WORDSWORTH AND WHITMAN: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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WORDS WORTH AND WHITMAN: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

THESIS

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By

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PREFACE

So far as I have been able to discover, no one has yet attempted a comparison of Wordsworth and Whitman. Consequently, my research has involved an intensive study of primary sources, with little need for secondary materials. Various critical and biographical works have been consulted for the light they shed on problems of interpretation. I have tried to avoid any misinterpretation that might result from an over-eagerness to find points of comparison, although I have not attempted to include in my discussion the many details of style and philosophy that distinguish the two poets. I would be the first to admit that differences do exist. Nevertheless, I have received a great deal of pleasure in having solved, at least to my own satisfaction, a problem for which I thought at first there was no solution. In spite of the doubts I had at the beginning, I have become convinced that Wordsworth and Whitman exemplify in their poetry some remarkable similarities.

For convenience of reference I have used the Cambridge Edition of The Complete Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, edited by A. J. George (1904), both for the poetry and for the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads. For the text
of the "Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff" I have used The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, edited by Alexander B. Grosart (1876). References to Wordsworth's letters are made to The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, edited by Ernest de Selincourt (1939). For the text of Whitman's poems and the later prefaces I have used Emory Holloway's Inclusive Edition of Leaves of Grass. Since the 1855 edition of Leaves of Grass was not available, I have used the Facsimile Edition (1919), for references to the 1855 Preface. For the text of all other late prose I have referred to the one-volume edition of the Prose Works (1892). For earlier prose I have used The Gathering of the Forces, edited by Cleveland Rodgers and John Black (1920), and I Sit and Look Out, edited by Emory Holloway and Vernolian Schwarz (1932).
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CHAPTER I

ROMANTICISM

There is in literature, as well as in music, painting, sculpture, and even in life itself, a certain discernible, yet intangible, quality called romanticism. Although this quality manifests itself in as various ways as are recognizable in Thomson and Poe, Coleridge and Longfellow, Keats and Emerson, still one fundamental inference can be drawn. That inference is that the romantic tendency, in proportion to the degree that it influences particular writers, makes those writers kin to each other and different from all others. With this idea as my fundamental premise, I feel justified in attempting a comparison of the poetry of William Wordsworth and Walt Whitman.

To many persons this comparison may appear far-fetched. I anticipate such a reaction. Wordsworth was a cultured Englishman; Whitman, a rugged American. Wordsworth's period of greatest poetic achievement was approaching its conclusion in 1815; Whitman at that time was not yet born. Wordsworth was with his age; he rose and declined with the so-called "Romantic Movement" in England. Whitman was the product of the last stage of romanticism and published his best
work after its decline. In order to resolve these difficulties and establish a basis of comparison, it is my purpose in this chapter to consider, first, the principles of romanticism in general, then the character of the romantic movement in England and America, and finally the influence which that movement had on Wordsworth and Whitman respectively.

The first question to be answered in such an investigation is "What is Romanticism?" No critic has ever answered this question clearly and completely. Romanticism is too much a part of life and living to be reduced to a dictionary definition. Therein, perhaps, lies its almost inexplicable effect on many of the foremost artists of the world. Romanticism may be felt and determined, but it can hardly be acquired. Working always from within, it seems to demand an outlet in artistic expression.

1 The works on romanticism mentioned in this footnote were listed by Lascelles Abercrombie, Romanticism, p. 11. Other more recent books on this subject are listed in the bibliography accompanying this thesis.

Oliver Elton, Poetic Romancers after 1850 (British Academy, 1914); Edmund Gosse, Two Pioneers of Romanticism: Joseph and Thomas Warton (British Academy, 1915); Walter Raleigh, Romance (1916); W. P. Ker, Romantic Fallacies (1921, in "The Art of Poetry"); H. J. C. Grierson, Classical and Romantic (1923); J. G. Robertson, Genesis of Romantic Theory in the Eighteenth Century (1923) and The Reconciliation of Classic and Romantic (1925); L. Pearsall Smith, Four Words: Romantic, etc. (S. P. E. Tract, No. 17, 1924).
Roget's Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases relates romanticism to such words as imagination, originality, creation, invention, fancy, inspiration, idealism, utopianism, and dreaming; to such phrases as a work of fiction, flights of fancy, a fairy land, divine afflatus, coinage of the brain, and castle-building. It suggests further connotations by mentioning the kinship of romanticism to myths, dreams, visions, shadows, phantasms, vagaries, golden dreams, and illusions. The fact that over fifty other verbal symbols are listed as implications of the one term romanticism leaves little doubt as to the impossibility of defining so abstract a term.

A glance at the many different interpretations given to us by literary critics makes us even more unsure of the exact meaning of romanticism. Dr. Frederick Henry Hedge, in the Atlantic Monthly, finds the origin of the romantic feeling in a sense of wonder and mystery -- a sense of "something hidden, of imperfect revelation." Those who live away from civic life, in untamed nature, are the ones most likely to become aware of the mystery of life, of that faint suggestion that there is something beyond and behind the world of sense. Such people are inclined to turn inward.

2Mark Peter Roget, Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases, pp. 172-173.

and find their greatest pleasure and source of knowledge in thought and reflection. In their literature they are subjective; their feelings, passions, and ideas pervade their writing. They are romantic. There is the same distinction between them and the classicists, says Dr. Hedge, as there is between the subjective and objective methods of approach in art.

Lascelles Abercrombie also has attempted to explain the meaning of romanticism. He sees it as an inherent quality of the mind, not as a method or a style in art. The essence of his analysis lies in the distinction he makes between the "inner expression," or "the experience which a man seems to give himself," and "outer experience," or "the experience which seems to be given to a man."4 In all great literature, Mr. Abercrombie believes, there exist certain evidences of romanticism. Somewhere in every great work there is discernible the effect of passion, ecstasy, inspiration, mysticism, extreme sensibility, imagination, hope, faith, illusion, or some other inwardly motivated, if outwardly stimulated, mental or emotional response.

Contrary to many critics, including Dr. Hedge, Mr. Abercrombie denies the antithesis of romanticism and classicism. Romanticism to him is an element; classicism is a method of

4Lascelles Abercrombie, Romanticism, pp. 6-7.
presenting elements, whether they be romantic or realistic. It so happens that what we call classicism is a more satisfactory method of presenting what is objective, realistic, or outward, whereas inner experiences, or romantic ones, have found more adequate expression in a free, flexible, original and unpredictable style which has simply been given the name of romanticism.

Henry A. Beers, an authoritative critic on the history of English romanticism, accepts in part the idea repudiated by Abercrombie. He believes, like Hedge, that "romanticism implies its opposite, the classic." Henry A. Beers, A History of English Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century, p. 3. 5 Romanticism is the antithesis of classicism "as its freedom and lawlessness, its love of novelty, experiment and 'strangeness added to beauty,' contrast with the classical respect for rules, models, formulae, precedents, conventions." 6 But he does not see romanticism only as the opposite of classicism. He goes further to uphold the more recent observation that "romanticism's discontent with things as they are, its idealism, its aspiration, mysticism, contrast with the realist's adherence to fact." 7 It is now opposed to realism as well as to classicism. He summarizes his attitude when he attributes to romanticism such qualities as

emotional stress, sensitiveness to the picturesque, love of natural scenery, interest in distant times

6 Ibid., p. 23. 7 Ibid.
and places, curiosity of the wonderful and mysteri-
ous, subjectivity, lyricism, intrusion of ego, im-
patience of the limits of the genres, and eager ex-
periment with new forms of art.8

Walter Pater, another well known critic, has presented
romanticism as an artistic opposite of classicism.9 He as-
sumes that the two terms indicate opposite tendencies or
elements which are present in varying proportions in all
good art. The essential function of classical art and lit-
erature is to take into account the qualities of measure,
purity, and temperance, whereas the function of romanticism
consists in "the addition of strangeness to beauty."10
"The desire of beauty being a fixed element in every artis-
tic organization," he continues, "it is the addition of
curiosity to this desire of beauty that constitutes the ro-
mantic temper."

Professor Ernest Bernbaum, in his book Guide Through
the Romantic Movement,11 seems to have struck more at the

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8Ibid., p. 227. It should be noted that the main thesis
of Beers' book is a discussion of romanticism as it repro-
duces the life and thought of the Middle Ages.

9Walter Pater, "Romanticism," Macmillan's Magazine,
XXXV (November, 1876). This article was not available for
my examination. The quotations and ideas which I have in-
cluded are taken from Beers' discussion of Pater's article,
in English Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century, pp. 7-10.
Footnotes referring to quotations from Pater, therefore,
must necessarily direct the reader to pages in the secondary
source, the book by Beers.

10Pater, quoted by Beers, ibid., p. 8.

11This book is the first volume of Bernbaum's five-
volume work entitled, Guide and Anthology of Romanticism.
root of the problem. He has attributed the difficulty of reaching an explanation of romanticism to the wide differences in the philosophy and art of the various writers who have been classified as romantics. He actually quotes twenty-two out of literally hundreds of definitions which are remarkably diverse in expression and implication. He does this to prove the impossibility of explaining romanticism by technical definition. It is his opinion that the only way to understand the term and its implications is to determine with what forces it came into conflict and is therefore distinguishable from. And so he looks beyond the Romantic period to the Victorian writers who followed. In them he recognizes a growing doubt in the faith which characterized their romantic predecessors. This doubt appears to be the result of scientific discoveries which proved to be irreconcilable, not only with Biblical Christianity, but also with idealism. Faith in nature and in man was not completely lost, but it was growing dim. In the Pre-Raphaelite School there appeared a tendency to turn away from intellectual and ethical problems, and to create literature only for art's sake and for pleasure's sake, to escape, that is, from actual life. Another group considered this cowardly, and sought truth at all hazards of comfort or beauty. It seemed to them, especially after reading Darwin's world-rocking Origin of Species (1859), that no honest mind could see the truth except in some form of materialistic
or mechanistic philosophy. From this source came the flood of realistic and pessimistic literature -- predominantly, of course, anti-romantic. It remained for Robert Louis Stevenson and Rudyard Kipling, in the late nineteenth century, to reassert in modified forms the romantic belief.

It is upon this analysis of the reaction against romanticism that Professor Bernbaum's conception of the romantic theory rests. In his opinion romantic standards are not necessarily the antithesis of classical ones. Rather "the real opposition and distinction is between romanticism on the one side, and, on the other, realism, materialism, mechanistic science, or 'common sense' in the baser meaning of the term."\(^{12}\) The romantic writers are in sympathy with one religious and philosophical attitude, as Professor Bernbaum sees it. They all have a keen consciousness of the difference between two worlds. One is a world of "ideal truth, goodness and beauty" which is "eternal, infinite, and absolutely real."\(^{13}\) The other is the world of appearances, which to common sense is the only world, and which, in the opinion of the idealist, is obviously so full of "untruth, ignorance, evil, ugliness, and wretchedness, as to compel him to dejection or indignation."\(^{14}\) Byron passed through the latter state. Most romantics, however, "passed onward to a faith that the ideal world and actual world were not

\(^{12}\) Ibid., p. 445. \(^{13}\) Ibid., p. 446. \(^{14}\) Ibid.
so disdowered as mere common sense or abstract idealism assumed. 15 Man was gifted with a higher reason, that is, his imagination, which enabled him to see that the good, the true, and the beautiful were not removed to a sphere unattainable in life on earth, but were interwoven with our human existence and earthly environment. The romantic poet considered it his duty to portray man and his world in such a way that "the presence of the infinite within the finite, of the ideal within the actual, would be revealed in all its beauty." 16 Despair was ousted; a true understanding of nature and man was destined to bring about fortitude, wisdom, optimism. Somewhere there was the possibility of happiness:

Wordsworth found it in nature and in the moral nobility of the simple life; Lamb, in the amenities of urban existence; Scott and Landor, in historical epochs and traditional types of character; Coleridge, in revelation of the Eternal in literature; Keats, in Universal Love as manifested in nature, friendship, and art; Carlyle, in the working out of one's individual ideal for one's fellowmen; and Shelley, in contemplating the glorious future of humanity. 17

Their means of happiness were different, but all rested on the assumption that the world is naturally good, and that it is rich in blessings which need only to be sought out by man. This, according to Bernbaum, is a romantic philosophy.

Up to this point in the discussion only a few of literally hundreds of conceptions of romanticism have been

15 Ibid. 16 Ibid., p. 447. 17 Ibid.
reviewed. If they have served no other purpose, they have proved that a concise definition of romanticism is impossible. They have also proved that a complete and all-inclusive definition, however lengthy and complex it might be, is equally impossible. Too many intangible particulars are involved for any two critics to agree in every detail. Nevertheless, the definitions collectively have made us familiar with words and phrases most commonly used to characterize romanticism: for example, there are, among many others, individualism, freedom, originality, lawlessness, novelty, spontaneity, and experimentation; subjectivity, reflection, inner experience, emotionalism, imagination, illusion, and sensitivity; return to nature, faith in God, mysticism, intuition, mystery, infinity, and strangeness; love of man, idealism, optimism, happiness, and natural goodness.

Needless to say, these characteristics of romanticism are not restricted to any one period of time nor to any one group of writers. Consequently, most of the critics who attempt explanations of romanticism make certain to add that it is something universal and timeless in its applications. It is equally certain, however, that there have been periods in which such characteristics were particularly dominant in thought and in literature. The Romantic Movement in England represents just such a period. It seems, then, that the best way to understand the term
"romanticism" as it relates to the present discussion and to the background of Wordsworth and Whitman is to investigate the various trends in thought which made nineteenth-century England predominantly romantic and which bring into view the many characteristics which have been suggested by the various definitions of romanticism.

A parallel view of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is needed in order to understand the romantic movement, since romanticism is, for our purposes, the embodiment of distinct reactions against many phases of eighteenth-century philosophy and life. England in the eighteenth century was prosperous, worldly, and free from the violent political agitation which was taking place on the continent. As a result, she was inert, self-satisfied, and practically convinced that civilization had reached a standstill in this, its ripest and most enlightened stage. The great issues of the world were settled, and the only thing left for intelligent men to do was to confirm and approve what was already agreed on. The accepted media for that confirmation and approval were to be found in reason and common sense. Men sought that which was useful and practical, so their purpose in science was utilitarian and in literature was didactic. The reason which they championed, however, was not the speculative reason of the scientist and the philosopher, for they tended to seek beyond what was already
proved, and by so doing threatened to destroy the little playhouse of perfection in which eighteenth-century conservatives were resting so peacefully. The idea of the perfectibility of things as they were, social scale and all, and the futility of trying to understand anything beyond what was readily apparent in the plain and non-technical laws of the universe.

Passions and emotions, they believed, are a sign of an unhealthy state, and should not enter into the determination of truth. Individualism was suppressed on the ground that man never really acts on his knowledge of what is good for him. Emphasis was placed on the actual follies of men when he fails to act according to the established standard of reasonable behavior. Since the order of reason was the order of nature, it was felt that the truth about God, man, and the external world could be expressed in intelligible and immutable laws. The Baconian vision of the conquest of nature by experimental laws, the program of Descartes which set up self-evident clarity as its criterion of truth, the work of the Royal Society, and the triumph of Newtonian physics confirmed the eighteenth-century faith in the
established order of the universe. The truth thus obtained, they thought, was much more valid than the disordered data of imagination, speculation, or sensation. Even religion was reasonable and practical. Mysticism, intuition, and blind faith were uncivilized aspects of devotion.

And finally we come to literature. Again we see the influence of conformity to standards. This conformity precluded from all good art the slightest originality, irregularity, individualism, or subjectivity. Wit was substituted for beauty. Everything had to be plainly and reasonably expressed in polite and correct literary form. Rigid limits were defined by time-tested rules and formulae, and the poet who could best express general truths within those limits was the truly great poet. He was greatest who could say things the best. The sense of perfection and completeness was the pleasure to be derived from literature, not emotional exhilaration.

And so we recognize in practically every phase of eighteenth-century life a superimposed discipline or restraint. The individual was considered unimportant except as he constituted a link in the entire social chain. As the majority of men were felt to be actually irresponsible and incapable of rational behavior, it was their duty to follow the laws of reason set up for them by social authority. Initiative and personal advancement were suppressed;
passions, emotions, sensations were ridiculed. This disciplinary force was carried over into the three main institutions of the country: the State disciplined by force, the Church through strict regulation and fears of eternal punishment, and literature through moralizing and satire. The people were virtual slaves to eighteenth-century conventions. There had to be an emancipation. That emancipation was effected in the reaction which we have since called the "Romantic Movement."

It is at this point that the terms which were singled out from the various definitions of romanticism become significant. They are, like the Romantic Movement, diametrically opposed to the eighteenth-century philosophy of life. A few of them, it will be recalled, are individualism, freedom, experimentation, subjectivity, emotionalism, imagination, strangeness, mysticism, intuition, idealism, and natural goodness. Whether the critics who used these terms indicated it or not, they were bringing out characteristics of romanticism which show it to be a name for the entire nineteenth-century reaction to the century which preceded it.

This emancipation of which I have spoken did not suddenly burst forth into nineteenth-century romanticism. It had its beginning in a period most fervently rationalistic -- deep in the eighteenth century. Anthony Ashley Cooper,
the third Earl of Shaftesbury, in his "Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit," affirmed man's instinctive goodness. He resented the dark picture which had been painted of man's nature, and he felt that man was capable of recognizing virtuous conduct without instruction or discipline. He also introduced in *The Moralists* the idea that the complement of man's instinctive goodness is the goodness of nature, the beauty and harmony of which make this the best of all possible worlds. More and more thinkers began to wonder if it were the divine will that some of the people should remain forever oppressed. They sensed the injustice of such an idea and speculated on its validity. The first powerful expression of this undercurrent of thought was made by the Frenchman Rousseau, and his influence on the American and French Revolutionists, and the English Romanticists, cannot be over-estimated. His views of man, nature, and society found direct application in the oncoming religious, political, and social doctrines of the nineteenth century. To Rousseau, God was a spirit ever working for good, a beneficent and paternal force that created the world and all in it. Since God, as a creative spirit, is manifest in nature as well as in man, it follows that man is most likely to remain Godlike and happy by retiring to nature and escaping the evils and restraints of man-made society. Since natural landscape and natural phenomena are available for the
contemplation of every man, no man is denied the means of reaching perfection, even here on earth.

The charm was dispelled. The chains were broken. When individuals were made to realize that they were as good as the master who dominated them, revolution was bound to occur. Frenchmen took up arms and fought for liberty, equality, and fraternity. Englishmen demanded democratic and humanitarian reforms in government, religion and industry. They demanded release from social conventions, narrow scientific theories, and literary restraint. For quite some time they had been confused by the complex and often contradictory philosophies of Hobbes, Hume, Locke, Berkeley, and the oncoming scientists. They began to realize that all important questions could not be answered by Newton and his law of physics. Reason was not what it had so long been considered -- infallible. Even the greatest scientists could not discover the activating principle underlying the perfect motion of the universe. Fundamental questions could not be solved, since there appeared to be no answers in the realm of reason and logic. People were forced to look elsewhere for their knowledge, happiness, faith, and satisfaction. But the direction in which they should look was not dictated. There was freedom in romanticism.

Some of the romantics sought their release from eighteenth-century restraint by turning to a supposedly happy
past, the Middle Ages. Others looked forward to a Utopia in a liberated America and France. They romanticized the past and idealized the future.

But a glorious past and an imagined future were not the only escapes utilized by frustrated eighteenth-century thinkers. Many of them, like Rousseau, turned to nature. There they discovered, or imagined that they felt, the presence of God. It was by communion with nature, then, that they hoped to develop an understanding of the fundamental truths underlying all aspects of life. This involved, of course, emotional response and extreme sensitivity -- things they had been denied in the rationalistic eighteenth century.

Other romanticists went even further. They looked within themselves for answers to questions that reason and science had failed to answer. They began to trust intuition and imagination, to believe that knowing did not necessarily imply understanding. They began to develop a transcendental philosophy. All men had a little of the divine; to know oneself, then, was to know God. Real peace lay in subjective rather than objective analysis.

The same emancipation was carried over into literature. The rigid heroic couplet gave way to diverse modes of expression in the revival of blank verse, the Spenserian stanza, ode, sonnet, and ballad forms, and new free forms. Witty and didactic verse was abandoned for lyrical and rhapsodic
nature poems, mournful and melancholy poems of death. There were novels and poems of sensibility; there was a sentimental revival of the past. Then came the Gothic novels, which stimulated the emotional minds of the romantics with their plots full of mystery, horror, and surprise, with their properties such as romantic castles, ruins, dungeons, ghosts, and supernatural appearances. Another romantic tenet found expression in stories dealing with the noble savage.

This parallel presentation of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophies brings out the reactionary character of the romantic movement. The effect of eighteenth-century rationalism, restraint, inertia, narrowness, conformity, and social, political and religious tyranny was to produce a generation of people who were characteristically aggressive, ambitious, optimistic, emotional, passionate, imaginative, romantic. From the narrow confines of science they escaped to the endless reaches of nature and the soul. Accepted subservience of the masses gave way to a republican belief in equality. There was a complete philosophical revolution.

This romantic revolution which took place in England and in Europe was destined eventually to reach the shores of the United States, but not until almost a half century after its flowering in Europe. When it did come, however, it was accepted almost in its entirety. The reason for
this ready acceptance is plain enough. The theory of romanticism was exactly the expression that was needed for the conditions and philosophy existing in America. We already had what the romantic spirit in England anticipated, complete social, political, and economic freedom. Since the American Revolution the United States had expanded rapidly, and there seemed to be no limit to their expansion in the future. Land was plentiful and always available. America had become shifting, restless, optimistic and acquisitive. The spirit of acquisitiveness found a fertile field in the unexploited resources of the new nation. Cautious ways were abandoned. New commonwealths were arising in the wilderness. Immigrants were pouring in from Europe. There was a good living for anyone who was willing to exert a minimum of effort to make one. America itself was indeed a romantic dream.

Such a vast expansion in material possessions and in temperament needed a corresponding philosophy. America had not had time for philosophizing and poetizing, so it was natural that she would hasten to borrow a philosophy that might be particularly applicable to her situation. America already had a democratic feeling of the inherent equality of all men, so she was ready to accept the French, English, and German theory which glorified the individual. In America it was called such things as individualism, with its social
and economic assertiveness; Unitarianism, with its doctrines of human perfectibility; republicanism, with its belief in the rights of man.

Rousseau's advice to return to nature fell right in step with the continuous retreat of American pioneers from the eastern coast to the uncivilized interior. The best way to escape the greed, worldliness, and realistic views of an up and coming industrialism was to retire to those parts that were untainted with the evils of society.

Europe sent out another message which was well timed to correspond with the sentiments here in America. The people had become finally and completely rebellious against the Puritanical beliefs of their ancestors. Such an optimistic people could not long endure the ideas of grace and election, predestination, total depravity, and limited atonement. They wanted to believe, as the romantics believed, that God is loving, just, and mindful of the needs of all people, and that communion with Him is possible for all those who seek Him. From the English and German transcendentalists and nature poets came the ideas adopted by American philosophers and poets -- Bryant, Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman and others. They too learned to look to nature without and to the soul within for evidence of the divine.

And so when the essentially romantic character of the new and expanding American frontier joined forces with the
imported European theory, there was no stopping romanticism in America, until, of course, it met its first challenger in the pessimistic materialism of the late nineteenth century.

It is a simple matter now to see how the main tenets of romanticism in England and America are brought to a focus in the poetry of Wordsworth and Whitman, and how a consideration of these aspects in their philosophy offers a fruitful basis for comparing the two poets. Both Wordsworth and Whitman hailed nature and man as divine creations and manifestations of a benevolent God, and upon this theory of nature did they base their entire philosophy of life. From nature as a point of departure and return they proceed to investigate science, to find it lacking, to develop a romantic reliance on intuition, and to become veritable transcendentalists. Their common belief in the essential goodness of man leads them both to a democratic theory of the individual's relation to society. And finally, the romantic breaking away from established literary forms gives sanction to their artistic experimentation. The romantic background of Wordsworth and Whitman, then, is particularly evident in their conception of nature, their transcendentalism, their democratic philosophy, and their literary theory.
CHAPTER II

NATURE

Many of the world's outstanding poets have risen to greatness on the strength of their nature poetry. Especially have the romantics found inspiration and food for thought in the natural world which surrounds them. Some poets even have based their entire philosophy of life on their fundamental concept of nature. Of no poets is this more true then of William Wordsworth and Walt Whitman.

There are many very striking similarities in the paths which these two poets followed in becoming nature poets. One might almost substitute the name of either poet in the autobiographical pattern of the other without altering the general trend in the development of his character. Both Wordsworth and Whitman spent the first years of their lives away from the evils and complexities of city life, and so it was that both of them were very early endeared to nature in her most unrefined state. This endearment soon grew into a passionate love, which at times assumed a mystical character.

A person has very little trouble in gaining an insight into the early life of Wordsworth. He has at his disposal
an accurate and complete autobiography in the form of The Prelude, many excellent biographies by well-informed authors, and finally, all of the extremely informative notations made by the poet's sister, Dorothy Wordsworth. With Whitman, however, an investigation of childhood tendencies is considerably more difficult. He had no desire to leave any records of his early life; in fact, it is said that he destroyed any information that might have been made available. Leaves of Grass was all the Walt Whitman that he cared to hand down to posterity. Nevertheless, several authentic biographies and a few scattered references in his poetry are sufficient to indicate that Whitman, like Wordsworth, looked back to find in his experiences amidst the beauties of his early surroundings the germ of a matured nature philosophy.

Let us first consider the English poet. The little village of Cockermouth, in Cumberland, was the scene of Wordsworth's birth and early childhood. To this place and its beautiful natural scenery his later poetry makes many references. In The Prelude Wordsworth thankfully declares that he was "much favoured in birth-place,"1 where

the fairest of all rivers loved
To blend his murmurs with my nurse's song,
And, from his alder shades and rocky falls,

---

1The Prelude, I, 1. 303. All references to Wordsworth's poems are made to The Complete Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, Student's Cambridge Edition (1904).
And from his fords and shallows, sent a voice
That flowed along my dreams.²

How happy must have been the young boy, who, as a grown man,
could exclaim in reminiscing about his birth-place and its
flowing Derwent, "fairest of all rivers":

Oh, many a time have I, a five years' child,
In a small mill-race severed from his stream,
Made one long bathing of a summer's day;
Basked in the sun, and plunged and basked again
Alternate, all in a summer's day, or scoured
The sandy fields, leaping through flowery groves
Of yellow ragwort; or, when rock and hill,
The woods, and distant Skiddaw's lofty height,
Were bronzed with deepest radiance, stood alone
Beneath the sky, as if I had been born
On Indian plains, and from my mother's hut
Had run abroad in wantonness, to sport,
A naked savage, in the thunder shower.³

In 1778, when he was only eight years old, Wordsworth
was forced to depart from Cockermouth and its beautiful
natural setting. He was sent to Hawkshead for the purpose
of entering grammar school. Fortunately, Wordsworth's change
of residence did not result in a break with nature. At
Hawkshead, just as at Cockermouth, he later reports,

\[
\text{And common face of Nature spake to me}
\text{Rememberable things.}^4
\]

The country surrounding the small village was quiet, peace-
ful, almost sublime. Near the school was the beautiful litt-
tle lake of Esthwaite, whose

\[
\text{And dead still water lay upon my mind}
\]

²Ibid., I, 11. 270-274. ³Ibid., I, 11. 288-300.
⁴Ibid., I, 11. 585-588.
Even with a weight of pleasure, and the sky,
Never before so beautiful, sank down
Into my heart, and held me like a dream.\(^5\)

Even as he loved the calm, still water, so did the boy Wordsworth grow to love the sun and the moon:

I had seen him lay
His beauty on the morning hills, had seen
The western mountain touch his setting orb,
In many a thoughtless hour, when, from excess
Of happiness, by blood appeared to flow
For its own pleasure, and I breathed with joy.
And, from like feelings, humble though intense,
To patriotic and domestic love.
Analogous, the moon to me was dear;
For I could dream away my purposes,
Standing to gaze upon her while she hung
Midway between the hills as if she knew
No other region, but belonged to thee,
Yea, appertained by a peculiar right
To thee and thy grey huts, thou one dear Vale!\(^6\)

Line after line in the second book of *The Prelude* tells of Wordsworth's increasing attachment for nature during this period of his life. Attending classes was of little or no importance to him. He liked the school, however, because he was usually allowed to wander as he pleased. There was in Wordsworth a strange, almost inexplicable, desire to be forever in nature's presence. It should be noted here, as a matter of particular significance, that later in life the poet admits that the sounding cataract, the tall rock, the mountain and the deep and gloomy wood produced in him at that time merely

An appetite; a feeling, and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,

\(^5\)Ibid., II, 11. 170-174. \(^6\)Ibid., II, 11. 183-197.
By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye.  

Wordsworth experienced no divine revelation. He found in
nature a charm, a joyous rapture. It isn't altogether
strange, then, that he loved, observed, contemplated, per-
ceived, but above all, remembered -- remembered those "pres-
ent pleasures" that were to become "the life and food for
future years."  

Wordsworth was indeed fortunate; first, to
have had at his disposal to observe, the beautiful objects
of a natural setting, but mainly, to have had the mind and
heart to absorb, absorb, and absorb, until, at a date far
into the future, he could rely upon his youthful absorp-
tions to lighten

the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world.  

Small is the wonder that Wordsworth in later years should
look back on nature as

The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.

Although literally hundreds of other references could
be cited to reveal further the influence of nature on Words-
worth the child, these will suffice, and I now proceed to
an investigation of Whitman and his early childhood. In
speaking of Paumanok, or Long Island, the land of his birth,

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7 "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," ll. 80-
84.  
8 Ibid., ll. 64-65.  
9 Ibid., ll. 39-40.  
10 Ibid., ll. 108-110.
Whitman made a statement which bears a remarkable likeness to the citation from Wordsworth given immediately above:

"My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this air."

"0 to go back," he says,

_to the place where I was born,
To hear the birds sing once more,
To ramble about the house and barn and over the fields once more,
And through the orchard and along the old lanes once more._

Whitman the man and the poet wants to go back to the place where he first learned to love nature. He wants to return to his birth-place, which has been described as being "shaped like a fish, plenty of seashore, the horizon boundless, the air fresh and healthy, the numerous bays and creeks swarming with aquatic birds, the south side meadows covered with salt hay, the soil generally tough, but affording numberless springs of the sweetest water in the world." In his description he admittedly brings out all the possible characteristics which might justify his opinion that, to Whitman, Long Island was a fair sample of America entire. He points out the hills and the

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13John Addington Symonds, Walt Whitman: A Study, p. xii. Symonds makes no reference to the original source of quotation.

valleys, the seashore and the bays, the plains and the
meadows, the pine forests and the fertile lands. He pic-
tures waves splashing, cattle grazing, farmers planting, and
natives fishing. All of this and more, he asserts, is Long
Island -- a wonderful place for an inwardly sensitive and
meditative young boy to ramble, loaf, and absorb. And, like
Wordsworth, these things he did.

At this point in the discussion, another interesting
parallel becomes clear. Before he was ten years old, Words-
worth was sent to school; while he was there he neglected
his work for communion with nature. Before Whitman was ten
years old, his father's occupation forced him to move to
Brooklyn and do various odd jobs for a living; it was no
easier for him than it was for Wordsworth to stick to his
assigned task. Whitman could not go for long without re-
turning to his real home -- in nature. It is generally
known that he paid frequent visits to his relatives who
continued to live on Long Island. He often neglected, or
even intentionally lost, his jobs because of a desire to
retire from the city. He delighted to read a book on the
seashore within the sound of the waves, or to loaf at his
esse and observe intently a blade of summer grass:

Or withdrawn to muse and meditate in some deep recess,
Far from the clank of crowds intervals passing rapt
and happy,
Aware of the fresh free giver the flowing Missouri,
aware of the mighty Niagara,
Aware of the buffalo herds grazing the plains, the
hirsute and strong-breasted bulls,
Of earth, rocks, Fifth-month flowers experienced,
stars, rain, snow, my amaze,
Having studied the mocking-bird's tones and the
flight of the mountain-hawk,
And heard at dusk the unrivall'd one, the hermit
thrush from the swamp-cedars.15

It was pointed out earlier in this chapter that Wordsworth as a child received no divine inspiration from his communion with nature. The same is true of Whitman. We have little reason to believe that as a boy he had any metaphysical experience which informed him of a "calling" to become the poet-prophet of his age. As the above quotation indicates, he merely saw, heard, became aware of and remembered the natural phenomena around him. It must be admitted, however, that he had a somewhat intuitive, as well as an emotional, feeling for nature, for he seemed almost magnetically drawn back to her. While he was in nature's presence he seemed better able to think, meditate, imagine.

Wordsworth left his studies; Whitman left his jobs.

Just as the youthful Wordsworth stored up memories which were to be for him "the life and food of future years," so did the boy Whitman. So absorptive was he, in fact, that

the first object he look'd upon, that object he became,
And that object became a part of him for the day or a certain part of the day,
Or for many years or stretching cycles of years.

The early lilacs became part of this child,
And grass and white and red morning-glories, and white and red clover, and the song of the phoebe-bird, . . .

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And all the changes of city and country wherever
he went . . .
The doubts of day-time and the doubts of night-
time, the curious whether and how,
Whether that which appears so is so, or is it all
flashes and specks? . . .
These become a part of that child. 16

This last quotation gives us something more to think
about concerning Whitman's childhood reaction to nature. Up
to this time we have seen Whitman as a beholder, a worshiper,
and a container of the natural objects which surrounded him.
In the line "Whether that which appears so is so, or is it
all flashes and specks?" we see him as a sort of intuitive
questioner of those same objects that he had so religiously
contemplated. And we find another statement in much the
same tone:

I too felt the curious abrupt questionings
stir within me. 17

Interestingly enough, for the purpose of this compara-
tive study, there are also various references in Wordsworth's
poetry to a wondering and questioning attitude toward nature
and its real meaning.

Several times Wordsworth had a feeling of the dissolu-
tion of the material world, of

Fallings from us, vanishings;
Blank misgivings of a Creature
Moving about in worlds not realized. 18

16"There Was a Child Went Forth."
17"Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," 1.58.
18"Intimations of Immortality," 11. 144-146.
Such feelings gave rise to
obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things.\textsuperscript{19}

What more are these than Whitman's "abrupt questionings," or his "doubts of day-time and the doubts of night-time, the curious whether and how"? In the case of both poets these questionings led to curiosity about death. Wordsworth afterwards asserts, "Nothing was more difficult for me in childhood than to admit the notion of death as a state applicable to my own being."\textsuperscript{20} It was only when Wordsworth returned to nature and felt

the sentiment of Being spread
O'er all that moves and all that seemeth still,\textsuperscript{21}

that he was able to feel himself a part of the universal soul, and thereby realize a certain vague intimation of immortality. "Oft in these moments," Wordsworth continues,

such a holy calm
Would overspread my soul, that bodily eyes
Were utterly forgotten, and what I saw
Appeared like something in myself, a dream,
A prospect in the mind.\textsuperscript{22}

Wordsworth found that nature asks the questions and then answers them. She raises the doubts and then resolves them. Although he really didn't understand what it was that he felt in nature, he intuitively knew that therein lay "the

\textsuperscript{19}Tbid., ll. 142-143. \textsuperscript{20}Tbid., Prefatory Remarks.
\textsuperscript{21}The Prelude, II, ll. 401-402.
\textsuperscript{22}Tbid., II, ll. 348-352.
fountain light of all our day,"23 the hope and assurance of
immortality.

Just as Wordsworth's questioning attitude led to a
curiosity about death and immortality, so did that same at-
titude on the part of Whitman. Well might his "Out of the
Cradle Endlessly Rocking" bear the title, "Intimations of
Immortality." In this poem is described the boy Whitman's
passionate yearning to understand the meaning of death, his
profound communion with nature, and his subsequent half-
realization of the immortality of all things in the world.
The poem, which allegedly is based upon an actual spiritual
experience, takes us back to a May day when Whitman discov-
ered among the briars by the beach a mocking-bird's nest
containing four pale green eggs. The boy watched over the
eggs and the nest from day to day until the mother bird
disappeared. After her disappearance the boy would escape
from his bed at night and run barefoot down to the shore,
where he would fling himself down upon the sand to listen
to the desolate singing of the widowed "he-bird" close be-
side the surf. There, in the night, with the sea and the
wind sounding about him, he lay utterly absorbed in the
sweet, sad singing of the lover, and to the reply of the
waves. Suddenly some mystical response awakened in his
soul until, in an ecstasy of tears which flooded his young

23"Intimations of Immortality," l. 152.
cheeks, he felt, rather than understood, the meaning hidden in the thought of death. The waves of the sea, the symbol of death or immortality, had become to him as Wordsworth's "sentiment of Being" that was "spread o'er all that moves and all that seemeth still." The waves had told him that to die is merely to become a part of the great universal float which is "forever held in solution." Nature had revealed to him, as she had to Wordsworth, an intimation of immortality.

Important indeed was nature to both Wordsworth and Whitman. She had revealed to the Englishman "truths that wake to perish never." She had awakened in the American "a thousand responses of my heart never to cease." Both saw in such truths and responses the necessary oil to feed "the fountain light of all our day." Wordsworth, as well as Whitman, had the "long foreground" about which Emerson wrote, and that foreground was in nature. Almost unlimited is the evidence which substantiates the personal admission of each of the poets that their intuitive knowledge was the result of an early communion with natural objects.

It seems to be in order at this point in the discussion to show how the love of nature stayed with the poets Wordsworth and Whitman even in their early manhood, and how such

24 "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," 1. 62.
27 "Intimations of Immortality," 1. 152.
a love influenced their lives during this period. Oddly enough, both of them had at one time the reputation of laziness, lethargy, and shiftlessness. Both of them loved to wander, roam, loaf, and meditate, even at the expense of whatever else needed to be done. Wordsworth himself admits in a letter to his old school teacher Mathews, "I am doomed to be an idler through my whole life."28 Judging from the attitude of Wordsworth's close friends and relatives, this remark is pretty nearly a statement of fact.

A brief glance at Wordsworth's life after he left Hawkshead for Cambridge reveals that he never knew exactly what he wanted to do with himself. He wouldn't choose a profession, because there was none that was appealing to him. He wouldn't study, because he placed little or no importance on the things that were taught at Cambridge. He would read and study, yes, but only the books of his own choosing, and usually under a tree in the woods, or by the side of a stream. He was thoroughly convinced at heart

How little those formalities, which
With overweening trust alone we give
The name of Education, have to do
With real feeling and just sense.29

As a matter of fact, Wordsworth was a constant source of dissension in the family circle. Dorothy was the only

28 Quoted by George W. Meyer, Wordsworth's Formative Years, p. 23.

29 The Prelude, XIII, ll. 168-172.
one who understood and defended him, and even she was at
times a little tried by his refusal to choose an occupation
and make a living for himself. In one of her letters to a
friend she makes a remark about William: "I am very anxious
about him just now, as he will shortly have to provide for
himself." But he never did. Luckily for himself, and
for the lovers of his poetry, Wordsworth never had to work
at anything except his poetry. He was left a generous legacy
at the death of a friend. In the meantime, he saw no bene-
fit in

the Lecturer's room
All studded round, as thick as chairs could stand
With loyal students, faithful to their books,
Half-and-half idlers, hardy recusants,
And honest dunces.

Neither could he be much concerned with

important days,
Examinations, when the man was weighed
As in a balance.

The things important to him, truth and faith, were to be
found in "the common countenance of earth and sky."

"I called on both to teach me what they might."

Firmly convinced that

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.

30 Quoted by George W. Meyer, op. cit., p. 17.
31 The Prelude, III, ll. 64-67. 32 Ibid., III, ll. 67-70.
33 Ibid., III, l. 106. 34 Ibid., III, l. 112.
35 "The Tables Turned."
Wordsworth chose the path that his heart directed. (In the last summer before his graduation from Cambridge, instead of studying for his final examinations, he took an extended vacation with a college friend into the beautiful mountains of northern France and Switzerland. This tour was faithfully recorded in a poem published in 1793, "Descriptive Sketches."

In 1791, Wordsworth graduated from Cambridge, but he came out into the world with no profession, no pecuniary ambition, and no money. His only pleasure was in communing with nature. It was no small wonder that his relatives were exasperated. Little did they realize, however, that the cause of young William's first failure was destined to be responsible for his final great success. Wordsworth knew he was not being practical, but he defended his actions by saying later in life,

Nature then was sovereign in my mind,
And mighty forms, seizing a youthful fancy,
Had given a character to irregular hopes.36

Leaving Wordsworth at this point, let us now turn to Walt Whitman. There are many differences in the early manhood of the two poets under observation, the main one being that Wordsworth's years were spent in enduring a college education, whereas Whitman never attended an institution of higher learning a day in his life. However, it is noticeable that Whitman's attempts at engaging in a steady occupation

36 The Prelude, VI, 11. 333-336.
were constantly interrupted, just as were Wordsworth's classes and study hours, by frequent desires to return to nature.

Unlike Wordsworth, Whitman at times felt slightly obligated to make a living for himself. Although he loafed, or meditated, and gave the impression of being shiftless and lazy, he usually had a paying job. It should be added that he was by no means unsuccessful in later years. In fact, for one whose life began and reached its climax in such a decidedly romantic vein, Whitman was remarkably enthusiastic about his very unromantic journalistic career.

Up until the time when he was sixteen years old, however, Whitman was not settled in a steady job. Canby tells us in his recent biography37 that the poet had not at this time acquired the reputation for laziness which clung to him through life, but that he was a restless rambler, forever skipping off from a job, or between jobs, to rural Long Island. Mr. Canby relates this restlessness, the inability or unwillingness to hold a paying job, or even to stick to an assigned task, to a type of man whose inner life is active and demands nourishment. Whitman believed, and so did Wordsworth, that to live was more important than to make a living; consequently, it took time, patience, and an enormous amount of self-discipline for him to smother his

37 Canby, op. cit., p. 22.
subjective tendencies with a blanket of journalistic endeavor. Wordsworth, as we know, made no effort to smother his.

Even by 1841, after several odd jobs of reporting, writing, editing, and printing, Walt had not yet conquered his romantic impulses. Between 1836 and 1841, he lived on Long Island, where he taught in several country schools. He could not stay in the city. We are told that during these days "he was lazy and liked to lie under the apple trees watching the sky; that he sat around in his shirt sleeves, was none too well-mannered, kept to himself: 'a dreamy, quiet, morose young man'; who spent most of his spare time in winter reading by the fire."38

Romantic indeed were both of the poets: self-centered, subjective, meditative, dreamy, working always from within, absorbing facts about nature and life which they were later so accurately to record. Wordsworth learned that "one impulse from a vernal wood" can teach "more than all the sages can";39 Whitman discovered that "to glance with an eye or show a bean in a pod confounds the learning of all times."40 Whitman was forever loafing, observing a spear of summer grass, and inviting the universal soul; whereupon, he says,

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38 Ibid., p. 25.  
39 "The Tables Turned."  
40 "Song of Myself," l. 1274.
Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge that pass all the argument of the earth. 41

Wordsworth was forever associating with high objects, with enduring things -- With life and nature -- purifying thus The elements of feeling and of thought, And sanctifying, by such discipline, Both pain and fear, until we recognize A grandeur in the beatings of the heart. 42

Nature it was that called both of them from their work. Nature it was that taught them the important things in life.

But neither Wordsworth nor Whitman had yet experienced the greatest and most far-reaching strain on his constant association with nature. (It was not until Wordsworth became interested in the French Revolution and in social and political reform that he completely forgot, at least momentarily, his home in nature. It was then that man became the main object of his concern. The cause of the French Revolution aroused the sympathy of Wordsworth. His feeling that all people were good and equal put him in harmony with the revolutionary principle. Up until his first residence in London, Wordsworth had loved individuals, but he had distrusted groups -- society, that is. While at Cambridge, he later reports,

I trembled, -- thought, at times, of human life With an indefinite terror and dismay, Such as the storms and angry elements Had bred in me; but gloomier far, a dim

41Ibid., l. 91. 42The Prelude, I, ll. 408-414.
Analogy to uproar and misrule,
Disquiet, danger, and obscurity. 43

In London, however, Wordsworth began to see the unity of mankind. He had the feeling of

One spirit over ignorance and vice
Predominant, in good and evil hearts;
One sense for moral judgments, as one eye
For the sun's light. 44

Such was the basis for Wordsworth's attitude on observing the revolution in France. The realization that man could, and possibly must, operate en-masse caused him to lose sight of nature and the individual. His friendship with Beaupuy, who was certainly not the type of person to go into raptures over a landscape, was a further influence on his increasing interest in men and his estrangement from nature. Social and political reforms engaged the conversations of Wordsworth and his greatly admired friend. In time, Wordsworth became thoroughly converted to the cause. He had a pity and a love for the wretched, combined with a hope of improving their condition. In fact, had not financial necessity forced him to come back to England in 1793, Wordsworth doubtless would have taken an active part in the conflict. "I should have then made common cause," he later writes,

With some who perished; haply perished too,
A poor mistaken and bewildered offering, --
Should to the breast of Nature have gone back,

43 Ibid., VIII, 11. 513-519.

44 Ibid., VIII, 11. 669-672.
With all my resolutions, all my hopes,
A Poet only to myself, to men
Useless. 45

Wordsworth was now back in London. Nature had definitely surrendered first place in his thoughts to humanity. Poetry was laid aside for awhile. He published "An Evening Walk" and "Descriptive Sketches" only to prove to his relatives that he had not wasted completely the time he had spent in college and on his travels. 46 He espoused the revolutionary cause in England and became an ardent Republican. It should be noted here that in the country as a whole sympathy for the French Revolution had begun to wane considerably. But Wordsworth was at the peak of his enthusiasm. He, of course, did not fail to realize that, what with the Terror in France and the lack of proper support in England, something was going wrong. Yet he later asserts that even in that period of strife, "in the people was my trust." 47 Such was Wordsworth's attitude "till with open war Britain opposed the liberties of France," 48 and by so doing

threw me first out of the pale of love;
Soured and corrupted, upwards to the source,
My sentiments. 49

Wordsworth continued to favor the French cause at the sacrifice of his patriotism. The action of his own country

45 Ibid., X, ll. 228-236.
47 The Prelude, XI, 1. ll. 48 Ibid., XI, ll. 174-175.
49 Ibid., XI, ll. 176-178.
was inexcusable, whereas the apparently outrageous activities of the revolutionists were merely a lamentable but perhaps necessary step in the achievement of complete freedom. He did not finally give up trust in the supposedly noble Frenchmen until he realized that they had "become aggressors in their turn." They

had changed a war of self-defence
For one of conquest, losing sight of all
Which they had struggled for. 50

Napoleon was preparing to have himself crowned Emperor. Disappointed, resentful, not knowing what else to do, Wordsworth turned to "Reason's naked self." 51 In this attempt "to anatomize the frame of social life," 52 he says, and by

demanding formal proof,
And seeking it in every thing, I lost
All feeling of conviction, and, in fine,
Sick, wearied out with contrarities,
Yielded up moral questions in despair. 53

Reason had failed. He had lost his faith in humanity. What would be able to reinstate in Wordsworth his love for mankind and his hope for the future? Wordsworth answers that question for us very plainly when he says that

Nature's self,
By all varieties of human love
Assisted, led me back through opening day
To those sweet counsels between head and heart
Whence grew that genuine knowledge, fraught
with peace,

52 Ibid. 53 Ibid., XI, 11. 301-305.
Which, through the later sinkings of this cause,
Hath still upheld me, and upholds me now
In the catastrophe.\textsuperscript{54}

It is only nature, says Wordsworth, that

\begin{quote}
    might teach Man's haughty race
    How without injury to take, to give
    Without offence.\textsuperscript{55}
\end{quote}

And so it was that in 1798 Wordsworth retired to na-
ture, in order that he might again find happiness and faith
in the future. He had begun to realize that the source of
man's happiness is an understanding of each other man's
soul, not man-made social reforms. Nature had taught him

\begin{quote}
    none, the meanest of created things,
    Of forms created the most vile and brute,
    The fullest or most noxious, should exist
    Divorced from good -- a spirit and a pulse
    of good,
    A life and soul, to every mode of being
    Inseparably linked.\textsuperscript{56}
\end{quote}

In nature, therefore, could be cultivated those feelings
necessary for a harmonious society. But there were so few
who realized this fact, so few who had found comfort and un-
derstanding in nature!

\begin{quote}
    One only in ten thousand? What one is,
    Why may not millions be? What bars are
    thrown
    By Nature in the way of such a hope?\textsuperscript{57}
\end{quote}

"Oh," said Wordsworth, in pondering on this question,

\begin{quote}
    that I might tell
    What ye have done for me.\textsuperscript{58}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{54}Ibid., XI, ll. 350-357.  \textsuperscript{55}Ibid., XII, ll. 11-13.
\textsuperscript{56}"The Old Cumberland Beggar," ll. 73-79.
\textsuperscript{57}The Prelude, XIII, ll. 87-93.  \textsuperscript{58}Ibid., XII, ll. 29-30.
And he does tell. Wordsworth is conscious, from his own experience, of the failure of all attempted social reforms. He is also conscious that in nature alone has he been able to recover peace and joy of the soul. At the age of twenty-eight (1798), he decides to describe in poetry the development of his own soul in nature, with the hope that it will lead to universal harmony among men. "Go to the Poets," he then advises, "they will speak to thee more perfectly of purer creatures." We poets will be, says Wordsworth,

Prophets of Nature, we to them will speak
A lasting inspiration, sanctified
By reason, blest by faith: What we have loved,
Others will love, and we will teach them how;
Instruct them how the mind of man becomes
A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
On which he dwells, above this frame of things
(Which, 'mid all revolution in the hopes
And fears of men, doth still remain unchanged)
In beauty exalted, as it is itself
Of quality and fabric more divine.

We see Wordsworth determined, at this point in his life, to be the voice through which nature speaks. He sees himself as a teacher, a prophet, the voice of his age. Wordsworth does indeed celebrate himself in pointing his way as the way for others to follow.

These developments in the character of Wordsworth are almost parallel with like developments in Walt Whitman's character more than a half-century later. Whitman too went through a period of great interest in political and social

59Ibid., XII. 11, 68-69. 60Ibid., XIV, 11. 444-454.
reform. He might not have been so passionately concerned as Wordsworth, but he probably worked at reform equally hard. Like the English poet, Whitman had his day of marked veneration for heroes and heroics of the American and French Revolutions. He was charged, it has been said, with "a peculiarly American variety of eighteenth-century liberalism." 61

The rights of man, the importance of the individual, the sacredness of the Revolution, the evils of privilege, and the absurdity of rank were all a part of his great democratic philosophy, which is revealed both in his journalistic work and in his *Leaves of Grass*.

But it is not my purpose here to discuss Whitman's ideas on a political democracy. That will be done more fully in a later chapter. Suffice it to say that until 1847, when he lost his editorship because of a break with the Democratic Party, Whitman was an orthodox liberal and humanitarian. (Those two terms have often been used in describing Wordsworth while he was about the same age as Whitman was at this time.) He wrote, he spoke, he electioneered. He dealt with people and society, rather than with the individual and his soul. His language and sentiments were his own; but they were also those of his party. It was the slavery issue which finally made him independent. From that time on he seemed to become counter to, rather than current with, his

times. His idealism was disturbed by the great split preceding the Civil War. He hated exploitation, inefficient leaders and blindly obedient mobs, commercialism, regimentation, class division, compromising politicians, and vested interests of slavery. In becoming more and more distrustful of society, Whitman became more and more resolved to speak for himself, and not through public editorials. Even though it meant the termination of his career, which was just now reaching its peak, Whitman abandoned his party to protect his principles. The crowd was running away from him, as it had run away from Wordsworth. He could no longer deal with them en-masse. As Canby points out, he was "ideologically adrift." He came to believe, as Wordsworth had, that a true understanding of democracy and its workings required a deeper insight than he had been getting -- an insight into the soul of man. No existing political ideology could answer this purpose; no longer could his ideas be developed in society nor expressed in editorials and pamphlets. They were too intangible and subjective.

In much the same mental and emotional crisis in which Wordsworth had shifted his outlook on life, Whitman shifted his. He turned to nature -- away from society. There, and there only, was he able to discover "the peace and knowledge that pass all argument of the earth." There he was able to

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62 Ibid., p. 70.  
63 "Song of Myself," l. 91.
discover the same underlying concept of democracy that
Wordsworth had found so many years before. Remembering
later in life the great truths that nature had awakened in
him, Whitman wrote:

I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,
And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of
my own,
And that all men ever born are also my brothers, and
the women my sisters and lovers,
And that a kelson of creation is love,
And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the
fields,
And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,
And mossy scabs of the worm fence, heap'd stones,
elder, mullein and poke-weed.64

Nature had told Whitman that the meanest of objects were
"limitless," that they had an everlasting soul. And so he
came to realize that all "is not chaos or death -- it is
form, union, plan -- it is eternal life -- it is Happiness."65

At the age of twenty-eight, exactly the same age at
which Wordsworth made up his mind to become the poet through
whom nature was to speak, Whitman likewise assumed the role
of a poet-apostle.66 Like Wordsworth, he determined to re-
tire to nature and discover the truths that "wait in all
things."67 Just as Wordsworth had found it necessary to
abandon reason, Whitman found it necessary "to throw out
questions and answers."68 He was able to learn from nature,
he says,

What the study could not teach -- what the preaching could not accomplish.69

Whitman had found that an understanding of men required an understanding of the soul of man. He further had discovered that the way to a knowledge of man's soul was through communion with nature. Like Wordsworth, he determined to spread by means of his poetry the truths which he had learned in his lessons from nature. He was to become a voice for his age, a prophet, a teacher, an answerer of the great questions in life. Having received his lesson complete, he, a "maker of poems," might settle "justice, reality, immortality."70 Such was Walt Whitman's ambition. He made his decision:

Done with indoor complaints, libraries, querulous criticisms, Strong and content I travel the open road.71

Wordsworth and Whitman were indeed champions of the same cause. Both of these men very early in life became attached to the natural objects which surrounded them. Both of them in time, however, experienced a period in which nature held second place to a temporary interest in humanity. On becoming greatly disillusioned by the inconsistent behavior of the masses, both of them had a long foreground in nature to fall back on. By reverting to nature they were

69ibid., l. 100. 70"Song of the Answerer," l. 58. 71"Song of the Open Road," ll. 6-7.
saved from a pessimistic despondency and a loss of faith in humanity. Happy and thankful in their own salvation, each of the poets felt an obligation to preach a message to the whole creation. Wordsworth did his preaching in a spiritual autobiography, which was, in effect, a song of himself. Whitman wrote his message into a song of himself, which was, for all practical purposes, a spiritual autobiography tracing the development of his own soul. And, although Wordsworth was at the age of twenty-eight a finished artist, and Whitman was, at the same age, only entering into a seven-year apprenticeship before ever beginning to publish, it was in this same year in their lives that each poet determined to become a poet of nature and of the soul.
CHAPTER III

TRANSCENDENTALISM

It appears somewhat strange to begin a chapter on transcendentalism as it affected the philosophies of William Wordsworth and Walt Whitman, by making reference to their respect for science. And yet such procedure seems almost inevitable if a true picture of the causes leading up to their transcendental ideas is to be given. First, however, it might be well to make an over-all survey of the picture.

Both Wordsworth and Whitman, we have found, had for their primary goals as poets the understanding of the human soul. They felt that nature held the secret of that understanding and that to study nature was the best method of arriving at a true knowledge of life and its essential meaning. Interestingly enough, each of the poets relied upon science for a part of his instruction, since some of the teachings of science seemed to be very compatible with the ideas which he had developed, or was in the process of developing, into a definite philosophy of life. Consequently, each one had a certain respect for scientific theorizing and discovery. In time, however, both of the poets seemed to reach a snag, just as many of the scientists did, in
determining the very intangible first causes of things --
the fundamental nature of being. It is at this point that
we recognize the emergence of their remarkably similar
theories of reliance on intuition. They couldn't under-
stand or explain; they could only feel and know. Having
found the knowledge of science insufficient, they both be-
came wise through transcendentalism.

But to return to the original starting point -- the re-
spect which the two poets had for science. Let us look
first at Wordsworth. He expresses himself very frankly and
clearly in his great Preface to the second edition of

*Lyrical Ballads:*

If the labours of men of science should ever create
any material revolution, direct or indirect, in our
condition, and in the impressions which we habitually
receive, the Poet will sleep then no more than at
present; he will be ready to follow the steps of the
man of science, not only in those indirect effects,
but he will be at his side, carrying sensation into
the midst of the objects of science itself. The re-
 mote discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist, or
the mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the
Poet's art as any upon which it can be employed, if
the time should ever come when these things shall
be familiar to us, and the relations under which
they are contemplated by the followers of these re-
spective sciences shall be manifestly and palpably
material to us as enjoying and suffering beings.
If the time should come when what is now called
science, thus familiarised to men, shall be ready
to put on, as it were, a form of flesh and blood,
the Poet will lend his divine spirit to aid the
transfiguration, and will welcome the Being thus
produced, as a dear and genuine inmate of the house-
hold of man. . . . ¹

¹The Complete Poetical Works of William Wordsworth,
p. 795.
And so, although the facts promulgated by Henry Brook, Erasmus Darwin, Isaac Newton, and others, were not yet "manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings," Wordsworth saw some good in those teachings, and was willing to accept them,

Not as our glory and our absolute boast,
But as a succedaneum, and a prop
To our infirmity. 2

Contrary to the opinion of many people, then, Wordsworth did not utterly disregard or condemn the value of science. 3 He objected to it only as it puts boundaries around human thought, or as it divides those things which we perceive so that they lose their relation to the general whole. We must not analyze things into nothingness, he says, or

Viewing all objects unremittingly,
In disconnection dead and spiritless;

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3 Too many people look no further into Wordsworth's ideas on science than the two lines in "A Poet's Epitaph," which make scornful reference to a physical scientist as

One that would peep and botanise
Upon his mother's grave.

It must be remembered that this same poem makes equally disparaging characterizations of a lawyer, a divine, a soldier, a moralist, and a public man. As Professor Joseph Warren Beach says, in The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth Century English Poetry, p. 157; "Each one of these is an unsympathetic -- because blind and heartless -- representative of his profession -- all of them set in contrast to the poet, who, weak and idle in comparison with these serious men, is praised for his humane feeling and unpretentious wisdom."
And still dividing, and dividing still,
Break down all grandeur.  

"Yet may we not entirely overlook," he insists,
The pleasure gathered from the rudiments
Of geometric science.

In such study, Wordsworth goes on to say,

I found
Both elevation and composed delight.

He describes how

With Indian delight and wonder, ignorance pleased
With its own struggles, did I meditate
On the relation those abstractions bear
To Nature's laws, and by what process led
Those immaterial agents bowed their heads
Duly to serve the mind of earth-born men
From star to star, from kindred sphere to sphere,
From system on to system without end.

It wasn't just intuition or a mystical experience, then,
that enabled Wordsworth to realize the divine spirit in na-
ture. He is still speaking of the abstract sciences when he
says,

More frequently from the same source I drew
A pleasure quiet and profound, a sense
Of permanent and universal sway,
And paramount belief; there, recognized
A type, for finite natures, of the one
Supreme Existence, the surpassing life
Which -- to the boundaries of space and time,
Of melancholy space and doleful time,
Superior and incapable of change,
Nor touched by welterings of passion -- is,

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4The Excursion, IV, ll. 961-964.
5The Prelude, VI, ll. 115-117.
6Ibid., VI, ll. 119-120.  7Ibid., VI, ll. 121-128.
And hath the name of, God. Transcendent peace
And silence did await upon these thoughts
That were a frequent comfort to my youth. 8

( It appears from this examination of various passages
in The Prelude and in the Preface that Wordsworth was open
for all aid that science might give him in the understanding
of the great truths of life. At all times he felt that "a
wiser spirit is at work for us," 9 but he was never so
blindly mystical that he failed to recognize the practicali-
ty of scientific research.)

Now let us turn to Walt Whitman. For a parallel to
Wordsworth's statement in his Preface to the Lyrical Bal-
lads, we need to look no further than to Whitman's Preface
to the 1855 edition of Leaves of Grass. In a very similar
frame of mind he, too, defends science from the viewpoint
of the poet:

Exact science and its practical movements are
no checks on the greatest poet but always his en-
couragement and support. The outset and remembrance
are there...there the arms that lifted him first and
brace him best....there he returns after all his
going and comings. The sailor and traveler...the
anatomist chemist astronomer geologist phrenologist
spiritualist mathematician historian and lexicog-
rapher are not poets, but they are the lawgivers of
poets and their construction underlies the structure
of every perfect poem. No matter what rises or is
uttered they sent the seed of the conception of it...
of them and by them stand the visible proofs of
souls.....always of their fatherstuff must be be-
gotten the sinewy race of bards. If there shall
be love and content between the father and the son
and if the greatness of the son is the exuding of

8Tbid., VI, 11. 129-141. 9Tbid., V, 1. 360.
the greatness of the father there shall be love between the poet and the man of demonstrable science. In the beauty of the poems are the tuft and applause of science.\footnote{Facsimile Edition, Portland, Maine, Thomas Bird Mosher, 1919, p. vii. The dots are Whitman's punctuation. As the original text of this Preface has been altered in later editions, all references to the 1855 Preface will be made to this Facsimile Edition.}

Wordsworth's "prop" has become Whitman's "support." Wordsworth will, in time, accept science as "a dear and genuine inmate of the household of man"; science is the home where Whitman "returns after all his goings and comings." To Wordsworth, "the remotest discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist, or Mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the Poet's art as any upon which it can be employed," and "he will be ready to follow the steps of the Man of science." To Whitman, "the anatomist chemist astronomer geologist spiritualist mathematician historian and lexicographer . . . are the lawgivers of poets and their construction underlies the structure of every perfect poem."

But Whitman, like Wordsworth, does not confine his praise of science to prose alone. Even in his poetry he recognizes the value

Of all Geologies -- Histories -- of all Astronomy -- of Evolution, Metaphysics all.\footnote{"Going Somewhere."

He shouts,

Hurrah for positive science! long live exact demonstration!\footnote{"Song of Myself," l. 485.}
In speaking to the men of science, he says,

Gentlemen, to you the first honors always!
Your facts are useful, . . . 13

Going back to his prose once again, in Specimen Days we find him affirming that "Science testing absolutely all thoughts, all words, has already burst well upon the world -- a sun... most illuminating...surely never again to set."14

In looking back over the passages quoted from the works of Wordsworth and Whitman, one may certainly detect a difference in the tone which each of them sets in praises devoted to science. Such a difference is readily understandable. It must be remembered that science had made great advances during the half century that separated the poetic careers of the two poets under consideration, and that in that period of time scientific endeavor had become much more respected by society in general. Another significant factor is that Wordsworth was living in a yet conservative England, whereas Whitman was thinking his thoughts in a rapidly expanding, exceedingly progressive America. This accounts for the difference in tone between Wordsworth's gracious, somewhat dubious but none the less hopeful, acceptance of science, and Whitman's positive encouragement of it.

13 Ibid., 11. 490-491.

Notwithstanding this difference in degree of appreciation, the strong parallel still remains. Both Wordsworth and Whitman had a sincere regard for the tireless efforts of science to promote an understanding of the meaning of life. But we cannot stop here. Should we do so we would fail to give an altogether accurate interpretation of their feelings. Each one of the poets at various times qualified his praise of science by suggesting certain limitations to a complete trust in it. Wordsworth appears almost antagonistic to scientific research when he remarks of the scientists,

when will their presumption learn
That in the unreasoning progress of the world
A wiser spirit is at work for us,
A better eye than theirs, most prodigal
Of blessings, and most studious of our good
Even in what seems our most unfruitful hours?15

Besides science, and not understandable by means of science, there is a greater and more powerful source of knowledge. Wordsworth calls it

Wisdom and Spirit of the universe!
Thou Soul that art the Eternity of thought.16

Likewise, Whitman qualifies his tribute to the scientists:

Gentlemen, to you the first honors always!
Your facts are useful, and yet they are not
my dwelling.
I but enter by them to an area of my dwelling.17

15The Prelude, V, ll. 359-363. Italics are mine.
16bid., I, ll. 401-402.
17"Song of Myself," ll. 490-493.
Just as it was to Wordsworth, science was to Whitman merely a means to a greater end, "a prop to our infirmity." Wordsworth recognized a "wiser spirit at work for us," and, very similarly, Whitman recognized "the inherent light, greater than the rest." In his prose, the same idea is even more forcibly expressed:

Only, (for me, at any rate, in my prose and poetry), joyfully accepting modern science, and loyally following it without the slightest hesitation, there remains ever recognized still a higher flight, a higher fact, the eternal soul of man. . . .

There was something that science could not explain to either Wordsworth or Whitman.

Just exactly what significance does the foregoing investigation have regarding the problem before us -- the problem of considering the transcendentalism of Wordsworth and Whitman? A hint was given at the beginning of the chapter when mention was made that both Wordsworth and Whitman hit a snag, as it were, while traversing the sea of scientific theorizing. They got just so far and could go no farther. They had the choice of giving up in despair to a purely mechanistic conception of life or of recognizing a source of life and knowledge that transcends human understanding and wisdom. Both of them accepted the latter course. They developed a faith and an optimistic belief in what they

16"Thoughts." Cited by Beach, op. cit., p. 379.

could only feel and know.

The events leading up to each poet's recognition of a knowledge that transcends all understanding are remarkably parallel. In order to understand better the factors that influenced the poets in their gradual progression towards transcendentalism, it might be helpful to make a brief and very general survey of the scientific thought of the day. During the formative years of both Wordsworth and Whitman the eighteenth-century conception of nature as an orderly system was still highly regarded. Scientists and theologians alike shared the conviction that nature is the result of providential design, and that therefore the order of nature may be taken by men as a norm of conduct. The well-being of man is provided for within the scope of nature, and anything that might seem defective in itself is in reality an asset when viewed as a part of the general scheme of things. Since rural nature is less tainted by society, naturally it is more in harmony with the original right order of things. It is unmodified by the ingenuity and perverseness of man-made ideas and institutions.

And so it was that Wordsworth had ample justification from science for the pleasure he took in rural scenes, and for his preference of country-folk to town-folk. Many times in The Prelude Wordsworth lays stress on nature as the seat of lawful order, and consequently suited to give moral
instruction to men. In the thirteenth book he says,

not in vain
I had been taught to reverence a Power
That is the very quality and shape
And image of right reason, that matures
Her processes by steadfast laws, gives birth
To no impatient or fallacious hopes,
No heat of passion or excessive zeal,
No vain conceits, provokes no quick turns
Of self-applauding intellect, but lifts
The being into magnanimity;
Holds up before the mind intoxicate
With present objects and the busy dence
Of things that pass away, a temperate show
Of objects that endure.20

And in The Recluse he emphasizes the scheme, the union, the
plan of the universe:

How exquisitely the individual Mind
(And the progressive powers perhaps no less
Of the whole species) to the external World
Is fitted, and how exquisitely, too --

The external World is fitted to the Mind;
And the creation (by no lower name
Can it be called) which they with blended might
Accomplish . . . 21

The natural world, then, is to Wordsworth

A whole without dependence or defect,
Made for itself, and happy in itself,
Perfect contentment, Unity entire.22

Nature is the order -- "the law supreme of that Intelligence
which governs all."23

But let us look at Whitman. He, too, conceived the
world as a perfectly formed scheme or plan. We find him

20 The Prelude, XIII, ll. 19-32.
21 The Recluse, ll. 816-324.
22 Ibid., ll. 774-775. 23 Ibid., ll. 774-775
speaking of "the ensemble of the world," "the compact truth of the world," and "the divine law of indirections." He makes reference to

The simple, compact, well-join'd scheme -- myself disintegrated, every one disintegrated, yet part of the scheme . . .

The world in which we live is an affair of "great laws and harmonious combinations." Both Wordsworth and Whitman, like the scientists and philosophers of the eighteenth century, had the feeling that nature is uniform, correct, worthy of being followed. No wonder, then, that Wordsworth should determine to associate,

Not with the mean and vulgar works of Man; But with high objects, with enduring things, With life and nature; purifying thus The elements of feeling end of thought.

And, feeling the same way that Wordsworth felt, Whitman says in a very Wordsworthian tone,

Now I see the secret of the making of the best persons, It is to grow in the open air and to eat and sleep with the earth.

But neither the scientists nor the poets could stop at this point. In order to represent the operations of nature as a whole, and to account for what appeared to be her purposeful and rational behavior, they felt obligated to look

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24 "Laws for Creations."
25 "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," l. 7.
26 "A Song for Occupations," l. 67.
27 The Prelude, I, ll. 408-411.
28 "Song of the Open Road," ll. 71-72.
for an activating and directive power. There were too many 
difficulties in the purely materialistic or mechanistic 
views of the universe for such views to have universal sup-
port; so various men, including the scientist Newton, began 
to look for a spirit, a soul of things, an active principle.

It is important to note that "spirit" meant different 
things to different philosophers, scientists, and theologians. 
Professor Beach classifies them into two quite distinct con-
ceptions: "the scientific conception of a highly subtile 
form of matter -- an animating fluid, a spirit of vegeta-
tion, of electricity, of attraction, etc. -- and the abstract 
metaphysical notion of spirit as a 'principle' accounting 
for motion, for all kinds of activity, and for the purposive 
and rational behavior of the universe."29 Finally, Beach 
goes on to point out, there arose a conception common to 
most theologians: the idea of a spirit as a disembodied 
"soul" or intelligence, an immaterial person.

Which of these ideas had the most influence on Words-
worth in conceiving his "spirit of nature" it is not neces-
sary to determine, but this fact seems self-evident: scien-
tists raised a question that both theologians and mystical 
philosophers alike were forced to answer in some way. What 
is the active principle in the universe?

(The purely mechanistic explanations of the scientists

29Beach, op. cit., p. 203.)
were not sufficient for philosophers like Wordsworth. There had to be a knowing, a benevolent, power behind the workings of the world to make it run so smoothly, so in compliance with the needs and desires of human-kind. Herein we find the basis of Wordsworth's belief that science could be but the prop of knowledge. It could lead up to knowledge and perhaps help to sustain it, but science could never give a complete insight into the greatest truths. Thus it was that Wordsworth became a transcendentalist. This step of course had a long foreground in his early mystical communion with nature. But now Wordsworth was able to interpret his former feelings. He was able to realize that the active principle which the scientists sought was more than a mere mechanical force or motion. He knew -- he couldn't explain, but he knew -- that the forms of nature contain "the Wisdom and Spirit of the universe," which, in themselves, give "to forms and images a breath and everlasting motion."30 And he confesses,

\[ \text{my mind look'd} \]
\[ \text{Upon the speaking face of earth and heaven} \]
\[ \text{As her prime teacher, intercourse with man} \]
\[ \text{Establish'd by the sovereign Intellect,} \]
\[ \text{Who through that bodily Image hath diffus'd} \]
\[ \text{A soul divine which we participate,} \]
\[ \text{A deathless spirit.31} \]

By communion with nature he had had mystical experiences in

30 The Prelude, I, 11. 401-404.
31 Ibid., V, 11. 11-17. This quotation is as it appears in the 1805-1806 version. The 1850 version is slightly altered. The 1806-1806 text appears in the edition of The Prelude prepared by Ernest de Selincourt, 1926.
which he seemed to become one with the universal soul. Then it was that he felt completely omniscient of the great truths in life. Then it was that he knew things which transcend human understanding. Then it was that he was a transcendentalist.

Walt Whitman also recognized the inability of scientists to teach all that should be known. As Mrs. Alice Lovelace Cooke points out in her excellent article on "Whitman's Indebtedness to the Scientific Thought of His Day," most of the scientists during Whitman's period of development considered the laws of energy and matter sufficient to account for the phenomena of life and being. 32 But, like Wordsworth, Whitman "shied at all purely physical theories accounting for life." 33 There was in nature an inexplicable force which could be nothing but divine in character, nothing but spiritual in form. Indeed, Whitman had unlimited faith, not in science or in orthodox religion, but in the "Something behind all life," "even the triumphs of science," "which rounded out and completed it" -- the perfect universe. 34 He turned to nature, as did Wordsworth, to observe those

objects that call from diffusion my meanings, and give them shape. 35

32Cooke, op. cit., p. 112.
33Horace Trubel, Walt Whitman in Camden, II, 423.
35"Song of the Open Road," l. 25.
"Objects gross and the unseen soul are one," he insisted. In nature, then, in the meanest forms of nature, Whitman found the activating spirit of the world, that is, the soul common to us all:

Here is the test of wisdom;
Wisdom is not finally tested in schools;
Wisdom cannot be passed from one having it to one not having it;
Wisdom is of the Soul, is not susceptible of proof,
Applies to all stages and objects and qualities, and is content,
Is the certainty of the reality and immortality of things, and the excellence of things;
Something there is in the float of the sight of things that provokes it out of the Soul. 36

Whitman, too, had his moments in which he seemed to become one with the universe. He was able to observe a spear of grass and reach such heights of mystical communion that he felt divine, omniscient. He may not have dwelt on the forms of beauty so much as did Wordsworth, but he also rose from a contemplation of an individual object or scene to a realization of the divine order of which it is a symbol. Nature, then, brought both men to the consciousness of the universal soul of which they were a part. This was in each case accomplished by intuition, that is, by a recognition of an inherent light behind outer manifestations.

( In "Tintern Abbey" Wordsworth's inherent light, or universal soul, appears as

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36 Ibid., ll. 75-81.
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. 37)

Whitman likewise sees a spirit, which here he calls a soul,
interfused in "all things."

I swear I think that everything without exception
has an eternal Soul!
The trees have, rooted in the ground! the weeds
of the sea have; the animals; 38

The realization by means of intuition of an eternal
spirit in nature naturally indicates a faith in immortality.
Whitman stresses this point in his philosophy much more than
Wordsworth does, and yet there are evidences of such a be-
lief in the latter's poetry. (There is, for example, a pas-
sage in the fourth book of The Excursion in which Words-
worth speaks to those who mourn death:

I cannot doubt that they whom you deplore
Are glorified; or, if they sleep, shall wake
From sleep, and dwell with God in endless love. 39)

Wordsworth's "endless love," his previously quoted "ever-
lastling motion" 40 and "deathless spirit" 41 hint strongly of
Whitman's "float forever held in solution," 42 the parts of

37 "Tintern Abbey," ll. 92-100. Italics are mine.
38 "To Think of Time," ll. 119-120.
39 The Excursion, IV, ll. 187-190.
40 The Prelude, I. 1. 404. 41 Ibid., V, l. 17.
42 "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," l. 61.
which "slowly and surely . . . have passed on to this, and slowly and surely . . . yet pass on." 43

In his famous "Intimations of Immortality" Wordsworth sees the span of life as a mere "moment in the being of the eternal Silence." 44 Whitman considers "a few quadrillions of eras" but a small part of life eternal. 45 (Wordsworth's soul is something that "cometh from afar . . . trailing clouds of glory." 46 Whitman's is "something long preparing and formless," that is "henceforth secure, whatever comes or goes." 47 (Wordsworth has sight of "that immortal sea which brought us hither," and he therefore knows that life is "but a sleep and a forgetting" from which he will awake to find himself again with "God, who is our home." 48) Whitman sees ever so far and realizes that "there is limitless space outside of that." 49 He knows, then, that he too will return to God who is his home:

My rendezvous is appointed, it is certain,
The Lord will be there and wait till I come
  on perfect terms,
The great Comrade, the lover true for whom
  I pine will be there. 50

With their intuitive discovery of a faith in the immortality of the human soul, the poets Wordsworth and Whitman reached the climax of their transcendentalism. Wordsworth gradually tended toward religious orthodoxy; Whitman

43"To Think of Time," l. 116.
44"Intimations of Immortality," IX, ll. 155-156.
45"Song of Myself," l. 1194.
47"To Think of Time," ll. 73-74.
48"Intimations of Immortality," IX, l. 164; V, ll. 58, 66.
49"Song of Myself," ll. 45, 1196.  50Ibid. ll. 1198-1200.
remained religious but never accepted institutional religion. Neither ever forgot his original conception of nature which had determined the development of his religious optimism.

In retrospect it may be seen that both the poets received the impetus for their romanticism in their enthusiasm for the beauties of rural nature. From there, with the countenance and approval of science, they rose directly to the concept of nature as the unified system of all natural phenomena -- the epitome of law, order, and regulation. After witnessing an unfruitful search for a physical animating principle for the universe, they found an explanation of the power behind all things. They conceived by direct intuition the idea of a mystical, later a divine, providence that worked through the purposive laws of nature for the well-being of mankind and the whole world. The final outcome for both poets was a sustaining belief in immortality. Influenced both by nature and science, Wordsworth and Whitman became transcendentalists.
CHAPTER IV

DEMOCRACY

Having similar ideas of the divinity of all objects in nature, it was inevitable that Wordsworth and Whitman should entertain almost equally similar ideas concerning the individual and his relation to society and government. Whitman was, of course, the more obvious defender of democracy. His name has become almost inextricably linked with the term. Books have been written which carry as their entire thesis the democratic philosophy of the great American poet; he has become by reputation and by title, America's "poet of democracy." On the other hand, very little is heard about Wordsworth's democratic spirit. He has been almost universally classified as England's greatest nature poet; his democratic, or republican, ideas are far in the background.

It is understandable that Wordsworth's republican ideas should be somewhat neglected, or even discounted. The fact has been pointed out by recent critics -- and it is undeniably true -- that such ideas were promulgated by a young radical, emotionally aroused over the principles of the French Revolution. It was this young radical who, in
1795, wrote the denunciatory letter to the Bishop of Llandaff, defending the French Revolution and at the same time criticizing the monarchial government in England. It was the same ardent enthusiast who, in the years from 1791 to 1794, while composing the original verses of the poem "Guilt and Sorrow," denounced the social, economic, and political conditions in his country. The letter to the Bishop was never published during Wordsworth's lifetime, and the version of "Guilt and Sorrow" which was finally published (1842) contained little if any harsh criticism of the government, the emphasis being shifted to the calamities of war. In The Excursion (published in 1815), Wordsworth praises the English monarchy as being the stronghold of freedom and the seat of equity and law. Later, in letters written in 1834, he upholds the conservative element in Parliament, he defends the State, the Constitution, and the Church, and he opposes the Reform Bill because it is hostile to the established monarchy. And so the excited young radical became, in old age, a staid conservative. Nevertheless, there was a time when Wordsworth was a sincere supporter of republicanism, and the sentiments which made him so ready to uphold the revolutionary principle are parallel to those underlying the democratic theory of Walt

1The Excursion, VI, 11. 1-16.

Whitman. It is, therefore, upon the basis of his early liberalism that the following comparisons are made.

We have already learned from a study of their nature philosophy that Wordsworth and Whitman saw in this universe undeniable perfection. Pervading and uniting all forms of nature is a universal spirit, a divine presence, an awful power which brings about this uniformity, this endless perfection. The meanest of all natural phenomena have spiritual significance. How divine, then, is man, God-like as he is!

In his defense of the freedom of beggars, Wordsworth asserts,

'T is Nature's law
That none, the meanest of created things,
Or forms created the most vile and brute,
The dullest or most noxious, should exist
Divorced from good -- a spirit and a pulse
of good,
A life and soul, to every mode of being
Inseparably linked.  

Kings are no better than beggars, he says, for earth is "the common mother of us all." Although the fact is not so well-known and well-established as it might be, Wordsworth preached the gospel of spiritual democracy with as much feeling and assurance as Whitman ever did. Perhaps he was less persistent. He never lets us forget, however, that there is an ever-watchful spirit in the universe which

3"The Old Cumberland Beggar," ll. 73-78.
4The Excursion, VIII, l. 356.
presides over all people, regardless of their respective stations in life. He impresses upon us the fundamental "unity of man." Among the multitudes he recognizes

One spirit over ignorance and vice
Predominant, in good and evil hearts;
One sense for moral judgments, as one eye
For the sun's light.

Every man is born to "the heaven regarding eye and front sublime." Every man is led by a "power supreme,"

Without whose call this world would cease to breathe,
Who from the fountain of Thy grace dost fill
The veins that branch through every frame of life,
Making man what he is, creature divine,
In single or in social eminence.

It is inconceivable, then, that a man might

sink however depressed,
So low as to be scorned without a sin;
Like the dry remnant of a garden-flowers
Whose seeds are shed, or as an implement
Worn out and worthless.

But Wordsworth did not content himself with a passive defense of the humble, lowly, plain people of society. He was an active champion of the

simple manners, and the stable worth
That dignified and cheered a low estate.

He sounds almost like Whitman as he hails in broad and sweeping statements the simple occupations of common

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5The Prelude, VIII, ll. 668-669. 6Ibid., VIII, ll. 669-672.
7"The Old Cumberland Beggar," l. 80.
8The Prelude, X, ll. 419-424. Italics are mine.
9"The Old Cumberland Beggar," ll. 81-86.
10The Excursion, VIII, ll. 237-238.
laborers:

praise to the sturdy plough,
And patient spade; praise to the simple crook,
And ponderous loom -- resounding while it holds
Body and mind in one captivity;
And let the light mechanic tool be hailed
With honour; which, encasing by the power
Of long companionship, the artist's hand,
Cuts off that hand, with all its world of nerves,
From a too busy commerce with the heart!
-- Inglorious implements of craft and toil,
Both ye that shape and build, and ye that force,
By slow solicitation, earth to yield
Her annual bounty, sparingly dealt forth
With wise reluctance; you would I extol.\textsuperscript{11}

Realizing all too well, then, how we are inclined to
build up social distinctions and prejudices which are ir-
reconcilable with democratic principles, Wordsworth pleads
with us

To prize the breath we share with human kind;
\textit{And look upon the dust of man with awe.}\textsuperscript{12}

He expresses this sentiment further in The Excursion by mak-
ing the pastor praise certain persons for their "true hu-
mility," which "descends from heaven."\textsuperscript{13} "Stoop from your
height, ye proud," he warns, "and copy these."\textsuperscript{14} The truly
humble are those who are blessed with the great moral vir-
tues of "forgiveness, patience, hope, and charity."\textsuperscript{15}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[]\vspace{-1em}
\textsuperscript{11}\textit{Ibid.}, V, 11. 602-615. Italics are mine.
\textsuperscript{12}\textit{Ibid.}, V, 11. 657-658.
\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Ibid.}, V, 1. 718.
\textsuperscript{14}\textit{Ibid.}, V, 1. 722.
\textsuperscript{15}\textit{Ibid.}, V, 1. 727.
\end{footnotes}
dust, and kindred to the worm,"\textsuperscript{16} is

\begin{quote}
\textit{a Being}
Both in perception and discernment, first
In every capability of rapture.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

One no more than another, one as surely as the other, each
mortal is immortal, each man is,

\begin{quote}
more than anything we know, instinct
With godhead, and, by reason and \underline{by will},
Acknowledging dependency sublime.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

Nothing, then, is more important than the individual. He
is divine as God is divine. There can be no valid distinc-
tion between men, because each man is limitless in his in-
herent divinity. This spiritual equality is impregnable
to society-made distinctions. It precludes classes; it
exalts the masses. It presumes absolute equality. "There's
not a man that lives," declares Wordsworth,

\begin{quote}
who hath not known his god-like hours,
And feels not what empires we inherit
As natural beings in the strength of nature.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

What a firm foundation Wordsworth had for his faith in
society! No wonder he felt that rule by such a people would
be preferable to the monarchy with its accompanying evils
of nobility. Even though he realized the difficulties in-
volved in self-rule of the masses, and even though he recog-
nized the evil and corruption so prevalent in society, he
continued to have faith in their eventual accomplishment:

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{16}\textit{The Prelude}, VIII, l. 488. \textsuperscript{17}\textit{Ibid.}, VIII, ll. 488-490.
\textsuperscript{18}\textit{Ibid.}, VIII, ll. 494-494. Italics are mine.
\textsuperscript{19}\textit{Ibid.}, III, ll. 191-193.
\end{flushleft}
Neither vice nor guilt,
Debasement undergone by body or mind,
Misery not lightly passed, but sometimes scanned
Most feelingly, could overthrow my trust
In what we may become.  

He admitted that republicanism in its most desirable form
might be a slow and tedious process of accomplishment, but
he also knew

That objects even as they are great, thereby
Do come within the reach of humblest eyes.  

We do not need tyrants to decide what is good for us. We
are strong enough to do things for ourselves.

Man is only weak through his mistrust
And want of hope where evidence divine
Proclaims to him that hope should be most sure.  

There exists for our guidance

a spirit strong
In hope, and trained to noble aspirations,
A spirit thoroughly faithful to itself,

which

Is for Society's unreasoning herd
A domineering instinct, serves at once
For way and guide, a fluent receptacle
That gathers up each petty struggling rill
And vein of water, glad to be rolled on
In safe obedience.

"Mid the loud distractions of the world," he continues,

A sovereign voice subsists within the soul,
Arbiter undisturbed of right and wrong,
Of life and death, in majesty severe
Enjoining, as may best promote the aims
Of truth and justice.  

\[20\text{Ibid., VIII, li. } 645-650.\]
\[21\text{Ibid., X, li. } 159-160.\]
\[22\text{Ibid., X, li. } 161-163.\]
\[23\text{Ibid., X, li. } 165-167.\]
And now we look to Walt Whitman. Like Wordsworth he had a religious belief in the spiritual equality of every man and object in nature. To tally Wordsworth's assertion that there is "a life and soul, to every mode of Being inseparably linked," we have Whitman's previously-quoted assertion:

I swear I think now that everything without exception has an eternal soul! The trees have, rooted in the ground! the weeds of the sea have! the animals! I swear I think there is nothing but immortality! 24

But Whitman, too, does more than simply imply divinity. In another passage he actually asserts that "nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is." 25

Did you suppose there could be only one Supreme? We affirm there can be unnumbered Supremes, and that one does not countervail another any more than one eyesight countervails another... 26

What more convincing arguments could be produced to prove the importance of each individual and the equality of all individuals? In a world of limitless entities there can be no valid distinctions. Every mechanic is potentially a president. Whitman, even in the same words as Wordsworth employed, recognizes the brotherhood of all men by virtue of a common "Mother of All." 27

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24 "To Think of Time," ll. 116-118.
25 "Song of Myself," l. 271.
26 Preface, 1855 Leaves of Grass, p. vii.
27 "Pensive on Her Dead Gazing," l. l. See p. 72.
A great many of Whitman's poems bear out this idea of the fundamental equality of all individuals. In "Song of Myself" Whitman egotistically asserts that he is infinite. He is of the past and the present and the future. He is large and contains multitudes. His personality admits no barriers; he may become what he will. He sees through good and evil, through space and time. God is no more than he is. He will admit no limitations. Democratic! you doubtfully exclaim. Never so democratic as when he explains his seemingly egotistical attitude:

For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.28

In "A Song for Occupations" we have presented the antithesis between people as they appear in society and people as they really are. Drunkards, thieves, beggars, prostitutes, laborers, mechanics, presidents -- all are equal, infinite citizens of a spiritual democracy. "You and your soul enclose all things, regardless of estimation,"29 says Whitman. No occupation is capable of limiting the soul or of destroying or depriving it of its rightful position of importance in the world of the spirit.

"The Sleepers" carries out the same theme in showing us how sleepers, having appeared unequal in the eyes of the world, are made equal by night and sleep. Every distinction has vanished:

28"Song of Myself," l. 3.  29L. 130.
The laugher and weeper, the dancer, the midnight widow, the red squaw, The consumptive, the erysipalite, the idiot, he that is wrong'd, The antipodes, and every one between this and them in the dark, I swear they are averaged now -- one is no better than the other, The night and sleep have liken'd them and restored them.30

Again in "I Sing the Body Electric" we find the souls of men are equated. Nothing, not even the body, has the power to limit an infinite person or destroy his equality with other infinite persons.

"Faces" points out the distinction between the false appearances, the inequalities of the surface world, and the real equality of the inner world. Whitman speaks of "the ugly face of some beautiful soul, the handsome detested or despised face."31 He addresses such faces as "Features of my equals,"32 and says to them,

I see neath the rims of your haggard and mean disguises.33

Whitman is forever speaking of other human beings as brother, sister, companion, Camerado, equal, lover, and so on. His belief is sincere and unqualified that all men have the same potentiality for the eternal progression of the soul, for immortality, as it were, which is, after all, the thing of lasting importance. The idea of the absolute spiritual equality of all individuals led Whitman, as it had

30Ll. 129-133. 31L. 7.
32L. 34. 33L. 37.
led Wordsworth, to praise humble occupations and to defend the right of inherently divine massed to regulate their own communal life here on earth. Does society have the right to make distinctions in rank when a higher law makes us all equals? And what is more in accordance with that higher law than that all men should, by active participation and cooperation in a democracy, decide their own worldly regulatory measures?

It would be almost impossible to cite every passage in which Whitman praises humble, and at times, even disgraceful, occupations. They are seemingly innumerable. In "Song of Myself" he exalts as equals the machinist, the carpenter, the pilot and the mate; the gambler, the deacon, the spinning-girl and the farmer; the printer, the deckhand, the factory-worker and the paving-man; the reporter, the sign-painter, the canal boy and the shoemaker; ad infinitum. Endless catalogues appear throughout Leaves of Grass. Further reiteration of them would be superfluous. Suffice it to say that they provide ample proof of Whitman's truly democratic attitude -- his deep-felt respect for each individual in society.

Whitman's greatest pleasure was to "go freely with powerful uneducated persons."34 His extended "programme of chants" was in behalf of "Libertad! masses!"35 He was at all times

35"Starting from Paumanok," ll. 36-39.
interested in "equalities." His love was for the "divine average," and for the "grand, common stock." He was forever "welcoming every new brother," forever extolling "the broadest average of humanity," forever paying respects to "the democratic average and the basic equality." He is speaking to each person in the universe, whether that person be a millionaire or a pauper, a banker or a sweeper of streets, when he says,

I sing the songs of the glory of none, not God, sooner than I sing the songs of the glory of you.

Whitman earlier states, "I hear and behold God in every object." What more can this mean, concerning man and his true meaning, than the idea presented by Wordsworth in his statement that man, more than anything we know, "is instinct with godhead"?

This conception which Whitman held of the common man, "of the noble character of the young mechanics and of all free American workmen and workwomen" led him to believe

36Ibid., l. 143. 37Ibid.
39"Starting from Paumanok," l. 225.
41Ibid., p. 529. 42"To You," l. 349.
43"Song of Myself," l. 1281.
that "the genius of the United States is not best or most in its executives or legislatures, nor in its ambassadors or authors or colleges or churches or parlors, nor even in its newspapers or inventors . . . but always most in the common people."\textsuperscript{45}

Wordsworth's trust in what we, the common people, may become, has led to another comparison. Like Wordsworth, Whitman saw many ills existing in society as a whole. He lamented that

everywhere, in shop, street, church, theatre, barroom, official chair, are pervading flippancy and vulgarity, low cunning, infidelity -- everywhere the youth puny, impudent, foppish, prematurely ripe -- everywhere an abnormal libidinousness, unhealthy forms, male, female, painted, padded, dyed, chignon'd, muddy complexions, bad blood, the capacity for good motherhood deceasing or deceas'd, shallow notions of beauty, with a range of manners, or rather lack of manners, (considering the advantages enjoy'd,) probably the meanest to be seen in the world.\textsuperscript{46}

Nevertheless, Whitman had a "yet unshaken faith in the elements of the American masses, the composites, of both sexes, and even consider'd as individuals."\textsuperscript{47} He had what he termed "a reverent appreciation of the People -- of their measureless wealth of latent power and capacity, their vast, artistic contrasts of lights and shades -- with, in America, their entire reliability in emergencies, and a certain

\textsuperscript{45}Ibid., p. iii.

\textsuperscript{46}"Democratic Vistas," Prose Works, p. 212.

\textsuperscript{47}Ibid., p. 213.
breadth of historic grandeur, of peace or war, far surpassing all the vaunted samples of book-heroes, or any haut ton coteries, in all the records of the world."48

With such faith in the entire people of their respective nations, it is not surprising that Wordsworth and Whitman should have been so much in favor of an attempt on the part of those people to rule themselves under a democratic form of government. Wordsworth was even willing in 1793 that a nation should endure a bloody revolution, if that revolution were absolutely necessary in order to bring about "a fairer order of things."49 But he felt that after the first difficulties which a republican form of government might encounter in his own country were surmounted, a republic would "soon return to itself, and enjoy its freedom in moderate and regular delight."50 He was certain that it would "go on gradually refining itself."51

Whitman occupied a position considerably different from the one occupied by Wordsworth. He lived in a country where the democratic structure was already the basis of national and state government. He didn't need to foresee the evils and difficulties involved; they were right there before him. We have sufficient evidence of the poet's

48Ibid., p. 216.
50Ibid., p. 11.
51Ibid.
realization of them in the many editorials he wrote during the period preceding the Civil War -- editorials in which he criticized crooked politicians, corrupt party politics, the slave trade, and other practices that were endangering the very life of our democratic government at that time.52 Thus he believed, like Wordsworth, that the "fruition of democracy, on aught like a grand scale, resides altogether in the future."53 Though he knew he would not be alive to experience the "joy of entering at last the conquered city" of democracy, yet he was one of those who might look down centuries later on the world below "with the proud consciousness that amid whatever clouds, seductions, or heart-wearying postponements, we have never deserted, never despaired, never abandon'd the faith."54 It was just such a faith which caused Whitman to say, even in 1876,

I count with such absolute certainty on the great future of the United States -- different from, though founded on, the past -- that I have always invoked that future and surrounded myself with it, before or while singing my songs.55

And so, with a firm belief in the spiritual equality of all the members of the human family, and an unbounded faith in the potential collective accomplishments of those members, Wordsworth and Whitman submitted to the world their conceptions of the ideal political democracy. I use the

52See I Sit and Look Out, ed. Emory Holloway and Vernolian Schwarz, 1932, pp. 86, 91, 92, 95.
word ideal when referring to the plans of both the poets, recognizing here, as above, that Whitman was already living under a government which was democratic in structure. And yet, as has already been suggested, he, as much as Wordsworth, had in mind a democracy which had not yet been realized in his own country. He too looked to the future for a fulfillment of his dreams.

Wordsworth, in 1793, was in the depths of despair at what he saw in the social, economic, and political life of the English monarchy. His "Apology for the French Revolution, 1793," contained in a letter to the Bishop of Llandaff, and the first draft of his scathing poem, "Guilt and Sorrow," bear startling witness to this fact. Likewise do various passages in The Prelude, and minor poems in The Lyrical Ballads.

It is significant to note that whether Wordsworth was criticizing political, social, or economic evils of the England in which he lived, he attributed the fundamental cause of those evils to the fact that a monarchical form of government was in existence. In the letter to the Bishop of Llandaff Wordsworth relentlessly condemns the political setup. He denounces the tyrannical despotism of the monarch, the compelled obedience of subjects, the corruption in courts, the partial and oppressive laws, the disproportionate penalties and indiscriminate severity of the penal code.
He then proceeds to hurl daggers at the instability of a king's whims rather than those of national welfare -- whims that shift with each ascendent king. He points a deliberate finger at the failure of hereditary succession to produce men capable of handling the problems before them, and at the lack of any semblance of popular representation. Then he uncovers the lamentably corrupt judicial proceedings and the prevention of any redress of grievances on the part of the people. A strong case indeed against the monarchy of England, a case, to be sure, for a change to anything different -- and Wordsworth speaks for a republic.

But Wordsworth saw even further cause for anxiety concerning the English monarchy. In this same letter to the Bishop he brings to our attention such social and economic problems as class distinction and aristocratic prejudices, fictitious superiority of titles and nobility, excessively unequal distribution of wealth, the well-established tendency to dishonor honest labor, the "unnatural monster of primogeniture,"\textsuperscript{56} and the consequent impossibility for many people to earn even the most frugal existence. Wordsworth spares no words in his attempt to arouse the people for the spirit of democracy in a land of oppressed subjects.

Even more relentless is his almost savage denunciation of England in his poem "Guilt and Sorrow." The features of

\textsuperscript{56}"An Apology for the French Revolution, 1793," Grosart, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 5.
the English socio-economic system which he so ironically compares with the gross physical tortures of the Druids are many and contemptible. He indicted his homeland for its extremes of wealth and utter starvation, its rank injustice to the poor, its lust for empire, and its international hate. In the course of the poem he shows how the vagrant and her father were forced from their home, even in time of peace, by the savage machinations of a member of the upper class of the British socio-economic hierarchy -- the class which, with the king, ruled a people who were supposedly influential in the administration of their own government. Another rash injustice was brought to light when the old man, innocently believing that justice was available in the courts of his land, was presumptuous enough to insist upon his rights. The result was that he lost everything but his life.

It was the extreme economic inequality under the British monarchy, indicates Wordsworth, that produced crime, beggary and prostitution. The history of the female vagrant was merely a typical example of how a once happy girl, of pious parents born and bred, was forced to degrade herself in the eyes of God and man by prostitution.

Only a close examination of the various selections mentioned above can show deeply the feeling of Wordsworth about the situation he found in England late in the eighteenth
century.) Little wonder that he should want to bury forever the miseries
Of royal courts, and that voluptuous life
Unfeeling, where the man who is of soul
The meanest thrives the most; where dignity,
True personal dignity, abideth not;
A light, a cruel, and vain world cut off
From the natural inlets of just sentiment,
From lowly sympathy and chastening truth;
Where good and evil interchange their names
And thirst for bloody spoils abroad is paired
With vice at home. 57

How bitter was his
Hatred of absolute rule, where will of one
Is law for all, and of that barren pride
In them who, by immunities unjust,
Between the sovereign and the people stand,
His helper and not theirs. 58

How well he knew that

_tyrannic power is weak,
Hath neither gratitude, nor faith, nor love,
Nor the support of good or evil men
To trust in._ 59

It was natural that Wordsworth, deeply impressed by this
deplorable situation, should mourn,

 beholding that the best
Ruled not, and feeling that they ought to rule. 60

(As has been foreseen, Wordsworth's remedy for this con-
dition was a "government of equal rights and individual
worth." 61 Such a government to him was a republic. His
"Apology for the French Revolution, 1793" offers the most
enlightening view of this democratic proposal. In it he

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calls for the regular Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches, with special emphasis on the Legislative. Universal representation by the suffrage of every individual was to be its outstanding feature. In addition, his ideal republic was to be characterized by short terms for all officials, strict rotation of office holders, and absence of wealth or property requirements for voters or candidates for office. Corruption in courts was to be eliminated by closer public scrutiny. Also there would be a more equitable distribution of wealth, a raise in wages of workers, the privilege of workers to organize, and the abolition of the law of primogeniture. A long step indeed from what England had known -- Wordsworth's democratic ideal!

Other comments are necessary, however, for a completely accurate representation of Wordsworth's projected republic. First of all, he believed that the real foundation of democracy lay in a simple life, a communion with nature, and a sort of social love which Whitman later was to expand upon and call adhesiveness. Drawn to each other by a democratic comradeship, the individuals in Wordsworth's society would form a compatible working unit. A passage from The Prelude describes the sort of life which Wordsworth believed would give rise to such an ideal condition and serve as the foundation stone for a successful democracy:

Por, born in a poor district, and which yet Retaineth more of ancient homeliness, Than any other nook of English ground, It was my fortune scarcely to have seen,
Through the whole tenor of my school-day time,  
The face of one, who, whether boy or man,  
Was vested with attention or respect  
Through claims of wealth or blood; nor was it least  
Of many benefits, in later years  
Derived from academic institutes  
And rules, that they held something up to view  
Of a Republic, where all stood thus far  
Upon equal ground; that we were brothers all  
In honour, as in one community,  
Scholars and gentlemen; where, furthermore,  
Distinction open lay to all that came,  
And wealth and titles were in less esteem  
Than talents, worth, and prosperous industry.  
And unto this, subservience from the first  
To presences of God's mysterious power  
Made manifest in Nature's sovereignty,  
And fellowship with venerable books,  
To sanction the proud workings of the soul,  
And mountain liberty. It could not be  
But that one tutored thus should look with awe  
Upon the faculties of man, receive  
Gladly the highest promises, and hail,  
As best, the government of equal rights  
And individual worth. 62

Simple life -- devoid of artificiality. Therein the  
young Wordsworth learned the true meaning of equality. Na-  
ture had taught him that he was a brother to every man and  
that wealth and titles were no distinction. "Talents,  
worth and prosperous industry" were the makings of great  
men. This ideal situation -- where one man's opinion  
counted for as much as any others", where each man was re-  
spected as a scholar and a gentleman, where good, honest  
virtues were reason enough for recognition, where the idea  
of rank was completely unheard of -- served as a model for  
Wordsworth's ideal republic.

It may be seen, then, that Wordsworth's democracy, to be successful, requires mutual respect on the part of all its citizens -- that is, what he calls "human charity, and social love," or "love for the human creature's absolute self." This social love, this "noticeable kindliness of heart," is a product of man's communion with nature. Wordsworth emphasizes throughout his poetry how love of nature will inevitably lead to a love of mankind. And what is more essential in human relationships than "an unconscious love and reverence of human nature"? Through such love, says Wordsworth,

the human form
To me became an index of delight,
Of grace and honor, power and worthiness.

Thus arises the love which makes us "brothers all" -- a characteristic of Wordsworth's imagined community. Given such social adhesiveness as a foundation, Wordsworth prophesied, without hesitation, that

poverty
. . . would in a little time
Be found no more, that we should see the earth
Unthwarted in her wish to recompense
The meek, the lowly, patient child of toil,
All institutes for ever blotted out
That legalized exclusion, empty pomp
Abolished, sensual state and cruel power
Whether by edict of the one or few;
And finally, as sum and crown of all,
Should see the people having a strong hand

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63 The Excursion, VI, 1. 29. 64 The Prelude, VIII, 1. 123.
65 Ibid., VIII, 1. 124. 66 Ibid., VIII, 11. 278-279.
67 Ibid., VIII, 11. 279-281.
In framing their own laws; whence better days
To all mankind. 68

With all of his enthusiasm for general will, Wordsworth makes it clear to us that he does not want mob rule
to do away with personal liberty. He is ever conscious of
the importance of the individual. This detail is made most
apparent in Book X of The Prelude:

What delight!
How glorious! in self-knowledge and self rule,
To look through all the frailties of the world,
And, with a resolute mastery shaking off
Infirmities of nature, time, and place.
Build up social upon personal Liberty. 69

And finally, above and beyond all else in the world,
there exists that necessary dependence on God. Underlying
even a democracy there must be religion, for, as Wordsworth says in the words of the Wanderer,

"One adequate support
For the calamities of mortal life
Exists -- one only; an assured belief
That the procession of our fate, however
Sad or disturbed, is ordered by a Being
Of infinite benevolence and power,
Whose everlasting purposes embrace
All accidents, converting them to good." 70

But we turn again to Walt Whitman. He too had his
ideas about a political democracy. He firmly believed that
a system of government such as the United States had, a
system inspired by the Declaration of Independence, based

68 Ibid., IX, 11. 520-532. 69 Ibid., X, 11. 234-239.
70 The Excursion, IV, 11. 10-17.
on the Constitution, and worked out by representation in a balance of executive, judicial, and legislative power, was good in principle, and that such a system would endure so long as the spirit of the people remained conducive to such government. But mere machinery, he believed, was not the essence of democracy. His frequent and heart-felt commentaries on the social, political, and economic life of his country bear adequate testimony to this belief. He, like Wordsworth, found true democracy and its benefits as something yet to be realized.

Wordsworth expressed his grievances against his country mainly in "Apology for the French Revolution, 1793," and in the poem "Guilt and Sorrow." Whitman expressed his in the essay -- timely even today -- **Democratic Vistas.** Whitman made these observations on the government and management of his country during the period immediately following the Civil War. Democracy was on trial as never before; as Henry Seidel Canby points out,

We had destroyed the plantation system of the South, we had liberated the Negro without trying to fit him into any orderly evolution of self-government; we were opening up the richest continent in the known world, and allowing it to be exploited by a plutocracy. Corruption, strong arm politics, the oppression of minorities were to be seen everywhere. Democratic idealism seemed to be dead, and democratic government seemed to be growing weaker as the country grew richer.\(^7\)

Living in Washington, Whitman was in the center of
democratic degradation. Increased war-time powers were
being used by corrupt private interests. He saw society as
"canker'd, crude, superstitious, and rotten," its moral con-
science, the most important element in the state or man, "en-
tirely lacking, or seriously feeble or ungrown."72

Never was there, perhaps, more hollowness at heart . . .
we live in an atmosphere of hypocrisy throughout . . .
a scornful superciliousness rules in literature . . .
a lot of churches, sects, etc., the most dismal phan-
tasms I know, usurp the name of religion . . . the
depavity of the business classes of our country is
not less than has been supposed, but infinitely
greater . . . the official services of America . . .
are saturated in corruption, bribery, falsehood, mal-
administration . . . 73

Whitman goes on and on, heaping scorn upon almost every
phase of public and private life in America. In the cities
he finds robbery and scoundrelism; in fashionable life,
flippancy, tepid amours, weak infidelity, small aims, etc.
In business there is only the desire for pecuniary gain.

It is easily seen, then, why Whitman warns us against
the delusion that "the establishment of free political
institutions . . . determines and yields to our experiment
of democracy the fruitage of success."74 He believed,
like Wordsworth, that there should be a more universal
ownership of property, a redistribution of wealth, and a

73Ibid.
74Ibid., p. 209.
complete extinction of political fraud and corruption.\textsuperscript{75} He thought that contested elections and healthy arguments were good for a democracy. He even went so far as to say, in a published editorial, that "all the noisy tempestuous scenes of politics witnessed in this country -- all the excitement and strife, even -- are good to behold."\textsuperscript{76} Such things he was greatly concerned with. But, again like Wordsworth, he saw more to a successful democratic government than a mere enforcement of regulations and expression of will. Both believed a life of simplicity to be the foundation stone of democratic society. As Whitman says in a footnote to the Preface to the 1876 edition of \textit{Leaves of Grass},

\begin{quote}
To the highest democratic view, man is most acceptable in living well the practical life and lot which happens to him as ordinary farmer, sea-farer, mechanic, clerk, laborer, or driver -- upon and from which position as a central basis or pedestal, while performing its labors, and his duties as a citizen, son, husband, father and employ'd person, he preserves his physique, ascends, developing, radiating himself in other regions -- and especially where and when, (greatest of all, and nobler than the proudest mere genius or magnate in any field,) he fully realizes the conscience, the spiritual, the divine faculty, cultivated well, exemplified in all his deeds and words, through life, uncompromising to the end -- a flight loftier than any of Homer's or Shakspere's -- broader than all poems and bibles -- namely, Nature's own, and in the midst of it, Yourself, your own identity, body and soul.\textsuperscript{77}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{75}ibid., p. 221.

\textsuperscript{76}Gathering of the Forces, ed. Cleveland Rodgers and John Reck, 1920, I, 4.

\textsuperscript{77}p. 284.
Whitman believed that a great democracy is composed of great individuals. Such individuals, as he shows us, are produced by a simple life. This character-building process he extends to nature, as does Wordsworth. He foresees that a nation receiving its impetus from the democratic spirit, and accepting its gauge in all departments from the democratic formulas, shall again directly be vitalized by the perennial influences of Nature at first hand, and the old heroic stamina of Nature, the strong air of prairies and mountains, the dash of the briny sea, the primary antiseptics -- of the passions, in all their fullest heat and potency, of courage, rankness, amativeness, and of immense pride.78

"Re-occupy," he goes on to warn us, "the eldest though ever-fresh fields, and reap from them the savage and sane nourishment indispensable to a hardy nation." It is for us to remember that "Democracy most of all affiliates with open air, is sunny and sane only with Nature."79 Again in a short prose selection Whitman writes,

American Democracy, in its myriad personalities, in factories, workshops, stores, offices -- through the dense streets and houses of cities, and all their manifold and sophisticated life -- must either be fibred, vitalized, by regular contact with out-door light and air and growths, farm-scenes, animals, fields, trees, birds, sun-warth and free skies, or it will certainly dwindle and pale. We cannot have grand races of mechanics, work people, and commonalty, (the only specific purpose of America,) on any less terms. I conceive of no flourishing and heroic elements of Democracy in the United States, or of Democracy maintaining itself at all, without the Nature-element forming a main part -- to be its health-element

78 Ibid., p. 283.
and beauty-element -- to really underlie the whole politics, sanity, religion and art of the New World. 80

Such are the individuals which Whitman hopes to have in his ideal democracy -- individuals who will grow and become morally educated by simple living in communion with nature. These individuals, he adds, are to cooperate in a smoothly-working unit by virtue of "universal democratic comradeship -- this old, eternal, yet ever-new inter-change of adhesiveness, so fitly elblematic of America." 81

"It is," says Whitman,

by a fervent, accepted development of comradeship, the beautiful and sane affection of man for man, latent in all the young fellows, north and south, east and west . . . that the United States of the future, (I cannot too often repeat,) are to be most effectually welded together, intercalated, anneal'd into a living union. 82

Wordsworth's social love has become Whitman's adhesiveness. Both men have found a similar attitude to be necessary for truly democratic cooperation.

Just as Wordsworth proposed "to build social upon personal liberty," so did Whitman think the entire purpose of democracy was to preserve individual freedom and dignity.

This idea of perfect individualism it is indeed that deepest tinges and gives character to the idea of the aggregate. For it is mainly or altogether to

80 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
serve independent separation that we favor a strong generalization, consolidation.\textsuperscript{83}

But with all of Whitman's faith in the individual and all his dependence on the adhesiveness of love that "fuses, ties and aggregates,"\textsuperscript{84} he still finds indispensable to a successful democracy a true and vitalizing religion. Religion -- and he calls it the "sole worthiest elevator of man or State" -- "breathes into the proud, material tissues, the breath of life."\textsuperscript{85} The religious element is the core of democracy, according to Whitman. "All religions, old and new, are there."\textsuperscript{86}

On such an exalted note does the comparison of Wordsworth and Whitman's philosophies of democracy come to an end. The first similarity noted was their commonly held belief in the spiritual equality of every individual. This belief led both men to a praise of lowly occupations. Each thought that man was divine and that the masses of people were deserving of complete trust and faith. In later years both Wordsworth and Whitman became more conservative, and consequently they were a little less enthusiastic about the perfection of the people en-masse. Nevertheless, it was in accordance with the former belief that they made their plea for a political democracy. The structures which they

\textsuperscript{83}"Democratic Vistas," \textit{Prose Works}, p. 214.
\textsuperscript{84}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 220. \textsuperscript{85}\textit{Ibid.} \textsuperscript{86}\textit{Ibid.}
advocated were remarkably similar. Even more remarkable, however, was the fact that they agreed on the fundamental principles underlying the mere details of machinery. Both required that the people lead simple lives in direct communion with nature, and that they be united into a sort of brotherhood by a social love or comradeship. No group action, however, was to thwart the all-important personal will; national liberty was a futile and superficial effort if it had not as its basis the freedom of the individual. Finally, and most important, both the poets realized that the saving feature of all life, individual or social, resides in a religious acceptance of the power of God.
CHAPTER V

LITERARY THEORY

The first important fact to mention concerning the parallelism in the literary theories of William Wordsworth and Walt Whitman is that each of them expressed his theory most adequately and completely in a prose essay prefixed to an edition of the poems which he was apparently trying to justify, or at least to explain. Wordsworth's explanation is to be found in his Preface to the second edition of the Lyrical Ballads; Whitman's, in his Preface to the 1855 edition of Leaves of Grass. Other comments by Whitman concerning his literary theory are to be found in his Preface to the 1876 edition of his poems and in "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads."

Some critics have considered Wordsworth's Preface relatively unimportant. They feel that it is more a defensive retaliation to the criticism that was made of his Lyrical Ballads than it is a true explanation of his theory of art. The foundation for this feeling lies in the fact that Wordsworth very soon began to write poetry which was for the most part out of harmony with his expressed theory -- poetry which was definitely superior to his early work from the
standpoint of artistic effect. As true as this observation is, we have no right to assume that Wordsworth was anything but sincere in his statement of principles. We must believe what he himself says, that he was dissatisfied with the poetry of his predecessors and contemporaries, and that he made a definite attempt to bring about a change, both by precept and example. Wordsworth's statement of theory, then, was in the form of a reaction.

Wordsworth realized, as he admits in his Preface, that few readers would appreciate or even tolerate his new kind of poetry. Notwithstanding his expectation of unpopularity, he made a conscious attempt in his poetry of 1798 to avoid many of the artistic devices characteristic of writers of his day. The first things he mentions as having consciously avoided are "the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers." A poet should not indulge in "arbitrary and capricious habits of expression, in order to furnish food for fickle tastes and fickle appetites." Nor should

1"Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" is the one exception in the Lyrical Ballads which does not exemplify Wordsworth's theoretical principle that poetry should choose incidents and situations from common life and present them in the plain and unelaborated language of rustics. This poem has been considered by the majority of Wordsworth's critics as one of his most artistically perfect poems, and indeed superior to the other Lyrical Ballads.

2Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth's Complete Poems, p. 790.

3Ibid., p. 791.
he go to the other extreme, as did some during Wordsworth's day, and condescend "to triviality and meanness both of thought and language."\textsuperscript{4} Such a practice, he felt, was "even more dishonorable to the Writer's own character than false refinement or arbitrary innovation, though ... far less pernicious in the sum of its consequences."\textsuperscript{5}

As a counteracting and ennobling influence on such practices as have just been mentioned, Wordsworth incorporated into his poetry, and later into his theory, the effort "to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men."\textsuperscript{6} By so doing he hoped to substitute for artificial, insincere, and high-flown language, a simple and unelaborated expression.

Wordsworth recognized in many writers of his day the tendency to apply "gross and violent stimulants"\textsuperscript{7} for the purpose of exciting the human mind. Such practice caused Shakespeare and Milton to be "driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant verse."\textsuperscript{8} It was to counteract this "degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation"\textsuperscript{9} that Wordsworth had attempted, in his \textit{Lyrical Ballads}, to choose

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{4}Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{5}Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{6}Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{7}Ibid., p. 792.
\item \textsuperscript{8}Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{9}Ibid.
\end{itemize}
subjects which were of real importance in themselves. He had endeavored to choose a worthy purpose for each one of his poems, the recognition of which was to enhance the discriminating power of the mind and offset the craving for superficial stimulation.

Further than the tendencies already mentioned, however, Wordsworth was in rebellion against the accepted style of eighteenth-century poets. Consequently, he rarely employed personification, and he utterly rejected it as "an ordinary device to elevate the style and raise it above prose."\(^{10}\) Rather his purpose was to imitate, and, in so far as was possible, to adopt the very language of men. Nor did Wordsworth sanction the use of figures of speech as a mechanical device of style which only the literati had the right to make use of. Instead, he wished to "keep the readers in company of flesh and blood,"\(^{11}\) persuaded that by so doing he could interest them. There was also to be found in Wordsworth's poetry of the Lyrical Ballads little of poetic diction. He took pains to avoid it because he felt he should liken his expression to that of all men, and further because he believed each poet's ideas would naturally give rise to such language as would best be fitted to the importance of his subject. And so Wordsworth was cut off from a large portion of poetic phrases and figures of speech.

\(^{10}\)Ibid. \(^{11}\)Ibid.
which had long been regarded as the common inheritance of poets. He willingly sacrificed all "transitory and accidental ornaments."^{12}

It may be seen, then, that many of the important details of Wordsworth's theory of poetry were arrived at by a reaction against contradictory principles in the poetry which he was disparaging. Although he accepted in theory and in practice the artistic devices of rhyme and metrical arrangement, he was utterly repelled by the artificiality, the stock ornamentation, the triteness, and the false style of his contemporaries. Wordsworth gave in to his desire to inaugurate a new theory of poetry which he felt would help to reinstate dignity, worth, and originality into poetic endeavor. He was just as much a champion of a new cause in England as Whitman was later to become in America.

Walt Whitman, like Wordsworth, very well knew that most people would not understand his startling break from the orthodox standards of poetry. Nevertheless, he, too, was willing and anxious to defy tradition in order to inaugurate a new poetry which he felt was more in keeping with the needs and spirit of America. Later in life he re-asserts the belief which brought about his early reaction: "There must imperatively come a readjustment of the whole nature and theory of poetry."^{12} It should be mentioned here

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^{12}Ibid., p. 795.

that Whitman was not so antagonized as Wordsworth was by the practices of other poets; he simply saw America's lack of a poetry suitable to her vastness and newness. Consequently, he, too, though in a much less resentful tone, challenged the poetic theories of his day by contending that "most works are most beautiful without ornament." He rejected the conscious effort for "rhyme and uniformity"; he condemned mere "amorousness and upholstery." These things cannot be superimposed, he says. If they exist at all in a perfect poem, they must "show free growth of metrical laws and bud from them as unerringly and loosely as lilacs or roses on a bush, and take shapes as compact as the shapes of chestnuts and oranges and melons and pears, and shed the perfume impalpable to form." The fluency and ornaments of the finest poems are dependent upon what goes into them. The importance of the subject is what really matters.

Speaking further about artificial imposition of artistic devices, Whitman theorizes, "... the pleasure of poems is not in them that take the handsomest measure and similes and sound." Rather, he says, "the art of art, the glory of expression and the sunshine of the light of letters is simplicity." Wordsworth had the idea that the language of

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17 Ibid., p. vi.
18 Ibid.
rustics should be used in poetry because such people hourly communicate with the grandest objects in nature, from which the best part of language is originally derived. Simplicity, he believes, constitutes the keynote for the most exalted expression. So it is with Whitman:

... to speak in literature with the perfect rectitude and insouciance of the movements of animals and the unimpeachableness of the sentiment of trees in the woods and grass by the roadside is the flawless triumph of art.19

Whitman was forever attempting to talk to the common laborer of his country. He had to use the language which that man might understand. "I will not have in my writing," he boldly declares, "any elegance or effect or originality to hang in the way between me and the rest like curtains."20 Not even the richest curtains would Whitman allow to obstruct the view of his audience.

What I tell I tell for precisely what it is. Let who may exalt or startle or fascinate or soothe I will have purposes as health or heat or snow has and be as regardless of observation. What I experience or portray shall go from my composition without a shred of my composition. You shall stand by my side and look in the mirror with me.21

Like Wordsworth, Whitman believed that all poetry should have a purpose. That purpose is the important thing, not the poetic wrappings which enclose it. Anything which might be called artistic expression is brought into being by the nature of the subject itself, not by superimposing

19Ibid., p. vii. 20Ibid. 21Ibid.
a determined form.

It is easy to see how this idea of Whitman's led to enthusiasm for "new free forms."²² That poet is greatest, he says, "who contributes the greatest original practical example. The cleanest expression is that which finds no sphere worthy of itself and makes one."²³ So it was that Whitman's style was born -- a style "less definite in form, outline, sculpture," a style which becomes vista, music, half-tints, and even less than half-tints. True, it may be architecture; but again it may be the forest wild-wood, or the best effect thereof, at twilight, the waving oaks and cedars in the wind, and the impalpable odor.²⁴

Both Wordsworth and Whitman, it becomes evident, were true experimentalists. They had new and definitely reactionary ideas about poetry, and they weren't afraid to incorporate those ideas into the Lyrical Ballads and Leaves of Grass. These poems they submitted to the world, realizing that possibly, and even most likely, the people of their day would not accept them as true art. Their expectations proved all too well-founded. Wordsworth's best friend, Coleridge, wrote almost an entire book condemning his theory. Whitman's was almost universally rejected -- more than that -- scorned, by his public. However, neither of them ever revoked a single principle voiced in his statement of theory,

²²Ibid.  
²³Ibid.  
²⁴Preface, 1876 edition, Leaves of Grass, p. 287.
although each of them later wrote poetry which defied it.\textsuperscript{25}

But Wordsworth and Whitman were reacting not only against the style and form of other poets; they were reacting also against the subjects which had previously served as poetic material. In the first book of \textit{The Prelude} Wordsworth tells of his effort to decide on a subject worthy of being made into a great poem.\textsuperscript{26} He mentions the possibility of writing about "some old romantic tale by Milton left unsung." There are available to him the themes of chivalry, of knights and their war-like feats, their spears and swords, and their glorious strife:

\begin{verbatim}
Whence inspiration for a song that winds
Through ever-changing scenes of votive quest
Wrongs to redress, harmonious tribute paid
To patient courage and unblemished truth,
To firm devotion, zeal unquenchable,
And Christian meekness hallowing faithful loves.
\end{verbatim}

"Sometimes more sternly moved," he continues,

\begin{verbatim}
I would relate
How vanquished Mithridates northward passed,
And, hidden in the cloud of years, became
Odin, the Father of a race by whom
Perished the Roman Empire: how the friends
And followers of Sertorius, out of Spain
Flying, found shelter in the Fortunate Isles,
And left their usages, their arts and laws,
To disappear by a slow gradual death,
To dwindle and to perish one by one,
Starved in those narrow bounds.
\end{verbatim}

(Wordsworth goes on to enumerate, one after the other, the various themes which he might have chosen as the main theme

\textsuperscript{25}Supra., footnote 1, p. 100.

\textsuperscript{26}This discussion and all the following quotations from \textit{The Prelude} occur within the lines 166-252.
for his great poem. They are such themes as many other poets of his day were using: mythology, war, chivalry, romance, deeds of past heroes, and matters of historical importance. Instead, however, he decides on "some philosophic song of truth that cherishes our daily life." He wanted a clearer insight into man, nature, and God. He decided that the best way to get that insight was, first, to look inward at himself, a man like all other men, "with meditations passionate from deep recesses in man's heart"; secondly, to "stray about voluptuously through fields and rural walks, ... resigned to vacant musing."

It can be seen, then, that the idea expressed in The Prelude is not at all contradictory to the one expressed in his Preface to the Lyrical Ballads; in many respects The Prelude seems to be an embodiment of that theory. Therein he analyzes what he considered so important in the Preface, that is, "the great and universal passions of men, the most general and interesting of their occupations, and the entire world of nature ..." In avoiding the conventional themes of poetry, he was able to concentrate on the passions and problems of all the men around him. "Poetry is the image of man and nature," he says, and what less than that image is The Prelude? By communion with nature and simple personalities, and by a thorough investigation of

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27 Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, p. 796.
28 Ibid., p. 794.
himself as a fair sample of all mankind, the poet Wordsworth felt he would be qualified to write a poem that would be of worth to his country and its people. It was Wordsworth's theory, then, that he should abandon conventional themes to write about himself, about people, about nature, about God, about the soul -- in short, those things nearest and most important to each individual.

Walt Whitman also avoided the conventional themes of the past. Like Wordsworth, in one of his poems he enumerates, but considers unworthy, the outworn themes of feudal pageantry, love, war, and dejection. In a Preface written near the end of his life he speaks of what he did in his early poetry:

For grounds for "Leaves of Grass," as a poem, I abandon'd the conventional themes, which do not appear in it: none of the choice plots of love or war, or high, exceptional personages of Old-World song; nothing, as I may say, for beauty's sake -- no legend, or myth, or romance . . .

And he continues to explain:

There are, I know, certain controlling themes that seem endlessly appropriated to the poets -- as war, in the past -- in the Bible, religious rapture and adoration -- always love, beauty, some fine plot, or pensive or other emotion. But, strange as it may sound at first, I will say there is something striking far deeper and towering far higher than those themes for the best elements of modern song.

29See "The Mystic Trumpeter."

30"A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads," p. 524. This selection was originally the Preface to November Bouguhs, 1888.

31Ibid., p. 526.
What is that "something striking far deeper and towering far higher"? That something, says Whitman, is the United States -- its millions of people -- "their lives, their passions, their future -- these incalculable, modern, American, seething multitudes around us, of which we are inseparable parts." 32 That something is the universal soul; it is each individual soul. It is the democratic average; it is comradeship; it is science; it is religiousness; it is sex; it is love; it is "a belief in the wisdom, health, mystery, beauty of every process, every concrete object, every human or other existence, not only considered from the point of view of all, but of each." 33 It is "Nature, entire and several." 34 It is everything in America -- animate and inanimate -- that affected the people of his day. It is a song of man -- of all men -- of nature and of God.

What vast themes! What endless possibilities! What a crime, thought Whitman, to indulge in a cheap imitation of foreign and age-old themes, when America had so much to offer her poets. Whitman was certain that "there must imperatively come a readjustment of the whole theory and nature of poetry." 35 In no other way could the vast, expansive, struggling, brave, progressive, optimistic America be adequately expressed. Her poets had to fashion and produce their own medium of expression, and Whitman saw

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32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., p. 534.
34 Ibid.
himself as a pioneer in that production.

Very significant is the fact that Whitman, like Wordsworth, sought to describe all these great themes with relation to his own personality. He, too, looked inward at his own soul. Considering himself typical of all other persons in nineteenth-century America, Whitman, in *Leaves of Grass*, "gives one man's -- the author's -- identity, ardors, observations, faiths, and thoughts, color'd hardly at all with any decided coloring from other faiths or other identities." He writes his own spiritual autobiography, and in it he includes the whole of America, and even at times, the whole of the world.

Indeed parallel were the reactions of Wordsworth and Whitman to the traditional poetic themes of their day. Both of them, in their respective periods, sought to avoid the same subjects; both of them, generally speaking, sought to include the same themes. Each of the poets, however different might have been the motives that influenced his decision, saw fit to write about man, nature, God, the individual and the universal soul. And to express these great themes, each one found the same medium in writing a song of himself.

Another important parallelism in their respective statements of theory is the inclusion of a detailed explanation

\[36\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 524.\]
of what a poet is, what his real function is, and what qualities he should possess. Wordsworth begins by saying that a poet

is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the Universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them.37

The poet has a strange ability, says Wordsworth,

of conjuring up in himself passions, which are indeed far from being the same as those produced by real events, yet (especially in those parts of the general sympathy which are pleasing and delightful) do more nearly resemble the passions produced by real events than anything which, from the motions of their own minds merely, other men are accustomed to feel in themselves: -- whence, and from practice, he has acquired a greater readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels, and especially those thoughts and feelings which, by his own choice or from the structure of his own mind, arise in him without immediate external excitement.38

Being endowed with such power of feeling and emotion, the poet is able

to bring his feelings near to those of the persons whose feelings he describes, nay, for short spaces of time, perhaps, to let himself slip into an entire delusion, and even confound and identify his own feelings with theirs.39

In addition to being able to put himself in the

37 Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, pp. 793-794.
38 Ibid., p. 794.
39 Ibid.
situations of other men and experience their sensations and emotions, the great poet, the democratic poet, sings a "song in which all human beings join with him."

"He looks before and after". He is the rock of defence for human nature; an upholder and preserver, carrying everywhere with him relationship and love. In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs; in spite of things silently gone out of mind, and things violently destroyed; the poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth and over all time. The objects of a poet's thoughts are everywhere; though the eyes and senses of man are, it is true, his favorite guides, yet he will follow wheresoever he can find an atmosphere of sensation in which to move his wings.  

In summing up the qualities which he enumerates as principally conducing to form a poet, Wordsworth makes certain to add that nothing is implied "differing in kind from other men, but only in degree." Although "the poet is chiefly distinguished from other men," he says, "by a greater promptness to think and feel without immediate external excitement, and a greater power in expressing such thoughts and feelings as are produced in him in that manner," it must be remembered that "these passions and thoughts and feelings are the general passions and thoughts and feelings of men."  

Wordsworth's poet is affected and inspired by the common, everyday objects and occurrences in life. His responses, like those of all other men, are directly connected  

40Ibid., p. 795.  
41Ibid.  
42Ibid.
with moral sentiments and animal sensations, and with
the causes which excite these; with the operations of
the elements, and the appearances of the visible uni-
verse; with storm and sunshine, with the revolution of
the seasons, with cold and heat, with loss of friends
and kindred, with injuries and resentments, gratitude
and hope, with fear and sorrow.\footnote{43Ibid., pp. 795-796.}

It is certain, then, that the feelings and sensations of
poets are not something unknown to men; they aren't some-
thing to hold at a distance and awfully revere. The poet
writes for all men and in behalf of all men. He "thinks
and feels in the spirit of human passions."\footnote{44Ibid., p. 796.} He is demo-
cratic.

\(\)Walt Whitman is far more prolific in his references to
the qualities and the duties of a poet than is Wordsworth.
Truly, he needs to be, for, although they both list many of
the same characteristics, Walt Whitman's idea is that the
poet sees all, knows all, includes all, and explains all.
He is indeed everything, and often Whitman's endless cata-
logues would make it appear that he is trying to give an
unabridged description of this complete, all-inclusive, om-
niscient being.

Important in Whitman's theory is his conviction that
the poet speaks to all men and in behalf of all men. Whereas
Wordsworth merely makes a statement to that effect, Whitman,
in "Song of the Answerer," attempts to name the various
representatives of the entire human race which the poet

\footnote{43Ibid., pp. 795-796.} \footnote{44Ibid., p. 796.}
speaks for: the sailor, traveler, builder, geometer, anatomist, phrenologist, artist, and so on. More generally and all-inclusively, he mentions all ranks, colors, races, creeds, and the sexes. All men accept the poet; the poet accepts all men. He answers their questions; he gives them their knowledge. He is their teacher.

Notwithstanding all of his knowledge and power, the poet whom Whitman describes is an "equable man." As he says in his 1855 Preface, "... a bard is to be commensurate with a people ... he is the equalizer of his age and land." He goes freely with "powerful uneducated persons," and he knows "the others are as good as he, only he sees it and they do not." The messages of the great poets to each man and woman are, he says, "Come to us on equal terms, Only then can you understand us. We are no better than you, What we enclose you enclose, What we enjoy you may enjoy." In other words, Whitman, like Wordsworth, distinguishes a poet from other men by virtue of his superior degree of understanding, knowledge, and sensibility. All men have the same potentialities, but those of the poet have been developed to the fullest. Consequently, he, like Wordsworth's poet, is able actually to relive the experiences of other men, and even to suffer as Christ did on the

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46 Ibid.
47 Ibid., p. vi.
48 Ibid., p. vii.
49 Ibid., p. vii.
cross. Extreme sensibility and imagination, capacity for passionate responses -- these make the poet able to know things he has never seen, feel things he has never experienced, understand things he has never investigated.

Whitman's poet is, in proportion to his degree of sensibility, a sympathetic and understanding individual. He encloses the past and the present and joins them. He is the "one complete lover." It will be finally through his efforts that the entire world will be united in a great spiritual democracy. On and on in a steady, almost unending procession, other outstanding qualities of a poet are brought before us: He is arbiter of the diverse and spirit of peace; he sees the farthest and has the most faith; he is no arguer ... he is judgment; he sees eternity; he hardly knows pettiness or triviality; "he is a seer ... he is individual ... he is complete in himself." The poet indicates the path between reality and men's souls; he perceives beauty and dignity. He knows God. He has perfect candor, and he exemplifies all virtues. He absorbs the whole country about him and uses it for his poetic material. Nothing is trivial to him; everything is important; all professions, occupations, diversions, amusements. Nothing

50 See "To Him That Was Crucified."
52 See "Passage to India."
escapes his eye; nothing he sees should be left unsung.

Both Wordsworth and Whitman, then, had in mind certain qualities which a true poet possesses. In exceedingly dissimilar styles of presentation they express remarkably similar ideas. Both of them agree that the poet is a man speaking to all men and in behalf of all men; he is surely democratic. He differs from others only in degree: he is more sensitive and receptive; consequently he is able vicariously to experience the passions and emotions even of perfect strangers. He is sympathetic and understanding -- lover of men. By virtue of this fact he is a uniter of persons and nations. He finds endless material for poetic creation in the world about him -- in the common man, in nature, in the individual and in the universal soul.

Having taken notice of all these rather particularized similarities in the literary theories of Wordsworth and Whitman, it might be interesting to follow the general trend which both of them followed in later years. It will be remembered that both the poets objected to the artificial employment of artistic devices, and that both desired to write in the language really used by the common man. In addition, it was their belief that the subject of a poem was the important thing and that little time and effort should be spent in trying to perfect the form it would take. The majority of the Lyrical Ballads and most of
"Song of Myself" were composed with these three principles in mind. It was in their very adherence to that theory, however, that Wordsworth's and Whitman's poetry failed to satisfy the artistic requirements that most critics demanded.

It wasn't long after the publication of the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads that Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote his famous criticism of Wordsworth's poetic theory in his book, Biographia Literaria. Herein expressed is the idea that as long as Wordsworth adhered to his theory which rejected beauty of form as a primary objective, he failed to produce great poetry. It was only when he gave evidence of artistic endeavor, such as was apparent in "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," that he achieved true poetic greatness. The same thought has been expressed by later critics. Most of them rank such poems as "Michael," "Laca-damia," and the almost artistically perfect "Intimations of Immortality" far above the poems in which the greatness of purpose and theme was supposed to be reason enough for appreciation. It would almost seem that Wordsworth himself recognized the inadequacy of his theory and sought to overcome it, although he never literally rejected his principles. In so far as he strove for beauty of expression and perfection in form, just so far, at least in the eyes of most critics, did his poetry increase in effect and greatness.)
And, generally speaking, so it was with Whitman. Evidence enough is to be found by contrasting the sometimes crude, often vast, bulky, and rugged portions of "Song of Myself" with the finer and more artistically formed poems such as "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," "Chanting the Square Deific," and "Passage to India." Whether he would have admitted it or not, the fact is none the less evident that it is the previously rejected restraint, the accurate and artistic symbolism, the unified structure, the harmonizing of form with subject matter, and the newly acquired poetic expression that make these poems so definitely superior to Whitman's first attempts at poetry.

And so it is that the broad outlines in Wordsworth's and Whitman's attempts at theorizing follow similar courses. Both embodied in their theories a reaction against conventionalities of their day, but both, it seems, went a little too far in their reaction. The result was that in attempting to exemplify his theory, each wrote some poems which are artistically inferior to those in which he was less concerned with the exemplification of theoretical principles. It was only when they abandoned their extremist attitude and returned to an artistic standard that Wordsworth and Whitman began to achieve a true poetic greatness. It is to be considered, however, that in their first reaction against the literary conventions of their day, each
avoided certain tendencies which, if followed, would have destined him to become only a mediocre poet -- one among many others. After a reaction that was somewhat too radical, both of them found their way back to a style which has placed them above any and all of their contemporaries. The poet was greater than the critic; the poet influenced the man.
CONCLUSION

It was pointed out in the first chapter of this thesis that the Romantic Movement in England had its beginning deep in the eighteenth century. Amid the rationalism, pessimism, classicism, conformity, and passionless belief that humanity is wicked and mankind is naturally perverse, there arose a faint but heartfelt cry for freedom, emotions, sensations, optimism, idealism, faith, and joyousness. The cry was first uttered by Shaftesbury, but it echoes and re-echoed in the poetry of Thomson, Young, Blair, Thomas Warton, Cowper, and Blake -- all of them writing in the rationalistic eighteenth century. Everything was ready and waiting for Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798, the year assigned by many critics as the one in which romanticism made its debut in England.

There had been erected, then, a substantial foundation for Wordsworth's romantic tendencies: his theory of nature, his transcendentalism, his republican ideas, and his literary theory. Yet he was perhaps the first to embody in his poetry what was seemingly the sum total of it all. The poetry of his predecessors had been strongly flavored with spices of romance, but Wordsworth's was the essence of
romanticism. He represented what all the rest had been merely approaching. But others besides Wordsworth were not long in coming. In the same volume with his *Lyrical Ballads* were four poems by Coleridge, another eminent romanticist of the nineteenth-century movement. So close behind that they were actually contemporaries of Wordsworth and Coleridge, came Lamb, Scott, Southey, Byron, Keats, Shelley, Hunt, and Carlyle. Romanticism was thriving, and Wordsworth was to remain its outstanding exponent.

And yet, even as classicism and eighteenth-century rationalism had been invaded by romanticism, so was romanticism invaded by the oncoming forces of Victorianism and mechanistic materialism. The first exemplars of Victorianism were the Brownings, Dickens, Thackeray, the Brontes, Newman, and Ruskin. They weren't actually antagonistic to romanticism; they retained the faith of their predecessors but applied it to new themes in new ways. In another group, however, doubt began to appear, largely because of scientific discoveries. These doubts may be found in the works of Tennyson and Arnold. Nature and its essential goodness was no longer trusted; man was not safest in her retreats. Then in the writings of Rossetti, Morris, and Swinburne -- members of the Pre-Raphaelite School -- there appeared the tendency to turn away from intellectual and ethical problems, and to create literature only for art's sake and
pleasure's sake. In other words, they sought to escape a reality which was hopeless and dark. Still others such as Huxley and Thomas Hardy sought truth at any price. After Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), they felt that no idea was true if it had not its foundation in a materialistic or mechanistic philosophy. And so, by the 1860's, the 1870's, and the 1880's, there was a flood of realistic and pessimistic literature that was destined to destroy the already threatened hopes and ambitions of romanticism. Wordsworth's last important publication was in 1850; he declined with the movement he had initiated.

During the period in which the first romantic poets in England were becoming known, American pioneers and statesmen were laying the groundwork for a romantic revolution in America, although its flowering into literary romanticism was not to come until considerably later than it came in England. During the years from the close of the Revolution to the War of 1812, the old America was dying. Political independence was the signal for social, religious, and economic independence. Cautious ways were abandoned; the people were contemptuous of what was static, rationalistic, pessimistic and customary. They could no longer conceive of human nature as evil and of men as incurably wicked, a conception which allowed no Utopian dreams, no plans for the future.
After the close of the war in 1815, America was intoxicated with her own importance. Nothing could stop her. There was the breaking in of new land and the establishment of new frontiers. Individualism was asserting itself on every hand; each man was his own master, and men were equal. A romantic dream was being realized, and a corresponding philosophy was being imported from France and England. Man was naturally good, religion was a matter of faith and subjectivity; government was an organization working solely for the benefit of the individual. That government was best which governed least. Theoretically, romanticism was spreading undisturbed over the vast continent of America.

But with all its apparent success, romanticism was suffering the same subversive deterioration that it had suffered in England. The very individualism that once had stood for democratic equality was becoming economic assertiveness and imperialism. The southern plantation owner became an aristocratic ruler of masses. The objective desires of eastern mercantilism led to an industrial capitalistic order. The impossibility of private occupation and disposal of vast western lands gave rise to group monopolies and fraudulent real estate management. The very spirit of the French democratic theory was being violated at the moment it was being heralded. Government was becoming a protectorate for vested interests rather than a guardian
of the masses. It was being used by industry, wealth, and by the political party in power.

With the change in ambition in America came a corresponding philosophical revolution which was to endure on into the twentieth century. As a new world unfolded itself before the inquisitive eyes of scientists, the old metaphysical speculations seemed obsolete and foolish. A new spirit of realism was abroad, probing and questioning the material world, disproving faith and intuition and championing the worth of exact knowledge. The conquest of nature by science progressed relentlessly, and industry gathered up the spoils of victory. Science and the machine were the twin instruments for creating a new civilization of which the technologists and industrialists were to be the masters.

A transformation indeed, and it was well on its way before the romanticist Walt Whitman ever published a line of his poetry. His work has been called the "afterglow of the Enlightenment." It might as accurately be called the afterglow of romanticism. It was not until 1855 that his mystical, transcendental, democratic _Leaves of Grass_ reached the eyes of America, and by that time the romantic vision had become somewhat clouded by the oncoming materialism. Whereas Wordsworth opened the performance in England, Whitman drew the final curtain on the Romantic Movement in America. But he did more than that. He stepped right onto
the twentieth-century stage with his prophecy of democracy
and his respect for a healthy materialism. In his later
prose he condemns many aspects of coarse materialism, but he
also exalts scientific advancement and material prosperity
as absolute essentials for a successful spiritual democracy.

It may be seen, then, that Wordsworth and Whitman are
both transitional poets, and that they represent the begin-
ning and the end of the great Romantic Movement. Whereas
Wordsworth introduces romanticism in England, his first
poetry shows definite evidences of an eighteenth-century
classical influence. Whereas Whitman is the last of the
important romantics in America, his poetry has some of the
qualities of twentieth-century realism. Accordingly, each
poet has characteristics which are not romantic, and which
are totally dissimilar to important characteristics of the
other. The basis of their common philosophy of life is
nevertheless romantic and has given rise in each of the
poets to an energetic faith in the goodness and dignity of
man, a love and respect for nature, a mystical belief in
intuition, a democratic conception of man's place in so-
ciety, and a liberal attitude in literary theory.
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