

# William Wordsworth; Natural Sciences, and Humanity

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## Summary

When we read “Advertisement” and “Preface to *The Lyrical Ballads*” written by W. Wordsworth, we can find out his key words, such as “a well-authenticated facts which happened in Warwickshire” and “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling”, which imply his great interest in the interaction between natural science and the humanities and their influence on each other. Having been inspired by many cases reported by Erasmus Darwin, he composed many poems, ‘Goody Blake and Harry Gill’, the Lucy poems, ‘Her Eyes are Wild’, and so on. He realized that there was a deep connection between the imagination and the human body, that was a function of organic life. Spontaneity is an essential feature in the laws of organic life and so his imagination was stimulated enough to realize his own poetic theme and methods with the aid of scientific phenomena such as “syncope”. The idea of “syncope” might have drawn his attention to the truth and aroused his desire to rejuvenate his poetic power. Those processes were indispensable steps in Wordsworth’s growth as a poet. He used these things in his writing method and also in the themes of his poetry such as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling”, which revealed the truth. That was his own way of “transfiguration” from science to art, which was as it were, his polemics.

It might be seen that he also had a great fear of future imbalance between natural science and the humanities, which inspired him his dream in *The Prelude V*, the Shell or the Stone dream, which puts forward the ideas of the totality of human powers – Euclid’s “Elements” on the one hand, poetry on the other. Even now we can say that Wordsworth’s prophecy of the “Deluge” as described in *The Prelude V* still carries warning. So Wordsworth reveals himself as a very modern and natural scientific (organic) poet, who was

wishing to reconcile Natural Sciences with Humanity.

**Keywords**

Wordsworth, Erasmus Darwin, spontaneity, poetic imagination,  
growth of a poet's mind

1

William Wordsworth was deeply interested in the interaction between natural science and the humanities and their influence on each other. Having been inspired by many cases reported by Erasmus Darwin, he composed his great poems. He wrote this relationship in the Preface to *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 general indirect effects, but he will be at his side, carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the science itself. 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, 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 respective sciences shall be manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings. If the time should ever 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 household of man.

(*W.P.W. II* 396–397)<sup>1)</sup>

From the above we see that when he wrote ‘Goody Blake and Harry Gill’, the Lucy poems, ‘Her Eyes are Wild’ and so on, he was ready to follow in the steps of Erasmus Darwin<sup>2)</sup> and brought feeling and emotion into Erasmus’ scientific cases, which impressed his reader. In short, Wordsworth realized that there was a deep connection between the imagination and the human body, that was a function of organic life. Spontaneity is an essential feature in the laws of organic life and his imagination was stimulated enough to realise his own poetic theme and methods with the aid of scientific phenomena such as “syncope”.<sup>3)</sup> The idea of “syncope” might have drawn his attention to the truth and aroused his desire to rejuvenate his poetic power. Those processes were indispensable steps in Wordsworth’s growth as a poet.

For Wordsworth, spontaneity and an unconscious chain reaction were very significant phenomena in organic life. He used these things in his writing method and also in the themes of his poetry such as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling”, which revealed the truth. That was his own way of “transfiguration” from science to art, which was as it were, his polemics.

This is not a place to criticise those great critics who have emphasised Wordsworth’s ecological nature and message. Rather, this essay wishes to understand Wordsworth’s nature, as an ecological poet, and also to extend our view of him. His predominant interest might have been in organic or biological phenomena when he said:

The Man of science seeks truth as a remote and unknown benefactor; he cherishes and loves it in his solitude: the Poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion. Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science.

(*W.P.W. II* 396)

Wordsworth's great fear of future imbalance between natural science and the humanities might have inspired his dream in *The Prelude V*,<sup>4)</sup> the Shell or the Stone dream, which puts forward the ideas of the totality of human powers – Euclid's "Elements" on the one hand, poetry on the other. Even now we can say that Wordsworth's prophecy of the "Deluge" as described in *The Prelude V* still carries warning. So Wordsworth reveals himself as a very modern and natural scientific (organic) poet, who was wishing to reconcile Natural Sciences with Humanity.

## 2

There seem to be some individual characteristics in Wordsworth's thought. Sometimes he brought some natural scientific theory of his time into his poetic principles or way of writing. There was no division between science and the humanities at that time just like we saw that tendency amongst Wordsworth thought in section one. Thomas De Quincey pointed out in his *Autobiographic Sketches*,<sup>5)</sup> "Wordsworth was a profound admirer of the sublime mathematics; at least of the higher geometry". So in an explanation of 'Immortality Ode' in the I.F. Note, Wordsworth referred to

Archimedes.

Archimedes said that he could move the world if he had a point whereon to rest his machine. Who has not felt the same aspiration as regards the world of his own mind ?

(*W.P.W. IV* 464)

Wordsworth had found a fulcrum whereon to rest his poetic structure, and he could express his shadowy notion, his sense of the indomitableness of the spirit within him. He said the fulcrum was “an ingredient of Platonic philosophy”, the notion of “pre-existence”, through which he affirmed the “Immortality of the Soul”. In short, he declared in the I.F. Note that he used Platonism as a framework for ‘Immortality Ode’. Within that Platonic framework, he wanted to describe the development of his mind.

Although the form of the poem is important, its content is much more significant. The notion of pre-existence, which seems to be a sort of “presumptive evidence” or some “testimony of immortality of the soul”, might sound like the dominant theme of the poem, but the main purpose is to recognize the value of “the human heart by which we live”. Out of his sufferings in Germany, a painful joy arose in his mind like a fountain. He noticed something in his “embers” stirring blindly, like the phenomena of syncope. He used the creed of Platonism of the immortality of the soul at his “point”, and then he could express how he realized the inherent power in himself. This power was like a fountain and the power of syncope.

This kind of writing, particularly in ‘Immortality Ode’, is especially Wordsworthian. He was inspired by the scientific fact of syncope, he

composed several Lucy poems in Germany and then made “a dedication to new powers” in ‘Immortality Ode’. So his ideas might have linked natural science and the humanities.

We can find another hint of his polemics in his description of the theory of poetry. In the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) there are these well known sentences about good poetry:

Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquility gradually disappears, and an emotion similar to that ...is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind.

(*Prose I* 148)<sup>6)</sup>

If we substitute “Rebirth from syncope” for “Poetry”, “sensorial power” for “feelings”, and “vital motion” and “powerful feeling” and “life power” for “emotion” in the above sentences, they seem to describe the process from syncope to revival. His sentences about good poetry seem to act in the conformity with the scientific laws of organic life (the process from syncope to revival).

The vital element in both cases is the phenomena of spontaneous overflow of inner power. Writing good poetry and revival from syncope are parallel. Spontaneity and an unconscious chain reaction are indispensable in both. So this essential nature seems to be based on the scientific laws of organic life. “Recollecting” inherent and indestructible qualities in the mind might produce similar life or emotion achieved via a kind of death as in Blake’s

“minde–forg’d” (London) life. In Wordsworth’s well-known concept of “spots of time”, we can see a similar process. Many personal memories and archetypal feelings are deep in the mind as are “spots of time” as they re-emerge in tranquility. These images and feelings overflow spontaneously. Wordsworth might have discovered the importance of these organic phenomena and applied these laws to his own poetic methods.

Let us now look at Wordsworth’s choice of subject. There appears to be a clue in Moral Fragment as to why Wordsworth often chose to write about mad women and criminals, who have a greater chance of moving from one world to another world.

Can it be imagined by any man who has deeply examined his own heart that an old *habit* will be foregone, or a new one formed, by a series of propositions, which, presenting no image to the [?mind] can convey no feeling which has any connection with the supposed *archetype or fountain* of the proposition existing in human life?

(*Prose I* 103) (Italics by author)

Wordsworth was here discussing habit. He used the word “habit” to include the meaning habitual: “with various shades of meaning as latent in the mind or memory, though not exhibited in action, as in habitual knowledge or cognition, knowledge latent in the memory, and capable of being called up when occasion presents itself” (*O.E.D.* “habitual”).<sup>7)</sup> He insisted that only a series of propositions which could present images and historical feelings connected with some archetype or inherent and indestructible quality in the human mind, could destroy an old habit, form a new one, and renew the

possibility of immortality.

He focused on nature of mind. Our habitual knowledge or cognition is “knowledge latent in the memory” in images or archetypes, which some occasion could call up and present. Here his discussion about habit might become a description of good poetry and the concept of “spots of time”, for he saw a human being as a person who had “deeply experienced his own heart”. His thoughts on “moral” and “habit” may be the same as on “poetry”. So, his poetry emphasised the importance of conveying historical and archetypal images, which sprang up a man’s mind on some occasion.

It might be said that mad women or criminals tend to have such “occasions” unconsciously. They are apt to have moments when they return to the real world and move again into the other world as Wordsworth described in ‘Her Eyes Are Wild’ (1798).

“A fire was once within my brain;  
And in my head a dull, dull pain;  
And fiendish faces, one, two, three,  
Hung at my breast, and pulled at me;  
But then there came a sight of joy;  
It came at once to do me good;  
I waked, and saw my little boy,  
My little boy of flesh and blood;  
Oh joy for me that sight to see!  
For he was here, and only he. (21–30)

He wrote about the moment of returning to sanity: “But then there came



a sight of joy;/ It came at once to do me good". And then she found that: "It cools my blood; it cools my brain" (32) and "they [babe's sucking lips]/ Draw from my heart the pain away" (33-34), and "It loosens something at my chest" (36) Something seizing her heart and giving her dreadful pain, and making her mad, she had been insane with her blood and brain burning wild. But the baby or the pain which the baby gave her sucking at her breast suddenly made her wake and return to sanity for a moment. At the moment which Wordsworth was describing, maternal, human, archetypal feelings might have sprung up in her mind.

As some critics have already pointed out a similar case of a mad mother may also be seen in Erasmus Darwin's *Zoönomia: The Laws of Organic Life*.

Where the cause is of a temporary nature, as in puerperal infinity, there is reason to hope, that the disease will cease, when the bruises, or other painful sensations attending this state, are removed. In these cases the child should be brought frequently to the mother, and applied to her breast, if she will suffer it, and this whether she at first attends to it or not; as by a few trials it frequently excites the storage, or maternal affection, and removes the insanity, and I have witnessed.

(Z.ii 360)

In Darwin's text, the above description and the case of 'Goody Blake and Harry Gill' are almost side by side. Considering this juxtaposition together with the time when Wordsworth wrote 'Her Eyes Are Wild' and also 'The Thorn' (1798), he might have also been inspired by the facts in Darwin's book, even though he said that "subject (of 'Her Eyes Are Wild') was reported

to me by a Lady of Bristol who had seen the poor creature” (*W.P.W. II* 486).

In Wordsworth’s explanation of why he composed the tragedy of *The Borderers*, we can also see his idea of humour and archetypal feeling as follows:

...in respect to the two leading Persons of the Drama, I felt no inducement to make any change. The study of human nature suggests this awful truth, that, as in the trials to which life subjects us, sin and crime are apt to start from their very opposite qualities.

(*W.P.W. I* 342)

His idea that “sin and crime are apt to start from their very opposite qualities” may parallel his view of original sin. Having seen how quickly the high ideals of the French Revolution disappeared, he realized how weak humans were. He emphasised the theme in *The Borderers* with his recognition of the failure of high ideals in the French Revolution, and presented us with an analogy of the Fall of Man. The reasons why Wordsworth wrote about infants and old men seem to be very similar to why he chose a madwoman or a criminal. Both infants and old men are able to cross over the real world into the other. So Wordsworth could describe them in images of primitive human nature.

But Wordsworth’s choice of subject was not necessarily limited to mad women, criminals, infants, and old men, he wrote about all kinds of ordinary people. In *A Poet’s Epitaph*, he spoke of the role of the poet: “In common things that round us lie / Some random truths he [a poet] can impart, – / The harvest of a quiet eye / That broods and sleeps on his own heart”

(II. 49–52). Wordsworth wanted to describe ordinary men and to enlarge his sensibility as much as possible, and describe his ability to experience sublime moments even in everyday life.

Let us now remember what Wordsworth said in the Preface to *The Lyrical Ballads*:

I have said that each of these poems has a purpose. I have also informed my Reader what this purpose will be found principally to be: namely to illustrate the manner in which our feelings and ideas are associated in a state of excitement. But speaking in less general language, it is to follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great simple affections of our nature.

(*Prose I* 126)

The reference to “the great simple affections of our nature” suggests archetypal feelings, for example, of maternal affection, of original sin, of the sublime, and of the truth. We can follow “the fluxes and refluxes” of various men’s minds, when we read his poems, so we can say that Wordsworth was in advance of his time, because he was interested in the psychogenetic human mind especially those people who are on the borders between two states of mind, so he developed his own polemic linking natural science and the humanities.

The impact of Charles Darwin’s Darwinism upon human life and thought has definitely been great and we have accepted the fruits of its belief in

progress. The material world is too bright and glaring for us to remember our first attempts to explore our inner selves and fill our lives with meaning for both the present and the future. Alfred Russel Wallace (1823–1913), who was in support of Darwinism and had put forward a similar theory of natural selection of his own, was however among the first to point out what essentials were missing in Darwinism.

It [Darwinian theory] shows us how man's body may have been developed from that of a lower animal born under the law of natural selection; but it also teaches us that we possess intellectual and moral faculties which could not have been so developed, but must have had another origin; and for this origin we can only find an adequate cause in the unseen universe of Spirit.

*(Darwinism 478)*<sup>8)</sup>

Wallace wrote the above in *Darwinism* first published in 1889. In 1863 Thomas Huxley (1825–95), grandfather of Aldous Huxley and well known as a supporter of Darwinism, who worked in the medical, biological and literary fields, also said the theory of evolution was still open to discussion. For example he wrote that “the moral and intellectual difference between them [the physically dumb and those who were terrified into speechlessness] and ourselves would be practically infinite, though the naturalist should not be able to find a single shadow of even specified structural difference” (Huxley II 474).<sup>9)</sup> The missing elements in Darwinism are not serious flaws but the inevitable result of any structurally organised theory such as progressionism. The greater the impact of any theory, the more easily we

overlook some essential facts such as the differences between the general and the specific, systematic laws and specific psychogenic phenomena, and the visible and the unseen. Since the Industrial Revolution (1760), there has been a tendency everywhere to ignore the invisible world.

William Wordsworth like Wallace and Huxley pointed out the essential differences between the visible and the unseen in the intellectual and moral fields. Essay on Moral was written in 1798 or 1799. He discussed that “a tale of distress is related in a mixed company, relief for the sufferers proposed. The vain man, the proud man, the avaricious man & C., all contribute, but from very different feelings” (*Prose I* 103). In the same moral fragment Wordsworth also said in criticizing the moralists, “The whole secret of this juggler’s trick lies (not in fitting words to things (which would be a noble employment) but) in fitting things to words” (*Prose I* 103). We can adapt this Wordsworthian metaphor and apply it to Darwinism’s approach to natural science. We can substitute “theories” for “words”, “individual and unseen things” for “things”. So the natural historian, “who was somewhat unreasonably attached to” (*Prose I* 117) the structural factors in the idea of natural selection, overlooked “the nicer shades of manners” and did not find “a single shadow of mind.”

Bearing Wordsworth’s idea in mind, it seems helpful for us to examine the more primitive psychobiology of the eighteenth century, for example, Erasmus Darwin, who was known as a grand father of Charles Darwin, his *Zoönomia: The Laws of Organic Life* (1794,96). Erasmus Darwin is said a person who has sown the seeds of Darwin’s Theory of Evolution. Erasmus Darwin was not only a natural historian but also a poet as was typical of the

range of interests of an educated man of his day. Wordsworth was similarly a man of wide interests. In visiting Germany with S.T. Coleridge and his sister Dorothy in 1798, he wanted “to acquire the German language”, and to furnish himself “with a tolerable stock of information in natural science” (*L.E.Y.* 213).<sup>10)</sup>

Since the time was the Industrial Revolution, the structure of society has greatly changed, so the Wordsworthian age was a particularly significant period in this change. The age of Erasmus Darwin and Wordsworth was still a time when people had a great variety of interests and more rounded lives than today.

For a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and, unfitting it for all voluntary exertion, to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor. The most effective of these causes are the great national events which are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies. To this tendency of life and manners the literature and theatrical exhibition of the country have conformed themselves.

(*W.P.W. II* 389)

We can say these description describe our own social situation today too, though we are surrounded by electronic communication systems. Although written by William Wordsworth about two hundred years ago, how

similar were his circumstances to our own. He lived during a period of the modernization and in a belief of progress in life.

Although there have been a great deal of benefits from higher standards of living in Westernized countries, there have also been negative aspects of “Progress”, for example global warming in the physical world and loss of soul in the spiritual. We may have to return to the way of thinking at the time of the Industrial Revolution. We have only valued the visible and the general, we have cut ourselves off from the invisible, the irrational, and the primitive. We need to consider both the visible and the invisible, the systematic laws and the psychogenic cases as Erasmus Darwin and Wordsworth tried to do. Erasmus Darwin’s psychogenic books contain both general scientific laws of medicine and miraculous phenomena such as the case later used by Wordsworth in his poem ‘Goody Blake and Harry Gill’.

Charles Darwin criticized his grandfather’s *Zoönomia: The Laws of Organic Life*: “the proportion of speculation being so large to the facts given” (Huxley II 255). But for present day readers, Erasmus Darwin’s books might have been more valuable because their basic psychobiological system tried to regard a human being as “organic life”. He described many psychogenic inexplicable phenomena exactly as they occurred. So Erasmus Darwin’s books might be thought of as “the stones that the builders rejected” but in fact become the cornerstones. For Wordsworth, each of Erasmus Darwin’s apparently unexplained medical cases was a “truth which is its own testimony” (*W.P.W. II* 395) and an example of “laws of organic life”. Of the many doctrines such as David Hartley’s, Godwin’s, Paley’s, Hazlitt’s, known to Wordsworth, he focused on Erasmus Darwin’s *Zoönomia: The Laws of Organic Life* particularly when he was writing *The Lyrical Ballads*.

Although he criticized the current negative aspects of “Progress” which made the human mind blunt and “reduced it to a state of almost savage torpor” (*W.P.W. II* 389), Wordsworth did not overlook man’s natural potential power of the human mind:

The subject is indeed important! For the human mind is capable of being excited without the application of gross and violent stimulants; and he must have a very faint perception of its beauty and dignity who does not know this...It has therefore appeared to me, that to endeavour to produce or enlarge this capability is one of the best services in which, at any period, a Writer can be engaged...reflecting upon the magnitude of the general evil [degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation], I should be oppressed with no dishonorable melancholy, had I not a deep impression of certain inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind, and likewise of certain powers in the great and permanent objects that act upon it, which are equally inherent and indestructible; ...

(*W.P.W. II* 389)

Wordsworth recognised here the capability of the human mind, so he repeated the words “inherent and indestructible qualities”. He wanted to say that a poet should stimulate and enlarge that inherent capability of the human mind and so become to believe in that human power and devote himself to fostering it.

Wordsworth wrote the above things in the Preface to *The Lyrical Ballads* (1800). At that time he was extremely interested in the strange medical cases recorded by Erasmus Darwin. He mentioned one of them “a well-



authenticated fact” in the Advertisement and also in the longer Preface, he explained the influences of Erasmus Darwin on ‘Goody Blake and Harry Gill’. These references by Wordsworth to Erasmus Darwin show how he used medical cases as subjects in his poetry. In his letter to Joseph Cottle from Alfoxden in the spring of 1798, he asked him to send Erasmus Darwin’s *Zoönomia: The Laws of Organic Life* by the first carrier, so that he could reread them (L.E.Y. 198).

In the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* he explained his aim in writing ‘Goody Blake and Harry Gill’. He said that he wished “to draw attention to the truth that the power of the human imagination is sufficient to produce such changes even in our physical nature as might almost appear miraculous. The truth is an important one; the fact (for is is a fact) is a valuable illustration of it” (*Prose I* 150).

The core of Wordsworth’s interest was the “inherent and indestructible” qualities of the human mind, which are illustrated repeatedly in those events reported in Darwin’s *Zoönomia: The Laws of Organic Life*.

4

What is the most abiding quality of the “inherent and indestructible” power of a human being? There is no doubt for Wordsworth that it is life beyond death, both spiritually and possibly physically. Erasmus Darwin in his book described “Syncope” as a case where there are actions of the sanguiferous system in Decreased Irritation. “Syncope” is not faint but a death-like state lasting for a long time. Erasmus Darwin clearly distinguished “syncope” from “syncope epileptica”, which is “a temporary apoplexy, the pulse continuing in its natural state, and the voluntary power suspended. This terminates the

paroxysm of epilepsy.” (*Z. IV* 139) Erasmus Darwin described “syncope” as follows:

...it [syncope] arises from great emotions of the mind, as in sudden joy or grief. In these cases the whole sensorial power is exerted on these interesting ideas, and becomes exhausted. Thus during great surprise of fear the heart stops for a time, and then proceeds with throbbing and agitating; and sometimes his vital motions become so deranged, as never to recover their natural successive action: as when children have been frightened into convulsions.

(*Z. III* 100-01)

A sudden joy or grief produces enormous excitement, and the power of extraordinary emotion changes one’s physical nature and stops vital motions. The description of Sect. XII.7.1 (appointed by Erasmus Darwin) is as follows:

Where the exertion of sensorial powers is much decreased, as in the cold fits of fever, a gradual accumulation of the spirit of animation takes place; as occurs in all cases where inactivity or torpor of a part of the system exists; this accumulation of sensorial power increases, till stimuli less than natural are sufficient to throw it into action, then the cold fit ceases; and from the action of the natural stimuli a hot one succeeds with increased activity of the whole system.

So in...syncope, there is a temporary deficiency of sensorial exertion, and a consequent quiescence of a great part of the system. This quiescence continues, till the sensorial power becomes again

accumulated in the torpid organs; and then the usual diurnal stimuli excited the revivescient parts again into action...

(*Z. I* 126-27)

We see that a sudden strong emotion causes cold fits, extremely weak organs and syncope. But on recovery, there is no damage to brain or mind. Cases of syncope were observed among British soldiers in the First World War, caused by fear of death and coldness and a strong feeling of isolation in battle. If we look up the word “syncope” in The Oxford English Dictionary, we can see the quotation: “Instances of such syncope, or extrusion, ... are not seldom found.”

If we look at Lucy’s death as a possible case of syncope rather than real death, it seems that the ambiguities surrounding the Lucy Poems could be resolved.

There are similarities between a case of “syncope” and what is described in the poem ‘Strange Fits of Passion Have I Known’. The factors common to them are “a young lady”, “a horse riding on a hill”, “sudden fear”, and some notion of death. But these common facts only show us some hint of why he wrote this poem. The point is that his imagination was stimulated enough to produce a lover’s strange fits of passion, swinging like a pendulum between life and death and based on the case of a young Stafford lady. Wordsworth, at that time, felt he was losing his poetic power, so he very much wanted his Muse to be renewed just as the moon that in dying is reborn.

The idea of “syncope” might have strengthened his desire to regain his poetic power. The circumstances of his writing the Lucy poems were thus so complicated that a great deal of ambiguity has arisen, especially surrounding

Lucy's death. Wordsworth's belief in the cycle of life, death, and rebirth was not strongly held, but he was attracted to the idea of "syncope" as a "truth which is its own testimony" (*W.P.W. II* 395), just as in the case of 'Goody Blake and Harry Gill'. Such cases of scientific "syncope" made him recollect his own spiritual and psychic energy, and made him regain the power of living and write it into his poem in the symbols and images of "Lucy", "moon", and "kind Nature's gentlest boon". His thought was shifting from scientific fact to village lover, to the archetypal image of the moon. When he expressed horror that Lucy who "looked every day fresh as a rose in June" might be dead as the bright moon drops, this could be an allusion to "syncope".

In 'A Slumber did My Spirit Seal', "slumber" is neither "sleep" nor "being awake". "Slumber" is a state of "sensorial powers much decreased" or suspended, and so it is the physical and spiritual state of syncope. Is it Lucy's slumber or the poet's slumber? It is not clear, so we may imagine both. A person who is slumbering has "no human fears" and "no force", and naturally loses all feeling. When Wordsworth says "She seemed a thing", she seems to have become something beyond time and space together "with rocks, and stones, and trees." The word "seal" seems to suggest the possibility of "breaking the seal", similar to the idea of moving from suspension to action or from "death" to "revival". The choice of the word "seal" and her lifeless condition seem to allude to Lucy's "syncope".

'I Travelled Among Unknown Men' was written in 1801, after coming back from Germany. The other Lucy poems were written during his stay in Germany in 1798 or in 1799. So the lines, "I travelled among unknown men,

/ In lands beyond the sea”, refer to his experiences in Germany where he thought himself frozen both in body and spirit. The lines: “Nor England! did I know till then / What love I bore to thee”, mean that it was not till after his German experience that he fully realized what kind of love he had held to England and its countryside. In short, he had earlier held a more naïve belief in poetry when he wrote ‘Tintern Abbey’:

...That time is past,  
And all its aching joys are now no more,  
And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this  
Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur; other gifts  
Have followed; for such loss, I would believe,  
Abundant recompense. For I have learned  
To look on nature,...

...

...well pleased to recognize  
In nature and the language of the sense,  
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,  
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul  
Of all my moral being.

...

My dear, dear Friend; and in thy voice I catch

The language of my former heart, and read  
My former pleasures in the shooting lights  
Of thy wild eyes. Oh! yet a little while  
May I behold in thee what I was once.  
My dear, dear Sister!

(83–89; 107–111; 116–121)

Later, even if he never felt dizzy and rapturous to the same extent as he had felt in his childhood, he would never mourn the loss of these feelings, because he could enjoy those pleasures in Natural nature and his sister's "wild eyes". Wordsworth had beheld his powers in Dorothy and gentle nature. But his serious experiences in Germany a sense of isolation, a sense of coldness and some notion of death both in himself and in Dorothy dreadfully weakened his power. In his misfortune he found out some quality in himself an inherent and indestructible power of mind through a sort of death, which is the theme of 'Immortality Ode'.

O joy! that is in our embers  
Is something that doth live,  
That nature yet remembers  
What was so fugitive!

...

We will grieve not, rather find  
Strength in what remains behind;  
In the primal sympathy  
Which having been must ever be;

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

...

Another race hath been, and other palms are won.  
Thanks to the human heart by which we live,  
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,  
To me the meanest flower that blows can give  
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

(130–133; 180–187; 200–204)

After his “life in death” experiences in Germany, Wordsworth realized “another race” similar to the power of “syncope”. Even though he was getting old and thought of himself as “embers”, he could rejuvenate himself by stirring the “strength in what remains behind”. The more critical the stage he reached, the more painful was the experience of “looking through death” and the more passionate was the recollection of the inherent and indestructible qualities in his mind, the more passionately he could revive his powers.

Compared with the belief in the ‘Immortality Ode’, that “the Winds [life] come to me from the fields of sleep” (that is he is still alive as a poet) and the human “nature remembers what was so fugitive”, we can see that the belief expressed in ‘Tintern Abbey’ is very naïve just as William Blake’s ideas in ‘Songs of Innocence’ contrast with those in ‘Songs of Experience’. So in the lines “Nor...did I know till then/ What love I bore to thee. / ’Tis past, that

melancholy dream!" in 'I Travelled Among Unknown Men', the phrase of "melancholy dream" seems to suggest the sadness of the human condition, and time seems to be "turning her wheel" mechanically day after day. Even though he became an ember, he didn't grieve, for he still loved England more than ever, because he realized that painful joy is a joy based on faith in the human mind. So he will never throw away that creative power which stimulates him. Wordsworth painfully won this creative power in Germany in the period between writing 'Tintern Abbey' and 'Immortality Ode'.

So the Lucy poems, inspired by the notion of syncope, can be seen as an indispensable stage in Wordsworth's growth as a poet. He was able to fully understand human agony; he moved from genuine pleasure to painful joy through many stages: childhood, the period of 'Tintern Abbey', the German period with the Lucy poems, and last the 'Immortality Ode' period, when he reached the mind stage of dedicating himself to "new powers". Syncope might have drawn his attention to the truth of things. His recognition of syncope was sufficient to revive him physically and psychologically in an almost miraculous manner.

Wordsworth saw something, such as "embers" in his body, stir blindly just like IX stanza in "Immortal Ode". It made him find out the processes of rejuvenating powers in both man's body and spirit. The overflowing of his poetic imagination has a close interaction between scientific phenomena such as syncope, and human feelings and reactions. We can quite understand his allusion in his saying "Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science." (*W.P.W. II* 396) This sort of writing should particularly show us the way of Wordsworth thinking. In a way, his essential idea might be



to harmonize human things with nature of science. Also he warned us of our loss of the sense of wonder about the invisible among conception of the dynamic human spirit in the age of evolution. Wordsworth seems to have penetrated our modern problems long before our modernization.

### Notes

- 1) *W.P.W.* William Wordsworth, *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. E. de Selincourt and H. Darbishire, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: OUP, 1952)

Abbreviate this works to *W.P.W.* hereinafter.

- 2) Erasmus Darwin (1731–1802) was a grandfather of Charles Darwin (1809–82).

Charles Darwin is a very famous naturalist for his work, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859). Erasmus Darwin wrote *Zoönomia: The Laws of Organic Life* (1796). Abbreviate this works to *Z.* hereinafter.

- 3) “syncope” In Erasmus Darwin’s *Zoönomia*, we can see one case of “syncope” as the following.

Miss \_\_\_\_\_, a young lady of Stafford, in travelling in a chaise was so affected by feeling the fall of a horse and postillion, in going down a hill, though the carriage was not overturned, that she fainted away, and then became convulsed and never spoke afterwards; though she lived about three days in successive convulsions and stupor.

(*Z II* 67–68)

- 4) *The Prelude* is one of W. Wordsworth’s long poem, growth of a Poet’s Mind. Its existence was unknown to the public until it was published after three months from Wordsworth’s death in 1850. The work was named by his sister, Dorothy Wordsworth.

William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, ed. E. de Selincourt, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., revised by Helen Darbishire (Oxford: OUP, 1959). Abbreviate this work to *The Prelude* hereinafter.

- 5) *Autobiographic Sketches* *Autobiographic Sketches* were based on a series of articles which first appeared in 1834–52. Thomas De Quincey collected these articles, revised, enlarged and polished them, and gave them to the public under this title in 1853. So the work has a various selections and editions.

- 6) *Prose* William Wordsworth, *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W. J. B. Owen and J. W. Smyther (Oxford: OUP, 1974) Abbreviate this Works to *Prose* hereinafter.
- 7) *O.E.D.* Oxford English Dictionary, 1933 Edition.
- 8) *Darwinism* Alfred Russel Wallace (1823–1913), *Darwinism* He was in support of Darwinism, but also pointed out the negative parts of Darwinism, that is what essentials were missing in Darwinism.
- 9) *Huxley* Thomas Huxley (1825–95) was a grandfather of Aldous Huxley. He worked in the medical, biological, and literary fields. He was a supporter of Darwinism, but also revealed the shadow of the theory of evolution.  
Thomas Huxley, *Collected Essays* (London: Macmillan and Co. , Limited, 1893).
- 10) *L.E.Y.* *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years, 1787–1805*, ed. E. de Selincourt, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., revised Chester L. , Shaver (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).