SILENT HARMONY

Music and Time in Wordsworth's Prelude

Sylvia Kanwischer

Wordsworth Proseminar
Professor Jonathan Arac
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Sensual imagery has been discussed by many of Wordsworth's critics, but although they might mention "the tyranny of the ear" as closely associated with "the tyranny of the eye," they tend to emphasize visual rather than audible imagery. The poet of The Prelude, however, is "now all eye/And now all ear" in the presence of nature (XI.143-44), giving equal emphasis to both seeing and hearing, or looking and listening. Entering The Prelude by examining the imagery associated with the ear, beginning with the many musical allusions and metaphors, enhances one's appreciation of Wordsworth's imagery by opening the door to the rich category of sound. Because sound is a temporal experience, an exploration of Wordsworth's audible imagery elucidates both his ideal of time and his real-life experience of it. Having identified Wordsworth's situation with respect to time by close reading of passages alive with a great range of sounds, one can step back and use this newly gained perspective--along with some applicable concepts from musicology—to find meaning in the poem's confusing overall structure.

Music is a particularly important kind of sound—and an excellent entrance into The Prelude because song and poem are equated from the outset. "I yearn towards some philosophic Song ..." he begins (I.230), "immortal verse/Thoughtfully fitted to the Orphean lyre" (I.233-34). As a boy he attempted "toilsome songs" (X.514), at Cambridge he was "not unused to mutter lonesome songs" (III.239), and the poem in progress is referred to as a Song (VI.670, XII.233, XIII.380); the poetic accomplishments of Coleridge are music and voice (XI.20-21). The identification of poetry and music is a common poetic conceit with a long tradition. A brief look at its origins, both mythological and musicological, is helpful in revealing Wordsworth's position in relation to it. In the beginning, or historically at the height of Grecian civilization, music and poetry were one and the same, a unity expressed by the mythological figure of Orpheus, the poet-musician.

* All references to The Prelude will be to the 1805 version, unless otherwise stated.
Music without words, which did not conform to this ideal, was considered a lower form of expression unworthy of celebration, but as the centuries progressed the distinction between music and poetry became more acceptable; already in Roman time each of the two art forms was developing its own legitimate rules. Renaissance writers, looking back at the prelapsarian purity of the original combination, sought a reunification of verse and music, but the connection could be recreated only on the level of metaphor. The stringed instrument of the human soul and the music of the spheres were popular metaphors long after the popularity of the lyre had waned and Ptolemy's theory had ceased to be an assertion of scientific truth. The tragic fate of Orpheus, who was torn to pieces by crazed Maenads, symbolized the fragmentation of the true music-poetry. Wordsworth's wide reading of classic literature, from the ancients to his English predecessors, would have familiarized him with the myriad aspects of music-as-metaphor.2

Although Geoffrey Hartman disapproves of what he sees as Harold Bloom's insistence on establishing "English poetry after Milton as a Milton satellite," Milton was undeniably greatly admired by the Romantics, including Wordsworth. Even if he had not read so widely, all of the possibilities of music in poetry that had been invented through the centuries would have been illustrated for him by Milton. Due to his formal training in music, Milton's interest in its association with poetry was more than figurative. Because his father was an accomplished and highly respected musician, the Milton home "was probably the resort of the best musicians of his time," and the poet's lifelong love of music was fostered by many musical evenings there, during which "airs and dances from the popular masques would alternate with older motets and anthems, psalms, organ voluntaries, and fancies for viols." In contrast to his more traditional parent, the younger Milton had a taste for what would have been regarded as
avant-garde music, illustrated by his purchase in Italy of music "composed in the new homophonic, harmonic style." With the composer who was probably his music teacher, Henry Lawes, the poet collaborated in the writing of two masques, Arcades and Comus. Because the appearance of Ernest Brennecke's John Milton the Elder and His Music in 1938 was the "revelation" that made critics aware of Milton's "vast knowledge of both the secular music of his own day and of Classical and Christian musical doctrine," it is safe to assume that Wordsworth was unaware of Milton's musical training. Nevertheless, Milton's training resulted in a sophisticated use of music—as-metaphor that Wordsworth could not have missed. In addition to many references in his poetry to what John Hollander calls "practical music," or actual performance such as angels blowing trumpets in Paradise Lost, Milton shows his command of all the traditional metaphors, paying particular attention to the fate of Orpheus and the history of music. For example, in "At a Solemn Musick," "the harmonious Sisters, Voice and Verse" (1.2) are joined in order to return them to their mythical unity, which existed "till disproportion'd sin/Jarr'd against natures chime, and with harsh din/Broke the fair musick . . ." (11.19-21). The destruction of prelapsarian unity at the Fall, the didmemberment of Orpheus, and the division of the limbs of truth after the ascension of Christ (as described in "Aeropagitica") are all synthesized in the image of Discord as "first daughter of Sin" (PL, X.707-8).

Lacking Milton's musical background, Wordsworth did not refer to formal modes, such as the Lydian mode that appears in "L'Allegro" (1.136), and the ancient association of mode with mood, nor did he show any interest in creating a practical synthesis of text and music by writing a libretto. The closest he came to expressing a wish for such a synthesis was his emphasis on "the music of harmonious metrical language" that contributes to
the "complex feeling of delight" imparted by a well-constructed poem. He was more in agreement with Milton's use of music as a figurative device only, as in Paradise Lost; in his "Preface to Poems" (1815) he explains:

Epic Poets, in order that their mode of composition may accord with the elevation of their subject, represent themselves as singing from the inspiration of the Muse, Arma virum que cano; but this is a fiction, in modern times of slight value: The Iliad or Paradise Lost would gain little in our estimation by being haunted. The other poets who belong to this class are commonly content to tell their tale;--so that of the whole it may be affirmed that they neither require nor reject the accompaniment of music.

This is not to say, however, that Wordsworth was uninterested in a return to a prelapsarian unity; on the contrary, a recurrent theme that involves music throughout The Prelude is the recapture of a kind of unity at which Milton only hinted.

Two poems illustrate Wordsworth's formation of a unified aural world. Profoundly affected by a particular musical performance, he wrote "The Power of Music" in 1806, the year after he completed the thirteen-book Prelude; this poem, in which he praises music's persuasive and entrancing powers and calls the musician an Orpheus, illustrates his knowledge of the more conventional ways of referring to music in poetry. But the more sophisticated view already developed in The Prelude is expressed in the 1829 "On the Power of Sound." Here man-made music and the mythological music of Arion and Pan have become part of a larger category that includes streams, fountains, oceans, birds, echoes, and even the sound of earth on a coffin lid. To melt music into sound is to dissolve artifice into the natural order, or, more simply, to unite man and nature. Milton blends artifice with nature only in the "crisped brooks" that flow from a "Saphire Fount" in the unreal garden of Paradise (PL, IV.237). To unite the two with music and sound in the everyday life of mortals is a Romantic idea, and to illustrate
it with music and sound is Wordsworth's own idea. It is interesting to note that he himself thought "The Power of Sound" a significant poetic achievement.

Wordsworth unifies all sound into one powerful category because every kind of sound, from man-made music to the sighing of the wind and the sound of rushing streams, is a means of communication with the source of inspiration, the soul of nature. Perhaps the most powerful sound that connects the poet to the inspirational source (certainly it is referred to most often) is that of the wind, which is the voice of a divine presence in nature, opening a "higher transcendental reality" to view. "Visionary Power/Attends upon the motions of the wind ..." the poet says (V.628-29). Earlier he exclaims, "What strange utterance did the loud dry wind/Blow through my ears!" (I.348-49). Its voice is part of a transforming of reality into otherworldliness: "the sky seemed not a sky/Of earth," he continues, "and with what motion moved the clouds!" (I.348-50). At times the wind is less than a voice, but as a scarcely audible breath it is just as powerful, if not more so. As a boy who has just captured a bird, he hears ominous breathings that seem to be nothing but the pressure of a guilty conscience:

I heard among the solitary hills
Low breathings coming after me, and sounds
Of undistinguishable motion, steps
Almost as silent as the turf they trod. (I.329-32)

But later he hears more breathings:

Now here, now there, stirred by the straggling wind,
Came intermittently a breath-like sound,
A respiration short and quick, which oft,
Yea, might I say, again and yet again,
Mistaking for the panting of my Dog,
The off-and-on Companion of my walk,
I turned my head, to look if he were there. (IV.174-80)

The sound he hears emanates from a benevolent source, or he would not mistake it for his pet; the divine spirit of nature is also the companion of his walk.
Etymologically, the words respiration, spirit, and inspiration are all connected: they originate from the Latin spiritus ("breath") and spirare ("to breathe"), definitions that connect them also to breath and breeze. In biblical commentaries, "it was commonly recognized that the moving air, the breath of the Lord, the Holy Spirit, the life and spiritual rebirth of man, and the inspiration of the Prophets ... were connected"; following this tradition, the sounds of wind and breath are associated with inspiration in The Prelude. They are part of the entire history of creation, "sounds that are/The ghostly language of the ancient earth,/Or make their dim abode in
the distant winds" (II.327-28), making the poet see "things viewed/By the
first men, earth's first inhabitants" (III.153). As Pan taught with a wind
instrument, his pipe (VIII.321), and the wise Druids were guided by "the
breath of music" (XII.351-52), the poet will remain receptive to the audible
spirit.

Breathings in the form of birdsong communicate inspiration in The
Prelude. Like little visitors from another world, they play their built-in
wind instruments "for ever" on the idyllic island in Windermere (II.60),
warble a revelatory accompaniment as the poet reads Chaucer under a tree
(III.278), and bring the inspiration of spring to his threshold just when he
is lamenting a fallow period (VII.23-37). The voices of the birds are
voices of the spirit in the same category as the winds and breezes. In the
old ruined church the poet visits in Book II, "internal breezes, sobbings of
the place/And respirations" and the sweet singing of "the invisible Bird"
are all intermingled, together emanating from "that still Spirit of the
evening air" (129-39).

Not always manifest in songs and light breezes or "airs" (II.96,
XI.10; one might read "melodies, or tunes"), sometimes the spirit appears in
stormy weather. When the poet recalls "the roaring wild/And clamorous rain"
and sees the ash tree rock "with every impulse of the wind" (IV.78-81) or
watches "A Girl who bore a Pitcher on her head" as she tries to "force her
way/Against the blowing wind," "her garments vexed and tossed/By the strong
wind" (XI.306-16), he finds joy (IV.72), "a spirit of pleasure . . . from
the power [these remembrances] left behind" (XI.323-25). "In their harsher
moments," Herbert Lindenberger points out, the elements serve as
"manifestations of power and vitality in the universe." 14

"Winter winds are
his delight," Dorothy Wordsworth wrote of her brother, "His mind I think is
often more fertile in this season than any other." 15 Receptive to power and
vitality in calm and in storm, the poet is ready with his own voice to
express the spirit he has breathed in. He responds to the airs in kind.

"Obedient as a lute/That waits upon the touches of the wind," (III.137-38),
he answers the wind not so much with "Eolian visitations" (I.104) as with "a
corresponding mild creative breeze" (I.43), which in the 1850 version
becomes "a correspondent breeze" (I.35). As a receptacle of breezes, he
becomes a breeze himself—he rambles like the wind (III.359) and passes
over Lake Como "like a breeze" (VI.605). He will join the choir of the
birds (VII.34-37) and "forth-breathe" (X.541) in return, not only for an
audience of other people, but in order to continue an interaction with
"Nature's self, which is the breath of God" (V.222), "an ennobling
interchange/Of action from within and from without" (XII.376-77).

Lindenberger writes: 16

The dominating images of The Prelude are wind and
water, images which by their very nature— their
flowing, transforming quality, their ability to
interact with other natural elements, and also their
traditional associations—allow the poet free range
between the observable world and the higher
transcendental reality which he wishes to make visible
to us.
One of the reasons these two images have an interactive ability is that they are both audible, allowing a sort of conversation between them and the poet. The voice of waters is a vehicle of inspiration like the wind, and the poet sees his vocation as having been shaped by the Derwent river that "loved/To blend his murmurs with my Nurse’s song" and "sent a voice/That flowed along my dreams" (I.273-77). Having absorbed this murmuring song, the poet responds in kind, so naturally that his flow of words seems almost unintentional:

... in the public roads at eventide  
I sauntered, like a river murmuring  
And talking to itself, ... (IV.109-11)

Water can have negative connotations in the poem, and destructive deluges appear such as the deluge of guilt and ignorance that breaks forth upon France in the form of the Terror (X.436-39). However, water is most often a friendly stream associated with inspiration, not only the influx of inspiration as from the wind, but with its continuing flow. Non-continuous inspiration is seen as an "interrupted stream" (VII.10). In the famous "ascent of Snowdon" passage, the inspirational "Soul, the Imagination of the whole" (XIII.65) is located in

A deep and gloomy breathing-place, through which  
Mounted the roar of waters, torrents, streams  
Innumerable, roaring with one voice.  
... that breach  
Through which the homeless voice of waters rose, ...  
(XIII.57-65)

Later in Book XIII the water is again the poet’s own imaginative faculty, a stream flowing from its origin in a mysterious cave and following the course of the poet’s imaginative growth (XIII.172-83). "Finally," the poet says, "whate’er/I saw, or heard, or felt, was but a stream/That flowed into a kindred stream," the kindred stream being himself (VI.572-74). The music of water is at once inspirational as an entity outside of the poet and one
with his inner flow of inspiration. As with the breeze that inspired the poet, became one with him, and then soared away again as his own expression, "the literal has become figurative and then literal again." In discussing "images of interaction," Lindenberger explains, "It is difficult to distinguish between the literal and the metaphorical level in Wordsworth. . . Distinctions between tenor and vehicle . . . are of little avail in this type of poetry." Transcending conversation, the interacting entities seem to merge or unify.

Echoes constitute another category of sound that blurs distinctions between the physical and the figurative in The Prelude. These echoes are not the kind that fragment the original sound and grow fainter and fainter with each repetition; "not a deaf echo, merely" (XI.104), they seem to have a power of their own as "living sound" (XI.105): When the precipices ring aloud during the boyhood skating scene in Book I (467), the sound may be an echo of the din the boys make, but considering that the hills are meanwhile producing "an alien sound/Of melancholy" (470-71) all their own, the ringing appears to be an independent sympathetic response to the children's joy. When the young poet stealthily borrows a shepherd's boat, "the voice/Of mountain echoes" (390) seems to propel the boat through the lake; this voice has a life of its own, for what in the "silent" (402) scene could it be echoing? The "sounds of exultation" that echo through the groves when the poet and his friend wander along the lake happily reciting and inventing verses (V.601-2) constitute another sympathetic vibration that might be considered independent of the actual vehicle that caused it--the boys' verses--because it is so figurative. Any suggestion that the groves are physically producing an echo is overwhelmed by the scene described in the lines immediately following:

For images, and sentiments, and words, . . .
Kept holiday; a never-ending show,
With music, incense, festival, and flowers! (V.603-607)
This scene, like Milton's paradisiacal scene of "Universal Pan/Knit with the
Graces and the Hours in dance" (PL, IV.265-66), is entirely conceptual
because it makes no sense visually or physically. Finally, of the many
echoes throughout the poem, the only one that hints at a specific physical
reality, a real sound undeniably reflecting another real sound, is the
response of the owls to the hooting of the Boy of Winander, but this echo is
akin to the other independent ones because it is also powerful rather than
fragmented:

--And they would shout
Across the wat'ry Vale, and shout again,
Responsive to his call, with quivering peals,
And long halloos, and screams, and echoes loud
Redoubled and redoubled . . . (V.399-403)

Once again the echo becomes figurative: it is difficult to tell whether the
landscape is actually reflecting sound to cause an echo as scientifically
defined or whether the crescendo is caused by an intensification of the
antiphonal hooting between the boy and the owls. In The Figure of Echo,
John Hollander explains that "antiphonal sounds are not strictly echoes.
But there is a kind of mutual confirmation of the various noises, human and
natural." 18

All of the foregoing examples of echoes occur in descriptions of the
poet's boyhood, leading one to wonder whether the continuing dialogue with
nature that leads to mutual confirmation and unity is achievable only in the
prelapsarian innocence of childhood. The mingling of actual and
metaphorical in the wind and water imagery of the poem almost answers this
question, but the give-and-take involved with this imagery is only one round
in duration; that is, nature gives, the poet receives, the poet gives, end
of round. The startling and unlovely image of fields shaped like ears
(V.457) hints at a continued reciprocity, but this image too occurs only in
a recollection of boyhood. For the mature poet, the continuing dialogue
leading to unity is an ideal to be remembered and sought but not so easily achieved. In a discussion of music and sound, we might call this ideal harmony.

Paradoxically, silence is important in the attainment of true harmony. The Boy of Winander achieves a sort of communion with nature when his hootings blend with the owls', but it is in "pauses of deep silence" that he achieves a true harmony with the scene:

Then, sometimes, in that silence, while he hung Listening, a gentle shock of mild surpise Has carried far into his heart the voice Of mountain torrents; or the visible scene Would enter unawares into his mind With all its solemn imagery, ... (V.406-11)

Although the poet and the Boy are not identical, the Boy seems to represent the poet's ideal. As a boy himself, the poet communes with the universe only when all surrounding noise has ceased and he is alone: in recollecting the scene on the lake when he was rowing the shepherd's boat, it is silence and solitude (I.402, 421) that give an eerie, otherworldly quality to the scene and bring an awareness of "huge and mighty Forms that do not live/Like living men" (I.425-26). He disparages the "hubub" associated with society (IX.56), especially in the city--including musical noise from hurdy-gurdies, fiddles, and all the "din of instruments" except the flute of the boy who plays to nature in solitude (VII.674, IV.321, II.175-76)--calling it "empty noise" (III.211); he values instead "the deep quiet and majestic thoughts/Of loneliness" (III.210-11). The noise of "chattering Popinjays" at present-day Cambridge is degenerate in comparison to the silence he imagines once reigned there, when there was an academic atmosphere conducive to the studies of the "venerable Doctors" of old (III.456,460). When he is in need of a restorative harmony after a term at Cambridge, he finds it in a solitary walk:

Above, before, behind, Around me, all was peace and solitude;
I looked not round, nor did the solitude
Speak to my eye; but it was heard and felt. (IV.388-91)

Silence is necessary to the awareness of a greater harmony, just as
Milton's blindness sharpened his internal vision:

So much the rather thou Celestial Light
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
Irradiate . . .
that I may see and tell
Of things invisible to mortal sight. (PL, III.52-55)

Wordsworth, in recollecting solitary walks at dawn, shows that he too,
although not physically blind, has experienced the power of blindness:

... I forgot
That I had bodily eyes, and what I saw
Appeared like something in myself, a dream,
A prospect in my mind. (II.368-71)

He is aware of unity as harmony more explicitly, however, when the noise of
waters brings him an experience of the power of deafness:

... in all things
I saw one life, and felt that it was joy.
One song they sang, and it was audible,
Most audible then when the fleshly ear,
O'ercome by grosser prelude of that strain,
Forgot its functions, and slept undisturbed. (II.429-34)

The poet remembers and hopes to recapture what Milton might have called
Celestial Harmony. (One wonders whether Mary Wordsworth had this passage in
mind when she named her husband's poem; perhaps she saw his written work as
the "grosser" or physical prelude to the transcendence he sought.)

Wordsworth carries silence one step further in the poem, praising not only
the power of deafness but the power of dumbness, found "among the walks of
homely life" in men who are "shy, and unpractised in the strife or phrase,"
whose outward inarticulateness is a sign of an inner, contemplative
"language of the heavens" (XII.265-70).

Occurrences of silence in the poem are preparatory to experiences of
harmony, but when the harmony arrives it is not always accompanied by
continued silence; sounds from the world of harmony increase in significance
as they increase in volume: the inner song of waters already discussed (Book II) brings joy when it is most "audible." Before the "Soul, the Imagination of the Whole" is revealed to him atop Mount Snowdon (XIII.65), the poet encounters a sea of mist that is "meek and silent" (44). This silence serves as a gateway to another world of sound, for apparently without moving from the spot he is suddenly aware of the mounting "roar of waters, torrents, streams/Innumerable, roaring with one voice" (58-59). As the experience intensifies toward an awareness of the presence of nature's soul, the sound of waters that "mounted" and "rose" (58,63) is like a crescendoing drum roll introducing the cymbal crash of revelation.

For Coleridge the imagination is the "reconciling and mediatory power" or "esemplastic" power that "shapes into one." Although Coleridge did not agree with his friend Wordsworth concerning all of the theories presented in the "Preface to Poems," he probably would have concurred regarding the imagination as a power that creates by a process of "consolidating numbers into unity, and dissolving and separating unity into number." Wordsworth did not write this definition until 1815, but the idea is already taking shape in the "Imagination" that is revealed atop Mount Snowdon. The appositive construction of the line "The Soul, the Imagination of the whole" equates the revelation of achieved harmony, the Soul, with the mediating power still aware of separate elements to be unified. Flowing from separate sources, the waters nevertheless roar "with one voice" because harmony is not only the union of poet and spirit; it is the unity of all discordant or separate elements. This fusion of ever-unique particulars is what Coleridge called "multeity in unity," not the prelapsarian harmony of childhood recaptured, but a restored harmony that is even greater because in it "differentiation and individuation are not lost." Elements to be unified include not only elements of nature, "tumult
and peace, the darkness and the light" (VI.567) but also of time: the entire range of past, present, and future. The revelatory scene at the end of the Simplon Pass episode is characterized by a suspension of time, "of woods decaying, never to be decayed" (VI.557), of joined contraries as

Characters of the great Apocalypse,  
The types and symbols of Eternity,  
Of first and last, and midst, and without end. (VI.570-73)

There is also a timelessness about the otherworldly island in Lake Windermere, "musical with birds/That sang forever" (II.59-60). The search for harmony is also a search for eternity.  

Such unity can be found in an everyday attitude of "steadiness," held by one

... who hath among least things  
An under-sense of greatest; sees the parts  
As parts, but with a feeling of the whole. (VII.710-13)

Ideally, "composure and ennobling harmony" (VII.741) are "habitual to the mind" (VII.722), and

The mind of Man is framed even like the breath  
And harmony of music. There is a dark  
Invisible workmanship that reconciles  
Discordant elements, and makes them move  
In one society. (1.351-55)

However, much as the poet desires permanent concord, in practice harmony is an elusive "sensation" of unpredictable origin:

When strongly breathed upon  
By this sensation, whencesoe'er it comes  
Of union or communion, doth the soul  
Rejoice as in her highest joy; for there,  
There chiefly, hath she feeling whence she is,  
And passing through all Nature rests with God.  
(VIII.831-36, my italics)

Although "Our destiny, our nature, and our home, /Is with infinitude," this is only in the sense of infinite expectation, an undying hope or anticipation of "something evermore about to be" (VI.539-42). True harmony,
a timeless or eternal world, appears to mortals only temporarily, as "wild blasts of music" (X.419). A lasting harmony or "'blend' would express Wordsworth's ideal and not his achievement," writes Harold Bloom, "but the try itself is definitive of Wordsworth's strangeness and continued relevance as a poet." 25

Following the path of language associated with the ear in *The Prelude*, has led to Wordsworth's ideal of harmony, but other sets of imagery, such as that associated with the eye, can lead to the same center of meaning. The poet passes over Lake Como equally as a sunbeam or a breeze (VI.607), and just as the power of deafness reveals "blasts" of harmony, so the power of blindness reveals "flashes" of revelation (V.629, VI.595). However, following the path of musical imagery has led to *harmony*, which is a particularly useful word because it includes eternity as well as spirit, revelation, and unity. When Wordsworth identifies harmony and poetry, harmony has much more significance than the traditional music-verse trope of "this Song, which like a lark I have protracted " (XIII.380-81) because it implies eternity. To pursue the concept of harmony in *The Prelude* is to uncover Wordsworth's relation to time and with it his relation to the poem as a whole.

It is in the dream related in Book V that harmony and poetry are identified. With a stone representing Euclid's Elements, or science, in one hand and a shell representing poetry in the other, an Arab is seen to be rushing on camel-back to save these two treasures from an advancing deluge. In the parallel dream that René Descartes had on the night of 10 November 1619, a man appears mysteriously and converses with him regarding a dictionary and a collection of poems, leading Descartes to the conclusion that "la Raison dans les Philosophes" of the dictionary is inferior to "la divinité de l'Enthousiasme, & ... la force de l'Imagination" evinced by the poetry collection. 26 Wordsworth seems to agree with the distinction;
indeed, the Arab calls the shell "something of more worth" than the stone (V.90). "Poetry and geometric Truth" (64) are the two subjects that occupy the mind of the dreamer in Book V, so that when he dreams of two books and one is associated with science by being identified as "Euclid's Elements" (88), the shell by simple process of elimination must represent poetry. The similarities between the two dreams are fascinating, leading one to believe that a learned friend, perhaps Coleridge or Beaupuy, did tell Wordsworth about Descartes' dream, but the differences are even more fascinating. First of all, the silent stone and the shell full of living voices are Wordsworth's invention. In "On the Power of Sound," the shell is a musical instrument with the affecting powers of the human voice; in early times, "the infant Age" (121),

... Voice and Shell drew forth a tear
   Softer than Nature's self could mold. (119-20)

In The Prelude, the shell's appearance does not belie the fact that it is also a book:

... Strange as it may seem
   I wondered not, although I plainly saw
   The one to be a Stone, the other a Shell,
   Nor doubted once but that they both were Books, ... (V.110-13)

That the book is also a musical instrument gives it a potential for living expression that it would not otherwise have. Holding the musical instrument-as-book to his ear, the dreamer hears language and music joining to form a living expressive force:

... in an unknown Tongue,
   Which yet I understood, articulate sounds,
   A loud prophetic blast of harmony, ... (110-13)

The dreamer does not need an appointment to hear the shell's pronouncement; its performance appears to be ever-present, like the sound of the sea that any beachcomber listens for in a conch shell, so that articulate harmony would have reached his ear at any moment he chose to listen. The living
power of the shell could not contrast more sharply with the volume the dreamer held in his hand as he fell asleep, the "shrine so frail" of man's intellectual achievement (V.48).

A word about the implications of the adjective *prophetic* will add another dimension to the shell's expression. Throughout *The Prelude*, there is a holiness bestowed upon the poet who becomes an Aeolian harp to receive the spirit. The intention expressed in the "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*" of correcting and purifying the moral feelings of the public through a reevaluation of poetic taste has become abstracted. It no longer deals with particulars of poetic diction; instead, the bard is also a prophet, "clothed in priestly robe" (I.61), who speaks by divine inspiration and works for the redemption of mankind through communication with nature: "Prophets of Nature, we . . . will speak/A lasting inspiration . . ." (Xii.442-43). The poet hears "wild blasts of music" (X.419) when he is inspired "as the ancient prophets were enflamed" (X.401) and responds "to the God who looked into my mind" (III.144) with prophesy (III.151). The "Loud prophetic blast of harmony" from the shell (V.96) is prophetic not only because it foretells impending destruction (V.98) but also because the harmony it expresses, like the harmony or unity the poet reaches for throughout the poem, is God-inspired and sacred. In this light the shell is a treasure "of surpassing brightness" (81) indeed, and to attempt to save it from the deluge is a mission that is all the more heroic because it is holy.

"Waters of the deep/Gathering upon us" (V.130-31) were not part of Descartes' dream any more than the stone and shell were. Wordsworth's deluge has apocalyptic overtones, threatening "Destruction to the Children of the Earth" (98), but it does not carry with it that hope for an inner millenial transformation to which the Romantic poets turned, as Abrams explains, in
the "mood of revolutionary disillusionment" following the disintegration of the French Revolution in the Reign of Terror. Here the dreamer is overcome by fear (115) because he can see no positive outcome to the ominous flood. When the poet, contemplating the great books of the past, asks,

Oh! why hath not the mind
Some element to stamp her image on
In nature somewhat nearer to her own?
Why, gifted with such powers to send abroad
Her spirit, must it lodge in shrines so frail? (V.44-48)

it is clear that he is afraid that time will engulf his work. Instead of promising a cleansing of the earth followed by a millenial joy, the waters seem to represent the inescapable and irreversible oblivion of advancing time.

The Arab races ahead of the deluge "with wild look" (V.119) and his "countenance . . . disturbed" (V.127) because he fears that his errand is impossible. The dreamer relates,

I fancied that he was the very Knight
Whose Tale Cervantes tells, yet not the Knight,
But was an Arab of the Desart too;
Of these was neither, and was both at once, . . . (V.123-26)

Why Wordsworth chose an "Arab of the Bedouin Tribes" (78) one cannot be certain. Perhaps he is the character most appropriate to the desert scene that contrasts so strongly with the "fleec waters of the drowning world" (136), or perhaps he is meant to bring a feeling of fairy-tale exoticism and supernatural power to the dream through connotation of the Arabian Nights that Wordsworth loved as a child. But there can be no uncertainty regarding the Arab's other persona, for who could be more the quintessential hero on an impossible adventure than don Quixote? What makes Cervantes' hero a madman in the eyes of his contemporaries is not as much the barber's basin he sports as a helmet as it is his exalted idealism and undaunted purity of faith that are akin to holiness.
below the surface of his absurdity is the tragic figure of a man who tries single-handedly to bring all of the admirable virtues of ancient chivalry back to life, or, in other words, to maintain as living expression the contents of books that were long ago archaized by passing time.

"And I have scarcely pitied him;" says the dreamer in The Prelude, "Have felt/A reverence for a Being thus employed, . . ." (V.149-50). The poet identified with "this Semi-Quixote" (142), not only during the dream, when the poet "begged leave/To share his errand with him" (116-17), but afterward, when he says,

... I, methinks,
Could share that Maniac's anxiousness, could go
Upon like errand. Oftentimes, at least,
Me hath such deep entrancement half-possessed,
When I have held a volume in my hand
Poor earthly casket of immortal Verse! (V.161-65)

A significant change that appears in the 1850 version of The Prelude is the transformation of the dream from a second-hand experience to a first-hand one: "Sleep seized him, and he passed into a dream" becomes "Sleep seized me, and I passed into a dream" (V.70). Jane Worthington Smyser sees this change as a turning away from verisimilitude for dramatic effect, "for artistic reasons only," but the fact that the change inserted an awkwardness into the passage where before there was none, "the awkward vestige" of the friend in lines 50-56, seems to belie this opinion and give preference to the reason she sees as less likely, that "the dream had become his dream" and the mission his mission.

Wordsworth and his Semi-Quixote wish to escape what musicologist David Epstein calls chronometric time. Rejecting the common notion of objective time because it falsely implies an absolute time outside of experience, Epstein describes chronometric time as mechanistic, made up of "pragmatic and convenient periodizations." In contrast, during temporary blasts of timelessness the poet could be said to enter a "time enriched
and qualified by the experience within which it is framed," which is Epstein's definition for the other order or temporal experience, integral time. Wordsworth's ideal is a human nature that is "not a punctual Presence, but a Spirit/Living in time and space, and far diffused" (VIII.761-64), or—assuming in this case that his later revision was only for the purpose of clarifying the original meaning—"diffused through time and space" (VIII.611, 1850). However, he clearly realized that he would be lost if he lived only in integral time: after having crossed the Alps with his friend Robert Jones (unnamed in the poem), the two mountain climbers are "lost, bewildered among woods immense" (VI.631) because they do not understand "those Italian Clocks that speak the time/In fashion different from ours" (VI.623-24); the loss of their accustomed relation to chronometric time causes them a confusing and uncomfortable night in limbo. Another illustration of Wordsworth's awareness that the confines of chronometric time are indispensable is the specificity of time throughout the poem. Not only do bells ring the hours, but, in passages too numerous to list, days are spent; weeks and months are enumerated; seasons pass; and years flow, divide into sections, or vanish in specific number. In addition, the narrative cannot function in its autobiographical capacity without being punctuated by frequent references to its protagonist's age.

Beyond the poem's human subject, the work itself, like a piece of music, cannot exist outside of chronometric time. The act of putting pen to paper creates a linear progression of time, just as the acorn dropping in Book I interrupts a timeless scene "with a startling sound" (94) that creates a linear time progression; that is, it creates a before-the-acorn and an after-the-acorn. In continuing to develop The Prelude over a period of forty years, if not longer, Wordsworth can be seen to have fought the idea of an after-the-poem, struggling to maintain the poem as a living expression
like that of the shell; to complete it and set it aside would be to consign
it to past history and, in a sense, kill it. "Poor earthly casket of
immortal Verse!" we recall the poet exclaiming to the volume in his hand
(V.164). For Wordsworth The Prelude became like a piece of music being
constantly reinterpreted in repeated performances by its composer, in order
to prolong indefinitely in integral time the temporary experience of
performance.

Resisting closure in this mortal life is bound to be a losing battle,
and The Prelude's publication was posthumous in more than one sense of the
word. Wordsworth's death also signified the demise of the poem as a
continuing performance, both as read aloud by its composer to his friends and
as work in progress. Wordsworth offered various explanation for withholding
the poem from publication: "the personal character of the subject" was one;
that it must appear only in conjunction with the greater work, The Recluse,
which would justify saying such "a frightful deal . . . about one's self" in
The Prelude was another. But that the poem would be published "never during
my lifetime" is a notion that took hold early on, before the 1805 version
was completed, and when he declared it finished, Dorothy wrote, "No doubt
. . . he will, whether from the suggestions of his Friends or his own or
both have some alterations to make, but it appears to us at present to be
finished," a statement of closure so qualified that it signifies its
opposite. It is clear that Wordsworth planned the poem as posthumous so that
his working life could continue within it indefinitely. Saying, as
Christopher Wordsworth did following William's death in 1850, "It was left
ready for the Press by the Author" is akin to saying, "It was laid out in
its Coffin by the Author."

Memories of temporary revelatory experiences help to describe the
harmony Wordsworth hoped to attain during the experience of performance, but,
in addition, the poem as a whole can be seen to express the integral time he sought. Certainly its expression of chronometric time is full of nonchronometric surprises: the frequent references to hours, seasons, years, and the poet's age only serve to confuse the reader who takes them as signposts in a chronological biography. A brief overview will illustrate this point: first the poet is a young man ready to write the poem; then, recalling his early youth chronologically, he is a baby, then "a five years' child" (I.291), then he has "nine summers" (I.3110, then "twice five seasons" (I.587); next his "seventeenth year was come" (II.405), and he becomes a student at Cambridge: but in recalling the influence of books on his development he begins again with his childhood until he reaches thirteen (V.575); in Book VI, after mentioning his thirty-fourth birthday (VI.61), he is again a college student and in Book VII a graduate, but Book VIII recalls his childhood again before continuing with his life in London after graduation, after which he is again a child in the countryside as he traces the growth of his love of mankind until his twenty-third year (VIII.483); Books IX and X describe his sojourn in France and his feelings about the Revolution in more or less chronological order, but Book XI turns to the famous "spots of time" in which significant childhood events are recalled in order to support the explanation of the restoration of his imagination, which continues in Book XII; the final book returns to a walking tour that dates before the residence in London of Book VIII and then, amidst an acknowledgments section, to the time following his withdrawal from France. In sum, one might say that the comparison appearing at the start of Book IX between the poem and a river following a retrograde course (IX.1-9) could not be more apt.

Counteracting the obvious disjunction of the poet and measured time, another order of temporality that is more important than the chronology
marked by tolling bells and birthdays subtly makes its appearance, "an everlasting motion" (I.431) associated with the eternal soul and spirit of the universe (428-29) and marked by "the beatings of the heart" (441). Internal feeling, the "beating mind" (II.18) or "the inner pulse Of contemplation" (III.334-35), coincides with

The pulse of Being that everywhere was felt,
When all the several frames of things, like stars . . .
Were half confounded in each other's blaze,
One galaxy of life and joy. (VIII.627-31)

The bird that "beats the gladsome air" (II.426) and the storm and rain that "beat on my roof at midnight" (XI.385-86), the horses' hoofs that beat the sand along the seashore (X.566) and the waves beating the sand that those hoofs evoke, all these move with the same eternal pulse that makes

The surface of the universal earth
With triumph, and delight, and hope, and fear,
Work like a sea. (I.499-501)

Individual, interior, inaudible feeling and the universal, exterior, audible world are blended and harmonized into one eternally present spirit, not only for the boy in Book I but also for the man in Book VIII who has reached "a time of greater dignity" (624).

An ordered chronology would be at odds with the idea of a harmonizing pulse because pulse is an unending restatement that recognizes no distinction between past, present, and future. The repetition, as Lindenberger terms it, of the return to boyhood in a quest for the restoration of his powers is a pattern that "recognizes no beginning, middle, or end." This pattern can also be seen as a repeated expansion into eternity or integral time and contraction into the temporal world or chronometric time. It is an alternation, "between moments of high and low intensity, between fealty to the demands of an 'inner' reality and eternity and the demands of the
that is itself a kind of pulse. The entire poem, by means of its continual reach for harmony, becomes itself a single expression of harmony.

Landscapes within the poem suggest a visual or spatial way to clarify the temporal position of *The Prelude*. One is the level desert across which the tide of chronometric time progresses inexorably; the other is Mount Snowdon, the site of timeless revelation. The flatness of the desert naturally accommodates the linear progression of chronometric time from past to future; not surprisingly, this kind of temporality is often called *linear time*. Just as there are many directions besides the horizontal, so there are many kinds of *nonlinear time*, but the kind most useful as a contrast is the precise contrary of linear time, *vertical time*, which represents a perpendicular intersection of the horizontal temporal plane; it corresponds visually to Mount Snowdon and conceptually to what takes place there. Musicologist Jonathan Kramer describes nonlinear time as "containing a complex of events" comprehended by the right side of the brain rather than a "sequence of events" comprehended by the left, or analytical, side of the brain. Vertical time, in its "attempt to deny past and future in an all-encompassing present," can be equated with harmony, so that *The Prelude* can be seen as rising from the linear plane to take place in or attempt to create an experience of vertical time.

Ascent on the vertical plane is perhaps an escape route, for Wordsworth's past and future were more like boundaries than horizons. Linear time began, tradition tells us, when Adam and Eve ate the apple and became mortal: the infinity of human life was transformed by that terrible mistake into a linear progression from birth to death that every mortal must follow willy-nilly. The poem itself, despite efforts to continue its life as a continuous performance, is destined to have a definitive beginning and
end, if only after the poet's death. By prophesying destruction, the shell illustrates how the poem's situation represents the poet's: like the poet, the living expression of the shell is mortal, and it is conscious of its own future doom. In addition to the inevitable limits of mortality, there are other limits that bind Wordsworth's linear time at each end, and these are self imposed. As Jonathan Arac suggests,

In response to the failure of his hopes for the revolution in France and its impact on Britain, Wordsworth found it necessary to make a self that could cope with the new conditions of his life. That making of the self and the making of the text of *The Prelude* are thoroughly correlative.

In order to define that self, Wordsworth looks for its origins throughout the poem, but those origins become more a boundary than a resource because they are so elusive; their seeming absence has a limiting force. On the opposite horizon, the timelessness or infinity that is part of the experience of harmony in vertical time becomes a limit on the linear plane because "the froward chaos of futurity" (V.372) is the deluge in the dream or a "devouring sea" (IX.4); the positive outlook of "something evermore about to be" (VI.542) hides temporarily but does not obliterate the fear of the horizon as an abyss. Against Abrams' construction, the spiral movement that "fuses the idea of the circular return with the idea of linear progress," 39 one can posit "the double pull that spoils Wordsworth's circle--the expansion of its end into 'something ever more' and the recession of its origin." 40 The circle, "liable to internal rupture," 41 breaks open and becomes a line defined by a limiting absence at each end. In a life experienced on this horizontal plane, "neither the end nor the origin would exist, but our consciousness of their absence would nevertheless define our life as medial." 42

Where is *The Prelude*--one might ask at this juncture--is it caught on the limited horizontal plane, or ascending the timeless vertical?
The situation of the poem is represented in miniature by the "spots of time" in Book XI, the memories that "with distinct pre-eminence retain/A renovating virtue" (XI.259-60). The eternal images that are the spots of time, one

The single sheep, and the one blasted tree,
And the bleak music of that old stone wall,
The noise of wood and water, and the mist . . . (XI.378-80)

and the other,

. . . the naked Pool,
The Beacon on the lonely Eminence,
The woman, and her garments vexed and tossed
By the strong wind. (XI.313-16)

create "a single present stretched out into an enormous duration, a potentially infinite 'now' that nonetheless feels like an instant," one of Kramer's definitions of vertical time. Although the wind is blowing in each otherwise static image,

The motion is so consistent that we lose any faster or slower motion that might keep us aware of the music's [the spot of time's] directionality. The experience is static despite the constant motion.

Each spot of time represents the poem itself because just as the spot ascends from the horizontal, or "enables us to mount/When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen" (XI.267-68), so the pulse of the entire poem creates harmony in vertical time. Each spot of time is a little story with a beginning and end that fits the definition of linear, but in another sense the progression of the description creates a spot or fixed image that is atemporal and exists in vertical time. As in music, the "linearity of listening," or reading one line and then the next, is used "to destroy the linearity of time." Likewise, the non-chronology of the entire poem creates a pulse only by means of our experience of that nonorder in linear time. In other words, "linearity and nonlinearity are complementary forces." The poem is both becoming and being, and it takes place in linear and vertical
time simultaneously. It is doubtful whether the poem actually creates an experience of vertical time in the reader akin to the timelessness that vertical music is said to bring to its audience; creating an exaggerated comparison is one of the dangers of crossing terminology between two different art forms such as music and poetry. The point is rather that the poem can make more sense to the reader who is aware of the dual nature of time. Most appropriately, Wordsworth's own mode of composition, as described by Dorothy in 1804, provides a visual image of this dual time:

In wet weather he takes out an umbrella, chooses the most sheltered spot, and there walks backwards and forwards; and though the length of his walk be sometimes a quarter or half of a mile, he is as fast bound within the chosen limits as if by prison walls. He generally composes his verses out of doors, and while he is so engaged he_seldom knows how the time slips away, or hardly whether it is rain or fair. [my emphasis]

Despite his motion in linear time, he is bound by self-imposed limits, yet simultaneously he escapes into the timeless world of vertical time by means of his inner performance of The Prelude. When Wordsworth enters the world of The Prelude, he experiences "a real dissociation from the past and future, a now that is eternal even though it is destined to stop." 48

Pursuing the musical imagery in the poem led to the identification of blasts of harmony, which in turn led to a vision of the poem itself as an escape into eternity on the vertical plane that also temporary because it is bound by the linear plane. In expressing the dual nature of time, Wordsworth might have said, like Dylan Thomas, 49

\[
\text{Time held me green and dying} \\
\text{Though I sang in my chains like the sea.}
\]

But he did not say so. Instead of making his paradoxical relation to time his subject, he apologized for the nonlinear development of The Prelude, comparing it to the retrograde motions of a river (IX.8), expressing the need to "start afresh" and "precipitate" its progression (IX.9,10), presumably in
the expected linear manner of an autobiographical work, "on my own earlier life." Near the finish of the 1805 version, he wrote in a letter:

If when the work shall be finished it appears to the judicious to have redundancies they shall be lopped off, if possible. But this is very difficult to do when a man has written with thought, and this defect, whenever I have suspected it or found it to exist in any writings of mine, I have always found it incurable. The fault lies to deep, and is in the first conception.

Redundancy as a nineteenth-century defect or fault is transformed by twentieth-century discussion into repetition, alternation, and pulse, the means whereby the poem enters another dimension characterized by harmony and vertical time. Like Kramer, whose "focus is more on the ways we understand Beethoven's music now than what it meant in 1800," the modern reader who cannot help scrutinizing nineteenth-century poetry through lenses of Dylan Thomas and recent theories of time will produce a perspective that Wordsworth might have found unrepresentative of his work or even contrary to his intentions. The poem can be seen to encompass the dual nature of time, both being and becoming, but the synthesis is a shifting, uneasy one. Wordsworth's trying but never quite achieving a lasting "blend" constitutes his relevance for Bloom, and for Arac, that Wordsworth's "position was never wholly 'made up' or composed but always liable to displacement" is "the interest of his situation." Rather than venturing to assume that we understand intentions that Wordsworth hardly understood himself, today's critics find meaning in Wordsworth's position or situation. Of course contemporary perspectives can be produced about anything, by virtue of the simple fact that they are produced by contemporaries, but it takes the genius of a Beethoven or a Wordsworth to make relevant and interesting new perspectives possible.
NOTES

16. Lindenberger, p. 71.
17. Ibid., p. 69.
23. Ibid., p. 134.
27. Ibid., p. 274.
29. Ibid.
31a. Ibid.
33. Christopher Wordsworth, Jr., to Joshua Watson, June 14, 1850, in *ibid.*, p. 539.
34. Lindenberger, p. 142.
35. Ibid., p. 191.
37. Ibid., p. 16.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid., p. 74.
44. Ibid., p. 19.
45. Ibid., p. 219.
46. Ibid., p. 19.


52. Kramer, p. 4.


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