Ágnes Péter (Budapest: l’Harmattan, 2008), 186. The summarisations and quotations from Komáromy’s Hungarian text appear in my translation.

⁷⁶ Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, 237.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 237-238.

⁷⁸ Komáromy, “Emlékezet és Retorika,” 187.

However, some further clarification is still needed to see exactly how autogenous Wordsworth's "spontaneous" poetry is. As quoted above already, "the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, similar to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind."⁷⁹ Magnuson points out that there are two different emotions, which are, according to this passage, not one in creation: "one is engendered, perhaps by personal experience or nature, and subsides, and a second is stimulated by contemplating the first."⁸⁰ The second, "poetic emotion" is not a mere re-creation of the first, it cannot be, because then the process would be merely regressive. Furthermore, in the 1802 edition of the Preface, Wordsworth changed the word "similar" to "kindred", a gesture that can be interpreted to signal Wordsworth's awareness of the two emotions relationship. The new, "poetic emotion" has its source in the first emotion, but it is crucial that it will subside into thought, will become the subject of meditation, and through the contemplation of their relationship, a new, "kindred" poetic emotion will be engendered.⁸¹ Furthermore, to prove more precisely that Wordsworth differentiates between two emotions, we may highlight the end of the sentence: "an emotion...is gradually produced, and does *itself* actually exist in the mind. So there are going to be two emotions, one from the past that is recollected, and one that is new and is created through the recollection, which overflows spontaneously in the sense that it is free and void of external stimuli."⁸²

To back his interpretation about the nature of Wordsworth's creative process, Magnuson calls our attention to the writings of John Dennis, who has probably influenced Wordsworth in formulating his poetic theory in terms of distinguishing two different emotions. Dennis differentiates "Vulgar Passion" and "Enthusiastic Passion" and according to

⁷⁹ Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, 251-252.

⁸⁰ Magnuson, "Wordsworth and Spontaneity," 106.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 106-107.

⁸² Komáromy, "Emlékezet és Retorika," 190-192.

his ideas, “Vulgar Passion is that which is moved by the Objects themselves, or by the Ideas in the ordinary Course of Life.”⁸³ As opposed to this, “Enthusiastic Passion is a Passion which is moved by the Ideas in Contemplation, or the Meditation of things that belong not to common Life.” Dennis’ influence can be also seen in the 1815 Preface, where Wordsworth differentiates between “enthusiastic and meditative Imagination” and “human and dramatic Imagination.”⁸⁴

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

He distinguishes between a sublime based upon terror and personal fear, which, if continued “beyond a certain point,” results in “self-consideration & all its accompanying littleness” and a second, the more exalted sublime, which “rouses us to a sympathetic energy & calls upon the mind to grasp at something towards which it can make approaches but which it is incapable of attaining.” The familiarity with natural objects that mitigates personal fear and transforms it into the more exalted sublime resembles the deliberate process of contemplation...which transforms the original emotion into the poetic emotion.⁸⁵

On the one hand, familiarity with objects is important, so it is not a coincidence that Wordsworth describes and contemplates on elements from the ordinary. On the other, “Enthusiastic Passion” can be connected with what Wordsworth describes as “the more exalted sublime” because “Enthusiastic Passion” is generated through contemplation and meditation, “and those thoughts are, in their most sublime, religious ideas, which produce thoughts quite different from those of common objects.”⁸⁶ And, concerning the creative

⁸³ John Dennis, “The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry,” in *Augustan Critical Writing*, ed. David Womersley (London: Penguin, 1997), 154-155.

⁸⁴ Magnuson, “Wordsworth and Spontaneity,” 108.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

process which Wordsworth describes in the Preface, “Vulgar Passion” can be paralleled with the first emotion that comes to the poet (probably from outside stimuli), and “Enthusiastic Passion” (that is gained by meditation and contemplation) can be paralleled with the poetic emotion, which is derived from the contemplation of the first emotion.⁸⁷

Let us sum up what has been described so far: the centre of Wordsworth’s theory is the act of meditation. Through this meditation, he generates the poetic emotion, which is created through the contemplation of feelings. There is an initial emotion (that may have its source from external stimuli) but which will subside into thought through an undefined span of time. Through contemplating (via recollection) the relationship between the initial emotion and the thought (which is a memory, the representative of our past feelings), the poet will be able to create the new, poetic emotion. If we interpret habit as a phenomenon that can be part of man’s nature (via the speculations of Burke, where this was a possible option), we can claim that Wordsworth’s self-generative process due to becoming a habit of the poet, will be a natural process. It is through the habitual nature of this meditation that the poet can create a moral purpose for his poems. To see this, we will have to continue with some of Chandler’s speculations.

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

⁸⁷ Komáromy, “Emlékezet és Retorika,” 194.

opposition, in which case the second (moral) nature is constituted by social circumstances, by habits of social conventions.⁸⁸

Later, Chandler tracks down the influence of Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* in one of Wordsworth's texts: "That Wordsworth learned some of his Burke through the *Enquiry* is clear; only the question how much and how early have not been settled."⁸⁹ An obvious proof of the use of Burke's *Enquiry* can be depicted in the already mentioned "Sublime and Beautiful" section written for the *Guide to the Lakes*. The latest possible date is 1811-12, but he argues that it was most probably written much earlier.⁹⁰

Another text which shows Burke's possible influence on the writings of Wordsworth is an unfinished prose text bearing the title *Essay on Morals*. This was written during Wordsworth's residence at Goslar, probably as early as the latter part of 1798, and "its subject is not so much morality as moral writing – specifically, the relation between moral writing and its rhetorical effect."⁹¹ Although this particular text is a fragment, the Preface can be seen as a text which explicates and continues the arguments that are presented in the *Essay*. (And it probably also contains speculations that are in "The Sublime and the Beautiful.") And, as Chandler also points out, a central topic in the Preface is the question of purposiveness.⁹² This is a crucial aspect which distinguishes Wordsworth's poems from others: "that each of them has a worthy purpose."⁹³ The purpose of these poems will be, as already mentioned earlier, to

⁸⁸ Chandler, *Wordsworth's Second Nature*, 71-72.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 81-82. Chandler even highlights some stylistic features in Wordsworth's text to emphasise and reinforce Burke's influence: "Even Wordsworth's figures of speech in the *Essay* are Burkean. When he says, for example, that the rationalists 'strip the mind of its old clothing,' he is punning on 'habit' just as Burke did when he called habits the 'moral wardrobe of the imagination.' Burke's related figure of reason's 'nakedness,' which looms so prominently in the France book of *The Prelude*, also appears in the *Essay* where Wordsworth speaks of our 'bald & naked reasonings.' Burke did not himself invent these figures, of course, but they are properly called Burkean, because in the 1790s he invested them with an ideological power distinctively his own."

⁹² *Ibid.*, 82.

⁹³ Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, 237.

receive “from ordinary moral sensations another and more salutary impression than we are accustomed to receive from them.”

Now, let us bring together the thoughts of Burke and Wordsworth’s thoughts in his writings we have discussed: second nature is of moral nature, and is also constituted by social constructions, habits of social conventions. Wordsworth’s poems differ from contemporary poems in the sense that they have a worthy, moral purpose. Wordsworth wants to convey moral sensations for the readers’ moral amelioration. He is going to be able to do this through his habit of meditation, which is a thought-based process, and which is a habit. So Wordsworth is not discrediting thoughts, nor habits, customs or conventions, these all play crucial roles in his theory of poetry.

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

An untrue description of Nature was to him a profaneness, a heavenly message sophisticated and falsely delivered. He expatiated much to me one day, as we walked among the hills above Grasmere, on the mode in which Nature had been described by one of the most justly popular of England’s modern poets [who was, according to Bateson, most probably Tennyson⁹⁴] – one for whom he preserved a high and affectionate respect. “He took pains,” Wordsworth said; “he went out with his pencil and notebook, and jotted down whatever struck him most – a river rippling over the sands, a ruined tower on a rock above it, a promontory; and a mountain-ash waving its red berries. He went home, and wove the whole together into a poetical description.” After a pause Wordsworth resumed with a flashing eye and impassioned voice: “But Nature does not permit an inventory to be made of her charms! He should have left his pencil and notebook at home; fixed his eye, as he walked, with a reverent attention on all that surrounded him, and taken all into a heart that could understand and enjoy. *Then, after several days had passed by, he should have interrogated his memory as to the scene. He would have discovered that while much of what he had admired was preserved to him, much was also most wisely obliterated. That which remained – the picture surviving in his mind – would have presented the ideal and essential truth of the scene, and done so, in a large part, by discarding much which, though in itself striking, was not characteristic.* In every scene many of the most brilliant details are but

⁹⁴ Bateson, *Wordsworth*, 164.

accidental. A true eye for Nature does not note them, or at least does not dwell on them.⁹⁵

As Bateson argues, for Wordsworth, “memory was not primarily a recording mechanism, passively registering whatever came before the mind’s eye. It was active, a ‘power’ which selected from the stream of consciousness those items, and those items only, that *deserved* to be remembered.”⁹⁶ And memory is worked upon by the poet’s mind during the habit of meditation, where the poet creates, through reflection on thoughts that are “the representatives of all our past feelings,” poetic emotions. That Wordsworth told this to de Vere in his later years may signal that this process, the workings of a reflective mind through recollection, was important for Wordsworth not only then when he formulated his ideas about it in the Preface, but also in his later career as a poet. This is of course not to say that this is the only way Wordsworth has written poetry, or that these ideas can be traced down in each and every poem of his, but it is important to see this, because the thought-based process, habit of recollection will be crucial in terms of interpreting the Ode.

Before returning to the interpretation of the Ode, the workings of Wordsworth’s thought-based creative process will be presented through discussing some parts from his poem, “Tintern Abbey.” Afterwards, some similarities between “Tintern Abbey” and the Ode will be highlighted, and subsequently, the research will return to the discussion of the Ode.

A frequently occurring problem in “Tintern Abbey,” especially at the beginning of the poem, is the fear of seclusion. “The only thought mentioned in the first verse paragraph, aside from the recollection of the first visit, is seclusion.”⁹⁷ The landscape described offers a harmonious impression of romantic unity, and yet, seclusion enters the mind of the poet.

Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
Which on a wild secluded scene impress

⁹⁵ Aubrey de Vere, *Essays Chiefly on Poetry*, vol. 2. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1887), 276-277. Emphasis added

⁹⁶ Bateson, *Wordsworth*, 165.

⁹⁷ Magnuson, “Wordsworth and Spontaneity,” 110.

Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.⁹⁸

Magnuson argues that Wordsworth fears from the seclusion from his own past and from a seclusion of his “genial spirits”. In order to overcome this, the poet recalls the first time he visited the Wyre.⁹⁹ The recollections, youth’s “aching joys” and “dizzy raptures,” the continuity of the emotions that appeared when young are carried on, are transformed, through reflection, into poetic emotions.¹⁰⁰ It is due to this process that the poet can claim that he can still be

A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye and ear, both what they half-create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognize
In nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts.

It is half-created because the emotions in themselves are not enough to create poetic emotions, to give relief to the seclusion, the emotions have to be contemplated, have to go through the creative process of Wordsworth’s habit of meditation. As Chandler argues, the Ode resembles “Tintern Abbey” in that in both poems, “the once thoughtless is revisited in thought.”¹⁰¹

The logic is the same as we find with the opening lines of “Tintern Abbey,” where the poet’s reflections ...represent not only the occasion of his meditation but also the upshot of his maturation...In “Tintern Abbey,” these reflections supply the proof, as it were, that the poet now, in 1798, no longer seeks thoughtlessly after nature’s objects but rather has attuned his perception to the still sad music of humanity.¹⁰²

There are also textual similarities, images that appear in both poems and a rhetorical logic, a way of argumentation and presentation of ideas that appear in a similar fashion in the two poems. Lucy Newlyn, for example, highlights the similarity of the following two excerpts:

⁹⁸ Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, 110-115.

⁹⁹ Magnuson, “Wordsworth and Spontaneity,” 110.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 110-111.

¹⁰¹ Chandler, “Wordsworth’s Great Ode,” 148.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 150.

That time is past,
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.

The structure of this sentence from “Tintern Abbey” can be paralleled with lines in the Ode
(from stanza IX)¹⁰³

Not for these I raise
The song of thanks and praise
But for those blank misgivings...

Another, already quoted passage from “Tintern Abbey” can be similarly compared to a
passage from the Ode:

Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods
...
well pleased to recognize
In nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse, 110
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.

This will be similar to a passage from the last (XI.) stanza of the Ode,

And oh ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves, 190
...
I love the Brooks which down their channels fret,
Even more than when I tripped lightly as they...

The reason for why the poet can be still a lover, and a better lover of the brooks, of nature in the Ode, is because he will revisit nature not through feelings, as he tried it in the first part of the poem, but will revisit the scene through thought. The once thoughtless will be, similarly as in “Tintern Abbey,” revisited in thought. There is one more similarity that is going to be discussed. In Tintern Abbey, the speaker says that “The sounding cataract / Haunted me like a passion” when as a child. As already mentioned via the speculations of Magnuson, the poet can overcome the fear that appears in “Tintern Abbey” with transforming

¹⁰³ Lucy Newlyn, *Coleridge, Wordsworth, and the Language of Allusion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 55.

the fear, using it to create poetic emotions. In the Ode, “The Cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep.” The sublime image of the cataract appears in the setting where the timely utterance is echoed. This was the point where a dramatic turn took place. The poet entered the Dionysian whirl, where the poet experienced ecstatic feelings. The ecstasy added up to a feeling of unease, of horror, finally culminating in the ultimate horror of the poet, in the (re)-realisation of his loss.

In the following chapters, the remaining parts of the Ode will be discussed. The interpretation will hopefully shed light on the way the poet, similarly to the logic of “Tintern Abbey,” will manage to listen not to the Dionysian music, but to the “still, sad music of humanity.”

4 – Ode: Second Part

V

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy,
But He beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy;
The Youth, who daily farther from the east
Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;
At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day.

The second part of the Ode begins with thoughts about the platonic myth of pre-existence, or more precisely, the Wordsworthian version of the platonic myth, where “heaven [still] lies about us in our infancy.” So we come “not in entire forgetfulness,” but still with the feeling and sense of the celestial, of God, “who is our home.” Although we do not know for sure if Wordsworth has read Plato's *Phaedo* when composing the Ode, he knew about the platonic myth, and, as most critics agree, he knew about it from Coleridge.¹⁰⁴ Garrod is critical about how to handle the neo-platonic notion of the soul's pre-existence in Wordsworth's poem. In his arguments, he is mainly relying on Coleridge, according to whose ideas readers would probably not “charge Mr. Wordsworth with believing the Platonic pre-existence in the ordinary interpretation of the words, as I am to believe that Plato himself ever

¹⁰⁴ A. W. Price, “Wordsworth's Ode on the Intimations of Immortality,” in *Platonism and the English Imagination*, eds. Anna Baldwin and Sarah Hutton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 218., see also Garrod, *Wordsworth*, 115.

meant or taught it!”¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, Garrod argues that Wordsworth’s way of thinking cannot be congruous with Plato’s, because Wordsworth is a “pure sensationalist,” whereas Plato’s way of thinking and his theory of reminiscence is based on knowledge, on reason.¹⁰⁶ There is probably no problem with Garrod’s observations concerning Plato, but what he claims about Wordsworth will be questioned. As it could be seen already when discussing the first part of the Ode, relief will be granted to the poet through thought, not through feeling. And when presenting Wordsworth’s theory of poetry, it was argued that his theory is based on thoughts, on thinking, on reflection, consequently, Wordsworth’s way of thinking is congruous with Plato’s exactly because it is thought-based.

According to Plato, we lose the sense of our soul’s immortality immediately when we are born, and gradually relearn it through recollection.¹⁰⁷ Strictly speaking, Wordsworth does differ from Plato in this respect. In his Ode, the child is still a representative of this knowledge, and in Wordsworth’s poem, coming close to the sense of the immortality of one’s soul will be granted through recollecting not the existence before childhood, but childhood, the child itself. As Price argues, (although somewhat reluctantly), “that we advance through learning as recollecting” does not go against, but fits the platonic thinking.¹⁰⁸ As Wordsworth says in the Fenwick notes, “I took hold of the notion of pre-existence as having sufficient foundation in humanity for authorizing me to make for my purpose the best use of it I could as a Poet.”¹⁰⁹ It may easily be that Wordsworth did not believe in the notion in terms of faith, but he knew about it and has consciously built it into his poem, so it has to be dealt with, regardless of what Coleridge has thought of the matter. And, as argued, Wordsworth’s way of

¹⁰⁵ S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, vol. 2. ed. J. Shawcross (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 120-121.

¹⁰⁶ Garrod, *Wordsworth*, 117.

¹⁰⁷ Price, “Wordsworth’s Ode on the Intimations of Immortality,” 221.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 223.

¹⁰⁹ Gill, *Wordsworth*, 764.

thinking is not in contradiction with Plato's way of thinking, because both are based on reason, on thought, and both work with and through recollection.

As mentioned, Wordsworth differs from Plato in that in his poem, the child is still capable to represent the sense of immortality. Wordsworth uses the platonic myth to create another, his own myth, the myth of the child. It is in this sense that he uses it, as a poet, and for his purposes. Because the mythical child will be one who is still representing the soul's immortality, it will be the child who has to be remembered and recollected in the Ode, so not directly the sense of the soul's immortality, but the child who is a representative of it. With this, Wordsworth creates a possibility for a way of thinking, a need for recollection, and structurally speaking, concerning the poem, it will be possible to recollect the child, the joy, whose celestial way of being was described at the end of stanza III and in stanza IV, as the child who is in connection with and part of nature. The interpretation of the following stanzas will be given through bearing these thoughts in mind.

The opening line of the stanza is important: "Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting." Forgetting will be related to the title idea of the poem, to recollecting, which again, evokes the platonic myth of recollections and the soul's immortality.¹¹⁰ "What we are instructed to recollect, to call back and to gather together, is a sleep and a forgetting. 'Sleep' is characterised earlier as the region of fields from which the Winds come."¹¹¹ Indeed, in the third stanza, "The Winds come to me from the fields of sleep." This is the wind which carries along the utterance, or utterances, because due to the echoes, they are multiplied. Furthermore, the utterance which was carried along with this wind was the thought-based utterance which gave the poet relief.

The image and notion of sleep is textually and theoretically also important in terms of the connection between the Ode and Plato's parable. According to Socrates, "Life is opposed

¹¹⁰ Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, 73.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 74.

to death, as waking is to sleeping, and in like manner they are generated from one another.”¹¹²

Through claiming that one is generated from the other, Cebes deducts that “then the inference is that our souls exist in the world below.”¹¹³ As Socrates argues, he will confirm and describe this idea with “the case of sleep”:

You know that if there were no alternation of sleeping and waking, the tale of the sleeping Endymion would in the end have no meaning, because all other things would be asleep too, and he would not be distinguishable from the rest. Or if there were composition only, and no division of substances, then the chaos of Anaxagoras would come again. And in like manner, my dear Cebes, if all things which partook of life were to die, and after they were dead remained in the form of death, and did not come to life again, all would at last die, and nothing would be alive—what other result could there be?...I am confident that there truly is such a thing as living again, and that the living spring from the dead, and that the souls of the dead are in existence, and that the good souls have a better portion than the evil.

Cebes added: Your favourite doctrine, Socrates, that knowledge is simply recollection, if true, also necessarily implies a previous time in which we have learned that which we now recollect. But this would be impossible unless our soul had been in some place before existing in the form of man; here then is another proof of the soul’s immortality.¹¹⁴

The images of sleeping or being awake will be also important in stanza VIII, where the speaker gives the probably most precise description of the child, but there are still other aspects of stanza V to be discussed. It is important that Wordsworth depicts two different children. (This will get clearer in the following, but is also sensible in the present stanza.) There is a mythical child in the poem who is still in possession of the celestial light, the glory, and there is a “growing Boy,” who will gradually lose the glory, over whom “shades of the prison-house begin to close.” The growing Boy will still be “Nature’s Priest,” for a while, but the glory will “fade into the light of common day.” The interpretation of this last line is crucial.

On the one hand, that the light fades does not necessarily mean that it will disappear into nothingness. That it fades “into the *light* of common day” is also important, images

¹¹² Plato, “Phaedo,” in *Dialogues of Plato*, vol. 2. trans. B. Jowett (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), 211.

¹¹³ *Ibide.*, 212.

¹¹⁴ *Ibide.*, 212-213.

referring to light were so far connected with the celestial, with the glory. And as it was argued when comparing Wordsworth's way of thinking with Burke's, the common day, the habitual, can be considered not as a main enemy in Wordsworth's way of thinking, but an inherent part of it. Thus it can be argued that the light of the celestial will not disappear into, but will get transformed, merge into the common day, into the ordinary. On the other hand, it is man who "perceives it die away." Wordsworth does not only depict different children, but similarly, also makes a difference between men. That there is a man who consciously, through perceiving, realises the change, the transformation of light, reveals the thinking of a reflective mind. Bloom also makes a distinction between the child (who is, in his views, the Natural Man") and the mature poet at the end of the poem (whom he terms as the "Imaginative Man). In between, there is , what he calls, the Trapped Man.¹¹⁵ This trapped man is similar to the one who appeared at the end of stanza IV, who tried to recapture the celestial way of seeing, the glory through an emotional process, which did not grant, ultimately, the recapturing of the celestial. The following stanza contains some important speculations about the nature of the child and the "Trapped Man":

VI

Earth fills her lap with pleasures of her own;
 Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,
 And, even with something of a Mother's mind,
 And no unworthy aim,
 The homely Nurse doth all she can
 To make her Foster-child, her Inmate Man,
 Forget the glories he hath known,
 And that imperial palace whence he came.

It seems that the "growing Boy" and the "Trapped Man" can be interpreted as referring to the same person, or a particular state of a person, as this stanza also uses "Foster-child" and "Inmate Man" synonymously to refer to the same state. There seems to be a seclusion, a gap between nature and the trapped man, similarly to the way there was a

¹¹⁵ Bloom, *The Visionary Company*, 174.

seclusion in Tintern Abbey. Nature has pleasures and yearnings “in her own natural kind.” So there seems to be a distinction between nature and humanity that is impossible to bridge. Yet, it is said, that with “no unworthy aim,” thus, with a purpose, nature makes the child “forget the glories,” the celestial, thus there is a kind of connection between nature and the trapped man. This goes with the previously mentioned Burkean way of thinking, with which the nature of the child’s and trapped man’s connection with nature can be described. It seems that the child has, on the one hand, the celestial and immortal in his nature. However, he will also have another nature, a “second nature,” which will be described in the following stanza. So the child has an inherent nature, but he also has a second nature, that is metonymic and parallel to his nature. In the following stanza, a description of the child’s new, “second nature” is given:

VII

Behold the Child among his new-born blisses,
A six years’ Darling of a pigmy size!
See, where ’mid work of his own hand he lies,
Fretted by sallies of his mother’s kisses,
With light upon him from his father’s eyes!
See, at his feet, some little plan or chart,
Some fragment from his dream of human life,
Shaped by himself with newly-learned art;
A wedding or a festival,
A mourning or a funeral;
And this hath now his heart,
And unto this he frames his song:
Then will he fit his tongue
To dialogues of business, love, or strife;
But it will not be long
Ere this be thrown aside,
And with new joy and pride
The little Actor cons another part;
Filling from time to time his ‘humorous stage’
With all the Persons, down to palsied Age,
That Life brings with her in her equipage;
As if his whole vocation
Were endless imitation.

First of all, the child will indeed turn from nature to social activities, or more precisely, to the learning of acquiring different social roles. But these are termed as “new-born *blisses*,” they give joy to the child. Secondly, light first appeared with the “celestial light.” Later this light got carried over to the common day, to the ordinary. Now, the child receives the light “from his Father’s eyes.” The child is still endowed with light, but now he receives it from the common, the everyday.

A crucial idea of the stanza, the idea of imitation is in connection with this learning. As Cavell argues, “imitation in Plato, refers to *participation*, of things in their form, or, say, of time in eternity...imitating ourselves, or what we might become.”¹¹⁶ This is important, because this is the first point where the child is active out his own will. According to the stanza, the child, with his imitation, is trying to shape “his dream of human life.” So far, the child had no conscious decisions, made no actions out his own. It can be argued that this is a point where conscious reflection and thinking starts for the child and this is a new feature in terms of the child’s description in the poem. The child participates in human life with imitating his dream, the dream of his possible personality, and he does so still with light endowed around him from his father’s eyes, he does so with and through the light of the common day. From the mature man’s perspective, recollecting childhood, this stage of the child is also important. Participation in life entails responsibilities, and the man’s responsibility concerning recollecting the child, the dream “is to recollect the dream of life, as from fragments, as if in the whole vocation of becoming human, of suffering birth, were endless participation in such a dream...only so can we recollect that we as we are are not yet the fulfilment of this dream.”¹¹⁷ The dream will be complex. It will not only comprise the possible ideal that the child starts to imagine, but will also comprise the nature of his being

¹¹⁶ Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, 73.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 74.

when he is still representing the immortal nature of his being. This will be discussed through the interpretation of the following stanza.

VIII

Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie
Thy Soul's immensity;
Thou best Philosopher, who yet dost keep
Thy heritage, thou Eye among the blind,
That, deaf and silent, read'st the eternal deep,
Haunted for ever by the eternal mind, –
Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!
On whom those truths do rest,
Which we are toiling all our lives to find,
In darkness lost, the darkness of the grave;
Thou, over whom thy Immortality
Broods like the Day, a Master o'er a Slave,
A Presence which is not to be put by;
To whom the grave
Is but a lonely bed without the sense or sight
Of day or the warm light,
A place of thought where we in waiting lie;
Thou little Child, yet glorious in the might
Of heaven-born freedom on thy Being's height,
Why with such earnest pains dost thou provoke
The years to bring the inevitable yoke,
Thus blindly with thy blessedness at strife?
Full soon thy Soul shall have her earthly freight,
And custom lie upon thee with a weight,
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!

It is important to note that we are dealing with the description of a different child in stanza VIII from the previous one. This is the description of the mythical child, not the one who is already imitating, reflecting and participating in his dream. The argument would be that the description of the child in this stanza comprises all the possible positive absolutes that can be assigned to him. Coleridge was critical concerning this stanza. He criticised the stanza for its “faulty and equivocal syntax” and asked: “what does all this mean? In what sense is a child...a philosopher?”¹¹⁸ Furthermore, he also found “the frightful notion of lying *awake* in his grave” quite startling.¹¹⁹ What is interesting is that these are probably the most important

¹¹⁸ Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 111.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 114.

images in the stanza. Wordsworth is relying and developing the meanings of the images he used so far.

The child can be a philosopher because he is the “Eye among the blind.” Eye was important so far, because it was connected to seeing, and especially to seeing the light: at the beginning of the poem, it was connected with the “celestial light” and later, it was the father’s eye which endowed the child with the light of common day. But concerning light and eye, the child is elevated to such a level where he does not need any light to be shed on him, either by a father, or by the sense of immortality, he is the light, immortality itself. The grave where he lies is a place “without the sense or sight / Of day or the warm light.” Furthermore, images from the platonic myth also appear concerning the grave. The grave usually serves as a place where “we are laid asleep / In body, and become a living soul.”¹²⁰ As opposed to this, the grave, for the child, is “A place of thought where we in waiting lie.” The child is even capable of overcoming the oppositions of sleeping or being awake, of mortality and immortality, he is a “Presence,” as Wordsworth puts it.

Another important quality of the child (or the Presence?) is that he (or it?) is reading the eternal deep “deaf and silent.” This silence of the child can be interpreted, according to Richards, as a central point of the poem.¹²¹ As argued before, the child, in this stanza, is ascribed with absolute qualities, he stands for immortality itself. Thus there seems to be a gap between man and the mythic child that is insuperable. The child cannot hear us, as his ears are deaf to mortals, and even if he could hear us, he could not answer to us because he is silent. The state of being, the “presence” that he constitutes is probably a way of being that cannot be formulated in words, and “as the saying suggests, one remains a philosopher only by – being silent.”¹²² Nevertheless, according to the end of the stanza, the child will not be able to stay in

¹²⁰ Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, 111.

¹²¹ I. A. Richards, *Coleridge on Imagination* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 134.

¹²² F. W. Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. Marion Faber with Stephen Lehmann (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 11.

this state, custom will lie upon him “with a weight, / Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!” This is a dramatic and critical point in the poem where we could easily see custom and common-day, similarly to Abrams’ line of thoughts, as an absolute to nature and the child that creates a gap that is impossible to bridge.¹²³ However, there is a line which implies a possible way of overcoming our seclusion. When describing the child in connection with the grave (where he does not need light because he is the light and can surpass all oppositions as the presence or absence of light, or being asleep or awake), the grave is described as “a place of *thought* where we in waiting lie.” The entire stanza is about the child and the description of his features, and in this one line, we get a description of a place where man and child can be together, and can be together in and through *thought*. This will be important and in connection with the title idea of recollection. The second part of the Ode ends with the previously mentioned crisis of custom destroying the child’s (and hence, also the man’s) connection with his immortal nature. In the following, through discussing the third, last section of the poem, an interpretation will be given of a possible, Wordsworthian way of dealing and overcoming the crisis.

¹²³ Chandler, *Wordsworth’s Second Nature*, 79-80.

5 – Ode: Third Part

In the third, last part of the Ode, Wordsworth describes a possible way of overcoming the loss of the celestial light, a possible way of gaining relief. Stanza IX is possibly one of the most important stanzas of the poem, but it surely is the longest one, consequently, it will be quoted and discussed in parts, step by step.

IX

O joy! that in our embers
Is something that doth live,
That nature yet remembers
What was so fugitive!
The thought of our past years in me doth breed
Perpetual benedictions: not indeed
For that which is most worthy to be blest;
Delight and liberty, the simple creed
Of Childhood, whether fluttering or at rest,
With new-fledged hope still fluttering in his breast: –

The previous stanza ends with the haunting image of custom lying upon the child “with a weight, / Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!” Yet, it is “nature” that “remembers / What was so fugitive.” It is our “second nature” with which we can remember the fugitive. As argued in the theoretical part of the research, when discussing Burke, the nature of the “second nature” can be seen as being of moral nature. “Second nature” was first endowed on the child when he started to be able to reflect, to have a dream about life, about a possible personality that he would like to become. As reflection starts, through learning, through imitation, it will entail responsibility, the responsibility of fulfilling, of becoming one with the dream, to become the person we have to become. This can be considered as a moral duty. This also entails, in connection with responsibility, a responsiveness to life, to the ordinary, to the world that actually surrounds one. But “second nature” is within nature, and at the same time, it is something parallel to it. This way, one can also remember the celestial, which was

once so fugitive, the immortal nature of our being that can be recollected through recollecting the child who is a representative of it.

It is the “*thought* of our past years” which breeds “perpetual benediction.” This process is thought-based. This is important. The thought is in connection with our “past years,” with memories. Wordsworth’s habits of meditation are similarly, based on thought. Thoughts in the creative process are the representatives of past feelings, memories. The poet will be able to overcome the fear of seclusion, of days not “bound each to each by natural piety” through the thought-based process of recollection. With this, Wordsworth manages to create poetic emotions with which he manages to represent how one can overcome the fear of seclusion, how one can gain relief. Furthermore, that it is the “thought if *our* past years” also adds to the interpretation that there can be a connection between the child and the man. After listing for what the thought does not breed perpetual benediction, the poet goes on and tells what does breed perpetual benediction, for what he raises his song:

Not for these I raise
The song of thanks and praise;
But for those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings;
Blank misgivings of a Creature
Moving about in worlds not realised,
High instincts, before which our mortal Nature
Did tremble like a guilty Thing surprised:

The stanza tells in two sections for what the poet raises “the song of thanks and praise.” This is the first section. In this, we get a feature of the child, he is moving in “worlds not realized.” This is the state where reflection has not started yet. In this state, there is no difference between mortality or immortality, which can explain the puzzlement of “our mortal Nature” when faced with such a state of being. This is one aspect of the things the poet raises his song of thanks for. In what follows, the poet also gives the other aspect:

But for those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,

Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,
Are yet a master-light of all our seeing;
Uphold us, cherish us, and have power to make
Our noisy years seem moments in the being
Of the eternal Silence: truths that wake,
To perish never;
Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,
Nor Man nor Boy,
Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
Can utterly abolish or destroy!

The other aspect is the state when one will be able to practise conscious reflection. This will enable to have “affections” and “shadowy recollections.” That recollections are “shadowy” can mean two things. It can either refer to the child who is beginning to become self-conscious, thus he will have a dream of human life. It can be also connected the man, who can remember both the sense of immortality through recollecting the child, and the dream the child had, reminding him on the moral duty he has, of becoming the person he wanted to become, in other words, carrying out, accomplishing the dream. These insights are crucial in the dramatic development of the poem, and also in the development of the poem’s imagery. This kind of knowledge that can be gained through recollection is said to be the “the fountain light of all our day,” the “master light of all our seeing.” The images of light and seeing, in terms of the child’s description were probably the most important. The child is the one who still represents the celestial light. Furthermore, he is a “philosopher” because he can see the light, and not only can he see it, he represents it, the light which was in connection with the soul’s immortality. The child was also connected, in terms of his being representing that of a philosopher’s, through his silence. That through recollection the man can consider his “noisy years” as ones being part of the “eternal Silence” can mean that the man can also become a philosopher, and can also have, through his recollections, intimations of immortality.

The image of the “fountain light” is remarkable considering the remaining part of the stanza. Trilling brings together Freud’s idea of the so called “oceanic” feeling with the image of the fountain light. Freud’s notion of the oceanic refers to a state of being where the child is yet incapable of practising self-reflexive knowledge. His ego, not having yet a sense of detachment from the exterior world, is experiencing a unity with the rest of the world, an “oceanic” feeling. The word “oceanic” is felicitous, as it can also refer to the child’s pre-natal being and unity with his mother. The image of the “fountain light,” then, comprises the “oceanic,” which refers to the child’s pre-natal existence, and also entails light, the celestial light, which was similarly connected to the child’s pre-natal existence, thus, to the immortality of the soul.¹²⁴ As mentioned, the “fountain light,” the oceanic is in connection with the end of the stanza:

Hence, in a season of calm weather
 Though inland far we be,
 Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea
 Which brought us hither,
 Can in a moment travel thither,
 And see the Children sport upon the shore,
 And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

In terms of recollection, this is the most important and ultimate step the man can take, the end of the stanza is the projection of memory, recollection appearing for the speaker, bridging the temporal limitations of time, as the seeing of the children, being together with them in an oceanic unity, is narrated in a present tense. “*The intimation of immortality from recollections of early childhood in the poem is the sight of these children, for to be able to travel back to their shore is to intimate one’s fusion with them.*”¹²⁵ There is an aspect, however, concerning the nature of memory that needs to be discussed.

If something is a memory, than it is, by definition, the representative of an event or knowledge from the past, and it is important that it has passed. Memory cannot be the same

¹²⁴ Trilling, “The Immortality Ode,” 161-163.

¹²⁵ Bloom, *The Visionary Company*, 177.

with its object. If recollection represents its object, it can only give a figurative copy of its object.¹²⁶ This is an act of reproduction. As mentioned earlier, when discussing Wordsworth's creative process, recollection is a thought-based, constructive process which appears during the habit of meditation, where the poet, through contemplating the relationship between emotions and thoughts (that are representative of past feelings, memories), creates a new, kindred, poetic emotion. This represents a constructive aspect of the nature of recollection. It is an inherent feature of Wordsworth's creative process that it makes use of a contradiction concerning the nature of memories, namely that both the constructive and re-productive function of memory can work in his creative system at the same time.¹²⁷ It is creative, constructive, through reproduction. The poetic emotion that is created in Wordsworth's theory is new in the sense that is not entirely identical with the first one. However, it is not new in the sense that it would be completely unknown.¹²⁸ Memory can be only constructed from a thought, a feeling, or an event that has passed, from a knowledge that is in relation to a person's self. These ideas are going to be explicated through the interpretation of the following stanza:

X

Then, sing ye Birds, sing, sing a joyous song!
And let the young Lambs bound
As to the tabor's sound!
We in thought will join your throng,
Ye that pipe and ye that play,
Ye that through your hearts today
Feel the gladness of the May!
What though the radiance which was once so bright
Be now for ever taken from my sight,
Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind;
In the primal sympathy
Which having been must ever be;

¹²⁶ Komáromy, "Emlékezet és Retorika," 192.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 198.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 200.

In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering;
In the faith that looks through death,
In years that bring the philosophic mind.

The “radiance which was once so bright,” the glory, the celestial is lost. It is something from the past, it is not present in the man’s world. As Bloom puts it very precisely, “the glory is the intimation of immortality, and the loss of the glory is the first intimation of mortality.”¹²⁹ What remains is only our mortal nature. One can only have sense of one’s immortal nature through recollection. But it is important that one *can* have a sense of it, that through the thought-based process of recollection one can reunite with the child, with the immortal part of one’s soul. That this is possible, and recollection grants this possibility, is important. It is exactly the act of recollection which, enabling to have a sense of immortality, calls attention to the difference of child and man. That “our mortal Nature” trembles “like a guilty Thing surprized” in the face of immortality is a surprise that is good and that is needed. If Wordsworth would not make a distinction between these two, between the child and the man, neither the man, nor the boy, neither the immortal nor the mortal part of our nature could gain significance. Through the construction and reproduction of the knowledge of our immortal nature, through realising, acknowledging the difference between child and man, our mortality gains significance. And the same is true the other way around. Accepting and acknowledging our mortal nature gives significance to and knowledge about our immortal nature, and this acknowledgment can grant a “faith that looks through death.”

Through acquiring these insights, this knowledge, attention will be turned to “what remains behind,” to the “primal sympathy” which consists of “the soothing thoughts that spring / Out of human suffering.” And the primal sympathy that is gained also consists of *thoughts*. The process which leads to the appreciation of life, to sympathy, can be connected with recollection in the sense that both are based on thought. This is the point in the poem

¹²⁹ Bloom, *The Visionary Company*, 174.

where the Dionysian music is replaced with the “still, sad music of humanity,” where attention is turned to “human suffering.” This is the thought-based process which brings “the philosophic mind.” The change in the way of seeing the world, in other words, how the thoughtless is now revisited in thought, is similarly the subject of the following, last stanza:

XI

And oh ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves,
Forebode not of any severing of our loves!
Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might;
I only have relinquished one delight
To live beneath your more habitual sway.
I love the Brooks which down their channels fret,
Even more than when I tripped lightly as they;
The innocent brightness of a new-born Day
Is lovely yet;
The Clouds that gather round the setting sun
Do take a sober colouring from an eye
That hath kept watch o’er man’s mortality;
Another race hath been, and other palms are won.
Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

There is “no severing of our loves” for nature because the poet has acquired a different way of approaching nature, that is based on thoughts. This movement is similar to that which was highlighted in Tintern Abbey. Furthermore, it is not just that the poet can return now, with love, he can claim that “I love the Brooks which down their channels fret, / Even more than when I tripped lightly as they.” There is an aspect of this re-visitation that needs explanation. According to the speaker, there is one delight that has been relinquished: “To live beneath your more habitual sway.” The argument would be that this has been relinquished so far, that this is what the speaker will not be willing to relinquish after this point, and this is why revisiting in thought the once thoughtless will give relief. To explain this, we will turn to an idea from Heidegger, which we will connect to the ones presented from *The Thing*, and connect these to the argumentations about the poem.

Heidegger, in his essay entitled *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*, claims that dwelling always comes before building.¹³⁰ “Building as dwelling, that is, as being on the earth, however, remains for man's everyday experience that which is from the outset "habitual"—we inhabit it, as our language says so beautifully: it is the *Gewohnte*.”¹³¹ With this idea, we can illuminate several other previously mentioned ones. In stanza VIII, it was nature that remembered “What was so fugitive.” It is exactly through habituality, through inhabiting the surrounding world the poet can be the lover of nature. Concerning an already mentioned idea from Heidegger, the nearness of things, the inhabitation of the everyday surroundings, the ordinary is important in terms of defining our way of living, human existence. Furthermore, familiarity with objects was also important when discussing Wordsworth’s creative process (via Dennis), because familiarity with objects turned personal fears into the exalted sublime, which we could parallel with the poetic emotion.

The most important “thing,” or ordinary element in the stanza, and the poem, is “the meanest flower,” the pansy that reminded the speaker of the loss. Had there been no loss, or no pansy to remind the speaker of his loss, the thought-based process would not have been generated, thus there would have been only an emotional approach of overcoming the loss, which, as it was argued, was not successful in terms of gaining relief, in overcoming the loss of seeing the world endowed with a celestial light. Through recollection, one can manage to reunite with the child, who is, in connection with the platonic parable of pre-existence, a representative of one part of our nature which constitutes the soul’s immortality. But we also have a “second nature,” which comprises moral responsibilities, namely to become the person we wanted to become in our dreams, in fulfilling our “life’s dream,” so to say. Our “second

¹³⁰Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 144-145. Heidegger makes his arguments through reconstructing the original meaning of the words “to build” (*bauen*) and “neighbour” (*Nachbar*): “What, then, does *Bauen*, building, mean? The Old English and High German word for building, *buan*, means to dwell. This signifies: to remain, to stay in a place. The real meaning of the verb *bauen*, namely, to dwell, has been lost to us. But a covert trace of it has been preserved in the German word *Nachbar*, neighbor. The neighbor is in Old English the *neahjjebur*; *neah*, near, and *gebur*, dweller. The *Nachbar* is the *Nachgebur*, the *Nachgebauer*, the near-dweller, he who dwells nearby.”

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 145.

nature” is of mortal nature, but gains its significance in the face of realising, through recollection, our immortal nature, and vice versa, our mortality can gain significance in the light of our immortality, in having an opportunity here and now, to fulfil the dream of becoming who we are supposed to become. The realisation and acknowledgment of our mortal nature directs our attention to the everyday, to the thought-based process of primal sympathy. This is the knowledge that brings, makes one acquire the “philosophic mind.” Acquiring the philosophic mind, being able to see the world this way is in connection with another image from the stanza and the motto of the poem.

The eyes that keep “watch o’er man’s mortality” can be interpreted as the eyes of our philosophic mind, our new way of seeing the world, our acknowledgment of our mortality and our appreciation of our life. The acquiring of the philosophic mind can be also connected with the poem’s motto. It is because the poet can become, through thought, even a better lover of the world, that there is a possibility of “the innocent brightness of a new-born Day” to be “lovely yet.” As the motto goes, “I could wish my days to be / Bound each to each by natural piety,” by the primal sympathy that is based on the thought of acknowledging our mortal nature, by acquiring the philosophic mind. And the “Child is Father of the Man” because without the child, there would have been no possibility for realising and acknowledging neither the immortal, nor the mortal parts of our nature.

This is why the pansy, the “meanest flower,” the inhabitation of the everyday is important, because it generated a thought-process in the poet which has lead him to the above mentioned insights, to a new way of seeing the world, to approaching emotions, memories, and his relation to nature and his past through thoughts. Thanks to the thoughts of primal sympathy, and already as a manifestation of its workings, is it possible for the poet, that to him, “the meanest flower that blows can give / *Thoughts* that do often lie too deep for tears.”

Summary, Conclusion

As a last part of the thesis, the presented interpretation of the Ode will be summarised. The first part of the Ode, the first four stanzas dramatized the loss: there was a way of seeing the world, everything was “apparelled in celestial light.” This joyous ability of the speaker was lost. The speaker, as it could be seen, tried to recapture this joy, both through visual and phonic approaches, through feelings, but this approach could not give relief to the poet.

In the second part of the ode, from stanza V to VIII, the main focus is on the child. He is said to be one who is still possession of the “celestial light.” He is still endowed with the light, comes “from God, who is our home.” Wordsworth uses the platonic myth of the souls’s pre-existence to create his own myth of the child. He is the one who still represents the soul’s immortality, thus he can be the “best Philosopher.” This is one part of our nature that he represents. But there is also another part, a “second nature” that is at once within nature and parallel to it. This second nature comprises the moral part of our nature. This can be seen when the child is depicted as one, who will be able to practise self-reflexive knowledge, have a dream of his own. Through imitation, learning, he gets to know the world, and will have a dream of life. He will have a dream of himself as constituting a part of life. The celestial light will be shed on the child, from this point on, from the common day.

The last three stanzas of the Ode discuss the man’s relation to the child and to the ordinary world that surrounds him. The child will be a “double-hit,” so to say, because through recollection, the man will be able to recollect both dreams: the dream about the celestial state, thus the immortal part of our nature, and the dream about the human life, thus the mortal part of our nature. That our immortal nature can be only recalled through memory means, on the one hand, that it is not present. But on the other, the sheer fact that it can be recollected, means that it is a part of our nature, because one can only have a memory of

something that is already known. And if there would be no distinction in these terms between the child and the man, no acknowledgment of neither our immortal, nor our mortal nature and dream could take place. This is why the child is needed, and this is why “the Child is Father of the Man.” This is the knowledge that grants the man the “philosophic mind.”

It was the pansy, the “meanest flower” that reminded the speaker in stanza IV about the loss. Because the speaker, through recollection, went through a process based on thoughts, his first, emotional relation to the world turned into a relation based on thoughts. This brought him a “philosophic mind,” a “primal sympathy,” which then, made him see the significance of the ordinary, of the world that surrounds him. The pansy, the world is there to constantly remind the speaker about this knowledge. This is why, if one’s days are “bound each to each by natural piety,” one can love nature even more. This is how, in Wordsworth’s poem, the world of the dream, life is realised.

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