THE CONCEPTIONS OF NATURE IN THE POETRY OF

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH AND MATTHEW ARNOLD

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

THE CONCEPTIONS OF NATURE IN THE POETRY OF
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This essay compares Wordsworth's and Arnold's conceptions of nature and suggests reasons for the differences found.

Both poets were keenly sensitive to the loveliness of the external world, and found in nature a soothing and healing power for the troubled mind of man. Both derived conscious enjoyment from the beauties of nature, and found in nature permanence, peace, and tranquillity.

The fundamental difference in their doctrines of nature is in their conceptions of abstract nature. To Wordsworth, nature was a benevolent force which actively participated in the moral and spiritual growth of man. His was a doctrine of joy and optimism. To Arnold, nature was a great and indifferent force which man must transcend. His was a doctrine of stoicism and pessimism.

The differences are mainly due to the progress in science and thought from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century.

Wordsworth inherited the eighteenth century belief in a benevolent and all-powerful Deity, who manifested His goodness in nature. By a synthesis of this philosophy, the assumptions of associationist psychology, and his own experience, he explained the moral and spiritual growth of man.

Wordsworth believed that through love of nature, man was led to love of his fellow man and of God. He believed that
nature participated in man's moral growth, through the senses, with the aid of some supro-eneguous power - a 'supradds soul', an 'auxiliary light', which he believed to be the imagination. Through semi-mystical and visionary experiences, he became convinced of the unity between the soul of man and the soul of nature. This was the source of his joy in nature.

Arnold took for granted many of the assumptions of nineteenth century science regarding nature. Through these, and his own search for truth, he lost faith in a benevolent force in the universe. He saw no evidence of harmony or teleological purpose in nature. He found in nature only an edifying example of tranquillity, steadfastness, and stoicism. The central tenet of his doctrine was of the superiority of man over nature, through his reason and conscience.

On a broader basis, the change in attitude to nature between Wordsworth and Arnold is due to the changed conception of man's place in the Chain of Being. In the eighteenth century, man held the most important earthly place in nature's Chain of Being. In the nineteenth century, he lost that place. The Industrial Revolution created a materialist world in which only the fittest survived economically. Biologists and zoologists reduced man to the level of all other creatures. He lost his favoured place in the Chain of Being, and for him nature lost all order and purposiveness. A pessimistic view of nature was logical and common.
... he, who in his youth,
A daily wanderer among woods and fields
With living Nature hath been intimate,
... doth receive
In measure only dealt out to himself,
Knowledge and increase of enduring joy
From the great Nature that exists in works
of mighty Poets.

The Prelude, V, 586-595.
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1. Historical Background.
2. William Wordsworth.
3. Matthew Arnold.
Distinctly opposing views of nature underly the poetry of William Wordsworth and Matthew Arnold. Arnold recognized Wordsworth's pre-eminence among the many English poets of nature, and found in his poetry comfort and consolation and joy, though, like us, he was unable to accept Wordsworth's assumptions about nature. Arnold's own conception of nature is more intellectually acceptable to us, though it lacks the Wordsworthian joy and optimism. It is the purpose of this paper to enunciate and compare the conceptions of nature in the two poets and to suggest probable reasons for their differences.

Wordsworth's poetry was, among other things, the culmination of the eighteenth century cult of nature. One scholar, after a thorough study of the nature poetry between Pope and Wordsworth, has found that

The love of nature was awake in the hearts of men.
Their eyes were open to her beauty. Their ears drank in her harmonies. Their spirits were conscious of her higher gifts. Before Wordsworth most of his characteristic thoughts on nature had received fairly explicit statement.  

Wordsworth's conception of nature was based on the eighteenth century philosophy which he inherited and modified. At the time of his birth in 1770 the universe was regarded as the divine work of a great and benevolent creator, Newton had

demonstrated at the close of the previous century that the cosmic spheres and the universe itself were controlled and directed by a universal and fixed law of gravitation. The more men pondered Newton's laws, the more they became impressed with the intricate yet perfect order of the universe.

It seemed to them that this great and wonderful mechanism, with its infinite number of interdependent parts, was set in operation and kept in order by some omnipotent Great Artificer.

The fullness and diversity of the creation was the manifestation of His skill and power. Nature was the clear and sufficient evidence of the Creator. It proceeded from divinity and was itself divinity. Many poets and moralists became nature Deists and looked "through Nature up to Nature's God."

Wherever they looked they found proofs of their preconceived notions of the Master Craftsmen. Thomson in his *Hymn on the Seasons* praises the "force divine."

\[\text{That, ever busy, wheels the silent spheres.}\]

Shaftesbury invoked nature as follows:

\[\text{O mighty Nature! wise substitute of Providence!}
\text{Impowered creatress! Or thou empowering Deity,}
\text{Supreme Creator! Thee I invoke and thee alone adore.}\]

Henry Brooke believed that,

\[\text{The One grows sundry by creative power,}
\text{The eternal's found in each revolving hour;}
\text{Th' immense appears in every point of space}
\text{Th' unchangeable in nature's varying face,}
\text{And Deity in every atom shrined.}\]

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1 Lines 29-30.
3 Hymn to Universal Beauty, Lines 3-8, as quoted in E. Bernbaum, Selections from the Pre-Romantic Movement, p. 88.
Similar sentiments were also expressed by Dyer, Young, Akenside, Pope, and others of this period. To all, the creation was itself the basis for faith, and proof of the literal truth of the story of Genesis. The Creator could be intellectually apprehended by all who observed the world about them.

Newton's laws of gravitation were regarded as laws of nature. The new evidence which he brought forward of unity and order in the universe re-awakened interest in the old conception of the creation as a chain of being. The Great Chain of Being was now given new interpretation and new significance. The refurbished chain was composed of an infinite number of beings, extending from the lowest forms of existence at the bottom to the super-natural beings at the top, with an infinite number of intervening gradations. A corollary of this theory was what Professor Lovejoy has called the 'principle of plenitude', i.e., the belief that the Creator manifested His goodness, through the fullness and diversity of the creation. His goodness, it was maintained, impelled Him to create an infinite number and variety of beings; and it was better for the Creator to give life, even if for only a short time, than to withhold it. "Goodness" meant a fullness and diversity of finite being. If a being merely existed, it was good. By this principle even the existence of animals 'red in tooth and claw' could be accounted for. Thus a place was found in the Chain of Being for every conceivable form of creation; and the existence of every form was justified by the principle of plenitude.

That which appeared to be or to produce evil or pain appeared so only because finite man was unable properly to comprehend the infinite plan. That which he did not understand, he was to accept as part of the great plan which required such elements to complete its design. Shaftesbury, one of the most influential philosophers of the time, speaks for such a faith,

Unable to declare the use or service of all things in this universe, we are yet assured of the perfection of all, and of the justice of that economy to which all things are subservient, and in respect of which things seemingly deformed are amiable; disorder becomes regular, corruption wholesome, and poison prove healing and beneficial.

These philosophers and poets followed their abstract theories of a divine and benevolent Providence to the logical conclusion, as expressed by Pope,

All discord, harmony not understood;
All partial evil, universal good;
And, spite of pride, in erring reason's spite,
One truth is clear, \( \text{WHATEVER IS, IS RIGHT} \).

Social and political implications followed naturally. The harmony and order so apparent in the physical world provided example and instruction for the social world. The laws of church and state were the social counterpart of nature's divine example. Since 'whatever is, is right', it was man's

duty to 'follow nature.' Happiness was open to all who lived according to nature, and

To live according to nature, i.e., to co-operate with the general disposition and tendency of the present system of things. It was generally accepted that "the present system of things" was, like the universe, divinely ordered, and therefore complete and impossible of improvement; i.e., it was, to use the characteristic phrase of this age of optimism, "the best of all possible worlds."

Men, of course, had a place in the Chain of Being—above the animals and slightly below the angels. His possession of the faculty of reason distinguished him from the animals below him and entitled him to their service,

For as creation's ample range extends, The scale of sensual, mental powers ascends; Mark how it mounts, to man's imperial race, 

Without this just gradation could they be Subjected these to those, or all to thee? The powers of all subdued by thee alone, Is not thy reason all these powers in one?

Though there were opinions to the contrary, it was generally taken for granted that man was "eminently raised above the vast creation."

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1 Samuel Johnson, *Rasselas*, Chapter XXII.
The doctrine of the static and immutable Chain of Being was, however, in many respects a gospel of hopelessness. If the universe, and by implication, the existing social order, were perfect, and the imperfections in nature a necessary part of the universe, there seemed little hope for improvement or advancement. Many thinkers reacted against and rejected such an interpretation of the Divine Plan. If God was eternal and all-powerful, they thought, His power and goodness must be manifested in creation through all time, and such continuous creativity could be possible only in a dynamic universe. The insatiably creative God could best reveal His omnipotence and omnipresence through continuous creation. It was concluded that He was ever at work creating new forms in the infinite chain; and that every addition to the chain raised the status of those already in it,

Not content,
By one exertion of creative power
His goodness to reveal; through every age,
Through every moment up the track of time
His parent-hand with ever-new increase
Of happiness and virtue has adorned
The vast harmonious frame:......
Forever leads the generations on
To higher scenes of being; while supplied
From day to day with His enlivening breath,
Inferior orders in succession rise
To fill the void below.1

Thus the world changed from one of being to one of becoming; and with the change come hopes of progress for man in the universe.

Since the fullness of the creation was its greatest good, some thought that man could best imitate God by assisting in

1 Akenside, Pleasures of Imagination, II, 337-350.
the creation through the creative faculty which God had given him. That is, he could increase the sum of things by adding something of his own to the creation, and thus assist the Creator in fulfilling the Divine Plan; and in doing so man could perhaps better his own position on earth.

It had long been obvious to many that man did not live in the freedom, love, and virtue intended by God. This, however, was not considered to be the fault of God nor of nature, but of the institutions which man had devised for himself. Men who had not been corrupted by bad education, false religion, and faulty social institutions, seemed to live in a natural state of freedom and felicity approaching the bliss of Eden. The explorations and discoveries made by Captain Cook and other voyagers reawakened interest in the life of savages and natives of distant lands. It was believed by many that these savages in their primitive society lived in the natural state of harmony intended by God for man. The 'Noble Savage' and his life of unrestricted freedom was contrasted with that of 'civilized' man and his system of government. Rousseau and other sentimentalists wove a halo of purity and innocence around the savage and simple rural folk. Their 'natural' system of life was obviously that intended for man. Many became convinced that man could progress towards perfection by abolishing the evils of his own governing institutions. Nature then changed from a regulating principle and became mainly a liberating principle. Ideas regarding
'natural' and 'inalienable' Rights of Man, in part inspired both the American and the French Revolutions, both of which were interpreted by many as movements towards a State of Nature.

In England the French Revolution with its motto of "liberty, equality, fraternity" seemed to herald a new golden age of peace and happiness for all:

The Revolution was therefore a notable encouragement to all who believed in change and the power of human endeavour.¹

To the politician Fox the fall of the Bastille was "the greatest event .... that ever happened in the world, and how much the best!"² and to the young poet Wordsworth,

Not favoured spots alone, but the whole earth,
The beauty wore of promise....
Not in Utopia...But in....the world
Of all of us.³

Thus in Wordsworth's time it was thought that the laws of nature could be applied to the politics of man to cure social ills - that the way to human perfection was through the laws of nature. It was thought that Providence was working through nature's constant and uniform laws for the well-being of the whole universe and for the welfare of man in particular.

³ The Prelude, XI, 117-18; 140-3. Quotations from Wordsworth are from the Oxford Edition of Wordsworth's Poetical Works, ed. T. Hutchinson. The letter P. will hereafter be used as an abbreviation for The Prelude. Quotations from the early text (1805-6) of The Prelude are from the E.de Selincourt edition and are referred to as the A text. Thus L.A XIIX refers to book thirteen of the 1805-6 text of The Prelude.
These assumptions of order and purpose in the universe underlay Wordsworth’s conception of nature. An optimistic view of nature was common and acceptable.

By Arnold’s time the laws of nature were regarded as inimical to the interests of men, and a force against which he had to strive in order to rise above his brute creation. From a politically liberating principle, nature had become a sanction for economic competition. This change in interpretation of the laws of nature was due in part to the failure of the French Revolution, but mainly to the material success of the Industrial Revolution.

Progress in science and invention fostered the Industrial Revolution, which in turn brought a change in the mode of life for the majority of the people, and a corresponding change in thought to fit the new mode of life.

With the progress of the revolution, men’s attitudes to nature underwent a gradual change, so that by the Mid-Victorian period even the injustices of the laws of economics were attributed to nature. People no longer ignored or excused the apparent imperfections in nature. It was asserted that "no good or lovely thing exists in this world without its correspondent darkness."1 Newman’s faith in God was based on a voice speaking in his conscience and his heart, because he could see no evidence of the Creator in the living world.2

2 Apologia pro Vita mea, Chap.V., quoted Ibid., p.1.
Many others who failed to see the Creator reflected in the world were, however, unable to even find Him in their hearts and consciences as Newman did.

The loss of faith in God, and consequently in a benevolent Deity working in and behind nature, was one of the most significant changes in the attitude toward nature between the time of Wordsworth and Arnold. The reasons for this loss of faith and the changed attitude to nature, lie in the major changes in life and thought in the first half of the nineteenth century.

The first breakdown in faith came with the failure of the French Revolution to achieve what had been hoped of it. Hopes for a natural Eden were shattered by the brutality of the Reign of Terror and the aggression and military dictatorship of Napoleon. These excesses demonstrated that it was not sufficient for man merely to 'follow nature', because apparently some control of the 'natural' impulses was also needed.

England emerged from the Napoleonic wars elated and victorious; but the shouts of victory were soon replaced by murmurs of discontent. As in most wars, the aftermath was in many respects worse than the actual conflict. Thousands of soldiers were released to seek work, when there was no work to be found. Many farmers, deprived of their livelihood by the Enclosure Acts, swelled the ranks of the unemployed. The clatter of new machinery for the manufacture of textiles and other goods drowned out the whirr of the cottage
spinning wheels, and the spinners were robbed of their source of income.

An increase in population and a series of bad harvests caused more poverty and misery. In the period of the 'Hungry Forties' relief for the destitute and unemployed could be obtained only in workhouses, or 'Bastilles' as they were popularly called. *Punch* of the period, in a cartoon entitled "The Poor Man's Friend," depicts Death standing by the bedside of a poor man who claps his hands in supplication to the cadaverous figure.¹ Apparently for some, death had replaced nature as the friend of man.

The thousands who flocked into the new factory towns seeking work were crowded into hastily built houses near the factories, with little or no provision for their welfare. The conditions under which they lived may be summed up in the phrase of Carlyle as "the Universal Stygian quagmire of British Industrial Life."²

Though reforms did come about, the system which was responsible for conditions requiring reform remained on the whole unchanged. The new Middle Class entrepreneur did not wish to interfere with the laws of economics, but preferred to exercise his humanitarianism in contributing to charities for the relief of the poor, who as a class were considered a necessary part of the economic system. He took refuge

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behind the various theories that attempted to account for
and explain conditions in the new industrial world. The most
important of these theories are embodied in the works of
Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, David Ricardo,
and Thomas Malthus.

Malthus examined "the constant tendency in all animated
life to increase beyond the nourishment prepared for it,"¹
with particular reference to man. He held that population
tended to increase faster than food supply, and that epidemics,
diseases, wars, and famine were therefore natural and neces­
sary checks on population growth. Any improvement in working
class conditions would tend to encourage marriage, and bring
an increase in population. The food produced would then
have to be divided among more people; more laborers would be
competing for food and work; and food would go up in price
and wages would drop. This constant tendency to over-popu­
lation kept a large number of the people in a constant state
of distress, and prevented any permanent melioration of their
condition. Nature could provide for only a certain number of
her creatures, and any increase beyond this number meant mis­
ery and hardship. Malthus' description of the principle of
population could scarcely be reconciled with the idea of a
benevolent Deity behind nature.

Malthus' theory was supplemented by Ricardo's 'iron law' of wages, which was based on the principles of supply and demand. Ricardo put forward the theory that because of the inexorable laws of supply and demand, wages were governed by the ratio of the supply of workers to the demand for them. With this went the belief that only a certain fixed proportion of the nation's money could be available for wages, and that the total number of workers had to share this sum. The cost of a laborer was the amount needed to keep him alive and able to work. If the cost went above this subsistence level, more workers would swell the ranks of labor, and again reduce all to the lowest level.

The influence of these doctrines, many of which were regarded as 'natural' laws, must be considered in the light in which they were interpreted by those who found them useful to protect or justify their own privileged position.

Neither Malthus nor Ricardo really taught the dogmatic despair which was generally received as the lesson of their philosophies...their ideas, when adopted by other minds, hardened into a rigid and inexorable theory from which both of them would have shrunk.

The theories of Smith, Bentham, and Mill militated against government interference in the economic sphere. It was assumed that man was by nature selfish and would work best for his own welfare, and that if every individual worked for his own ends he would also be working for the good of the community, which was but a collection of self-motivated individ-

Thus God and nature linked the general frame
And bade self-love and social be the same.

Any attempt to interfere with the pursuits of the individual was regarded as interference in the welfare of the community. The good of society, it was thought, depended on free competition; and the most successful individuals were the best citizens. This free enterprise system was regarded as the natural course of man's economic activity. If one fell by the wayside he had only himself to blame, because he was obviously less energetic than his fellow-men, and therefore must suffer the natural consequences of his weakness. If nature was allowed to take its course, the unfit would be weeded out. The mighty law of self-preservation was becoming a new law of nature and society. For the majority there was no escaping the laws of supply and demand. These laws were considered to be inevitable and natural. The Times, commenting on a promise of the French government to provide work for the people, says,

To fulfill such promises is not only beyond the power of any government, but absolutely contrary to the laws of nature itself.

Again, The Times, surveying the East End of London in the throes of an economic depression, comments,

There is no one to blame for this; it is the result of Nature's simplest law!

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3 No date given. Quoted by M. Arnold in Culture and Anarchy, p.189.
The only hope for success against these laws, it was thought, lay in hard work and perseverance on the part of the individual. Man now had to struggle against nature.

In the Puritan piety of the times, riches became virtue and poverty, vice. God favored those who 'got on' in the world, so that material prosperity and spiritual salvation went hand in hand. It was this materialistic interpretation of life that Carlyle so bitterly attacked.

Hudson, the railway king, if popular election be the rule, seems to me by far the most authentic king extant in this world. What the desire of every heart was, Hudson had or seemed to have produced: Scrip out of which profit could be made.

Man was concerned now only with his material welfare in the struggle against nature. The benevolent and divine nature which had once given him spiritual inspiration no longer existed for him. If there was a Deity, he was not to be found in the tendencies of society.

Biology and zoology also contributed to the disillusionment. While economics, and religion, and bitter experience in combination were demonstrating that only the fittest members of society prospered or deserved to prosper, similar evidences of struggle were being noted in physical nature. Lyell in his Principles of Geology, 1833, and Chambers in Vestiges of Creation, 1844, detected an evolutionary and metamorphic process in nature. Their findings prepared the way for Darwin's Origin of Species, 1859, which, with its

1 "Hudson's Statue", Letter Day Pamphlets, p. 225,
mass of evidence, removed practically all doubt about the
growth and development of the physical universe. Darwin
found that all forms of natural life survived by adapting
themselves and overcoming their environments, a process in
which only the fittest survived. It is significant that Dar­
win's interpretation of his data was influenced by Malthus' 

Population:

In October, 1838 ... I happened to read for
amusement 'Malthus on Population', and ... it at once struck me that under these
conditions [struggle for existence] favor­
able variations would tend to be preserved,
and unfavorable ones to be destroyed.

Darwin's theory, with its revelation of indifference,
waste, and even cruelty in the animate world was incompatible
with the idea of a Benevolent Deity. No benevolent God
could be found in the fickleness and cruelty of nature.

Even the traditional source of faith, the Bible, was
questioned. Historians examined the gospels with the cold
logic of scientific research, as they would any other histori­
cal writings, and began to wonder when they were written, and
by whom, and why.

The Bible was put in the witness box and under
cross examination contradicted itself again and again.2

These attacks on the record of revealed religion deprived
many of their least source of faith.

2 D. C. Somervoll, The Victorian Age, Historical Assoc­
iation Pamphlet, No. 107, p. 19.
The Industrial Revolution, Darwin, and the Bible critics destroyed the basis of faith for many, and left them only skepticism, agnosticism, and spiritual despair. This cry of despair from the Nineteenth Century Wasteland may be heard in In Memoriam, written while Tennyson, like his contemporaries, was desperately searching for "the larger hope." It could certainly no longer be found in nature.

Are God and Nature then at strife
That Nature lends such evil dreams?
So careful of the type she seems,
So careless of the single life;

That I, considering everywhere
Her secret meaning in her deeds,
And, finding that of fifty seeds
She often brings but one to bear,

I falter where I firmly trod,
And, falling with my weight of cares
Upon the great world's altar-stairs
That slope thro' darkness up to God,

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all,
And faintly trust the larger hope.

... And he, shall he,
Man, her last work, ...
Who trusted God was love indeed
And love Creation's final law—
Tho' Nature, red in tooth and claw
With ravine, shriek'd against his creed—

... Be blown about the desert dust,
Or seal'd within the iron hills?!

At approximately the same time, John Stuart Mill wrote of nature as follows:

1 LV, 5-20, LVI, 9-20.
Nature impales men, breaks them as if on the wheel, ...burns them to death, ... starves them with hunger, freezes them with cold ... All this, Nature does with the most supercilious disregard both of mercy and of justice, ... no human being ever comes into the world but another human being is literally stretched on the rack for hours or days, not unfrequently issuing in death ... All which people are accustomed to deprecate as 'disorder' and its consequences, is precisely a counterpart of Nature's ways. Anarchy and the Reign of Terror are overmatched in injustice, ruin, and death, by a hurricane and a pestilence.

Chapter II

THE CONCEPTION OF NATURE IN THE POETRY

OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

William Wordsworth, born in 1770, spent a joyous and comparatively uneventful boyhood "compass'd round by mountain solitudes" in the Lakes District of England. The Derwent, "the fairest of all rivers", flowed through the back yard of his home, and made "ceaseless music that composed [his] thoughts."¹

His school days (1778-1787) were spent at Hawkshead school, which he remembered more for the free and natural life than for the instruction given there. He was more interested in his physical recreation than in his studies. Here he dwelt among simple folk, and roamed the woods and hills at will. He derived pure sensuous pleasure from his contacts with nature at this time, when he,

bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides
Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,
Wherever nature led. ²

In his days of maturity he particularly remembered some of his more exciting boyhood experiences in this nature background, such as skating on the lake, trapping woodcocks by moonlight, and even stealing game from other boys' snares-

.... and when the deed was done
I heard among the solitary hills
Low breathings coming after me.... ³

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¹ P. I, 277.
² Tintern Abbey, 68-70.
³ P. I, 321-3.
Ke recalls his fear one evening when he stole a boat and went rowing on the lake. Suddenly a huge black mountain peak upreared its head, and like a living thing seemed to stride after him, until "with trembling oars" he returned the boat. At another time he hung above the raven's nest by knots of grass when "with what strange utterance" the wind blew through his ear.

The rapture of his boyhood experiences, when nature was secondary to his own pursuits, is recaptured by the poet in his reminiscences of it.

Proud and exulting like an untried horse:
We hissed along the polished ice in games.

Nature provided no particular joys of her own; she merely served as background for sports and games. However, as the light-hearted boy went skating, trapping woodcocks, hunting birds' eggs, and boating, the surroundings in which he enjoyed these sports impressed themselves on his memory, and by association with such exciting experiences, came in time to be loved for themselves. As he grew older and his boyish energies subsided, he found that he loved nature for herself. He loved the sun and the mountains, the headlong torrents, the lowly plains, and their flowers and unassuming brooks, the sailing clouds, the warm fields, and the sheltering woods. In this

1 P. I, 357-400.
2 P. I, 326-39.
3 P. I, 430-4.
time of "aching joys" and "dizzy raptures" nature became
"all in all", and he found a new delight in beauty for its
own sake,

.... drinking in a pure
Organic pleasure from the silver wreaths,
Of curling mist, or from the level plain
Of waters coloured by impending clouds.
....gathering as it seemed,
Through every hair-breadth of that field of light.
New pleasure like a bee among the flowers.

At this time all his thoughts were "steeped in feeling," and
he felt "the sentiment of Being spread o'er all." He now
found joy in communion with nature, and all that he beheld
"respired with inward meaning." 

From Hawkshead he went to Cambridge, where he was in
general "an idler among academic bowers." His vacations from
university were noteworthy events in his life. In his first
summer vacation he returned to Hawkshead and to nature. The
experiences of this summer renewed and deepened the influences
of nature on his growing imagination. One event in parti-
cular he held significant to his future development. As he
was returning home at sunrise from a night of "dancing,
gaiety, and mirth", on a morning as "glorious as e'er I had
beheld", the sight of the sea, the shining mountains, and the
dew-sparkling meadows, coupled with the melody of the birds,
struck into his soul with never-forgotten force.

1 P. I, 563-66, 578-80.
2 P. II, 399 and III, 132.
My heart was full: I made no vows, but vows
Were then made for me; ... that I should be ...
A dedicated spirit. On I walked
In thankful blessedness, which yet survives.¹

In the next summer vacation (1789) he visited his sister
at Penrith,

Now, after separation desolate
Restor'd to me.

Here he and his sister, and her friend Mary Hutchinson, whom
he was later to marry, rambled over the paths and fields and
through the woods and over crags and mountain-sides, enjoying
the beauties of nature "and youth's golden gleam."² In this
summer he completed and dedicated to Dorothy a descriptive
poem (An Evening Walk) which he had sketched out during his
first vacation. The poem shows a sensitivity to nature, which
however, is spoiled in the expression. The poem is in rhymed
couplets in the eighteenth century tradition, with all its
worst evils of conventional 'poetical' style and diction.

The Bastille in Paris had fallen in July, and when Words­
worth returned to Cambridge "he found the University thrilled
by the first act of the French Revolution."³ During that year
the events in France were closely followed by all of Europe,

Europe at that time was thrilled with joy
France standing on the top of golden hours,
And human nature seeming born again.⁴

¹ E. IV, 323-38.
² E. VI, 200-236.
⁴ E. VI, 339-41.
At the end of the term, i.e. in the summer vacation of 1790, Wordsworth and his friend Robert Jones determined to make a walking tour of the Continent, particularly to visit the Alps. Wordsworth had some misgivings about slighting his studies to do this, and about the 'censures and ill-omening' of his guardians.

But nature then was sovereign in my mind,
And mighty forms, seizing a youthful fancy,
Had given a charter to irregular hopes. 1

No doubt the youthful travellers were somewhat thrilled at the prospect of visiting France while such exciting events were taking place, but Wordsworth's interest was in the countryside through which they travelled, rather than in the people. Though he participated in the celebrations of the French people, he did not yet understand the full implications of the revolution, and so remained an outsider:

A stripling, scarcely of the household then
Of social life, I looked upon these things
As from a distance... the ever-living universe,
Turn where I might, was opening out its glories,
And the independent spirit of pure youth
Called forth, at every season, new delights
Spread round my steps like sunshine o'er green fields. 2

After graduation from Cambridge, he went to London, but even there, "amid those overflowing streets," the spirit of nature was still upon him, and he found "composure and ennobling harmony" in the great city where he spent the winter months. 3

1 P. VI, 333-35.
2 P. VI, 766-78.
3 P. VII, 765-770. See also his Sonnet: Composed Upon Westminster Bridge.
He passed most of the following summer enjoying the natural beauty of Wales, with his friend Robert Jones. His formal education was now completed, but he had not yet any definite occupation or vocation. Restless and unoccupied, he returned to France with the professed intention of learning French to qualify himself as a tutor, or, more likely, as Mr. Legouis suggests,

Such was the excuse beneath which he concealed the twofold desire of continuing his roving life and revisiting the country which had already charmed him by its cheerful gaiety, and was beginning to inspire him with its revolutionary zeal.1

In France he associated with a group of officers, one of whom became his particular friend. Wordsworth and Captain Michel Beaujouy, a patriot to the revolutionary cause, were, for a time, inseparable companions. They held frequent and lengthy discourses

.... about the end Of civil government, and its wisest forms. ....we added dearest themes— Man and his noble nature, as it is The gift which God has placed within his power, ....sw in rudest men, Self-sacrifice the firmest, generous love, And continence of mind, and sense of right, Uppermost in the midst of fiercest strife.2

Finally, under the influence of this man, he saw the Revolution as the promise of a new world of freedom, peace, and justice for all mankind. He ardently embraced the cause,

1 The Early Life of Wordsworth, p. 192.
2 P. IX, 322-89.
and had he not been "dragged by a chain of harsh necessity" back to England, he might have given up his life for humanity. Nature had now surrendered to humanity first place in his heart and mind.

His new love and faith underwent severe trials after he returned to England. The first shock came early in 1793, when England declared war on France. It was a bitter blow, but his hopes and faith in the final goal overcame his patriotism, and he continued to cheer the triumphs of the revolutionaries, even when their victories were at the expense of English lives. Then the Reign of Terror broke forth with all its excesses, and "the goaded land waxed mad." It was a time of deepest grief and despair for those,

Whose souls were sick with pain of what would be Hereafter brought in charge against mankind.

Even through this night of doubt and sorrow he excused the course of events, and clung to his hopes. He remained steadfast to the cause until the French lost sight of all which they had struggled for and "changed a war of self-defence for one of conquest" — an outrage which Wordsworth made no attempt to defend. He could no longer condone the course of events, but for a time clung desperately to his faith in the abstract idea or theory of the revolution. Under the influence of Godwinian theories, he attempted to explain the

1 P. X, 152-54; 229-30.
2 P. X, 395-6.
3 P. XI, 206-7.
revolution in terms of reason. Like Godwin and other rationalists, he set up the individual intellect as the sole guide for action. He found, however, that though the intellect could rationalize the turn of events, it could not make them morally acceptable for him. He called his theories to account, and questioned the premises on which they were based, tested and re-tested them, and found them wanting. In this moral crisis he

...... toiled intent
To anatomise the frame of social life;
Yea, the whole body of society
Searched to its heart... calling the mind,
Suspiciously to establish in plain day
Her titles and her honours... till demanding formal proof
And seeking it in everything, I lost
All feeling of conviction and, in fine,
Sick, wearied out with contrarieties,
Yielded up moral questions in despair.
This was the crisis of that strong disease,
This the soul's last and lowest ebb; I drooped
Deeming our blessed reason of least use
Where wanted most....

This was the turning point in his doctrine. Disillusioned, depressed, and bewildered, he turned temporarily from the unstable world of men and his amoral political theories to the abstract world of mathematics, where the disturbances from human will and power could not reach him—perhaps immutable and eternal truths could be found only in the abstract world.

At this critical juncture, his sister intervened and gave him new life and hope. Under the triple influence of

1 P. XI, 279-309.
2 P. XI, 321-3.
her and Coleridge and nature, his despondency was overcome and his mind restored. In the quiet of the Quantock hills he found peace and relief and comfort, and time to reflect far from "the weariness, the fever, and the fret." Here he re-established contact with his former self ("my true self") and returned

To those sweet counsels between head and heart Whence grew .... genuine knowledge.1

He now realized that in exalting the reason as a sole judge of action, he had failed to recognize the feelings and higher instincts of mankind. Through his disillusionment in the French Revolution he found the true value of human instincts, passions, sympathies, and intuition. He recalled and noted anew that the shepherds and dalesmen owed their serenity and nobility of character to something much deeper and more reliable than mere intellect.2

He rediscovered the beauties of nature and found them more refreshing and salutary than ever, in contrast with the world of cold and dispassionate reason, from which he had just been rescued. He recalled his youthful ecstasies and joys in nature, and his early experiences of spiritual rapture when he had transcended thought and "felt a presence" and "a sense sublime," when,

the earth
And common face of nature spake to me
Rememberable things.....3

2. P. XIII, 165-75.
These early feelings about nature were only now, in the refining light of experience and the calm of contemplation, beginning to take on significance. The chastened spirit began at last "to see into the light of things." He found an inner identity of his own soul and the soul of nature. He now perceived a spiritual unity between man and nature; the 'something' that "rolls through all things" was also working in the mind of man. He linked the past and present, and now realized that his happy boyhood and youth had been the true life for him. His period of despair had been the period of reliance on reason, when he had cut off his heart.

"From all the sources of her former strength," He thus found that his source of joy was in nature. He once again felt himself a part of nature, interfused with her by an immutable and permanent Presence ("the soul of all the worlds"). Under this now-recognized "never failing principle of joy", his life took on new meaning. His poetic activity burst forth into full flood with his great hymn of thanksgiving to nature, written near Tintern Abbey.

This intuition of the unity of all life in and through nature lends the poetry of Wordsworth its unique quality. It was the foundation of his optimism and intense joy in nature, and of his doctrine of nature as applied to the moral and spiritual growth of man. It prompted him to write "On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life" to show their inter-
relation and interdependence. He endeavoured to show how nature, through developing the spiritual and moral life, leads to man's love of God and of his fellow men.

To rationalize his belief in the beneficence of nature, Wordsworth drew on the assumptions of associationist psychology as expounded by David Hartley. Hartley maintained that our ideas and moral character are not innate but are built up through the association of contiguous or successive sensations with one another. According to Hartley, the primary sensations are transmuted into 'purer' forms of thought, first into ideas of a simple sort, and then into more complex ones.

Our passions or affections can be no more than aggregates of simple ideas united by association. For they are excited by objects, and by the incidents of life.

Now these pleasures and pains [of virtue and vice] by often recurring in various combinations, and by being variously transferred upon each other, from the great affinity between the several virtues and their rewards, with each other; also between the several vices, and their punishment, with each other; will at last beget in us a general, mixed, pleasing idea and consciousness, when we reflect upon our own virtuous affections or actions; a sense of guilt, and an anxiety when we reflect on the contrary; and also raise in us love and esteem of virtue, and hatred of vice in others.

Wordsworth subscribed in large part to these theories of sensation, but did not attempt to explain everything in such

1 Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations. 1791.
terms. Indeed, as will be shown below, the essential part of his philosophy is based on concepts entirely outside the sphere of sensational psychology.

He believed that there was some well-intentioned "overseeing power", a "dark inscrutable workmanship" working through nature to mould his character. If this were so, it gave moral significance to his above-mentioned boyhood experiences in nature:

How strange that all
The terrors, pains, and early miseries,...interfused
Within my mind, should e'er have borne a part....
in making up
The calm existence that is mine when I.
Am worthy of myself! Praise to the end!
Thanks to the means which Nature deigned to employ;
Whether her fearless visitings, or those
That came with soft alarm, ... or she may use
Severer interventions, ministry
More palpable, as best might suit her aim. 1

His explanation here of the process or means of moral growth is similar to Hartley's theory of moral instruction through pleasure and pain. In applying Hartley's theory to nature, Wordsworth believed that the fear or joy associated with certain experiences in nature impressed the natural objects or scene associated with that experience on the memory, where it could be called forth to stimulate the imagination, which in turn softened the affections. He believed that even when the joy itself was gone,

The scenes which were a witness of that joy
Remained... Depicted on the brain ... and thus
By the impressive discipline of fear,
By pleasure and repeated happiness,
... end by force

1 P. I, 344-56. See also Three years she grey... my italics.
Of obscure feelings representative
Of things forgotten, these same scenes so bright,
So beautiful, so majestic in themselves,
Though yet the day was distant, did become
Habitually dear, and all their forms
And changeful colours by invisible links
Were fastened to the affections. 1

Wordsworth asserted that natural objects in themselves
played a large part in building up the moral being - specifi­
cally, in enlarging the sympathies and affections. He
speaks, for example, of his return one evening across a
shadowy lake after an all-day excursion with a number of com­
panions. One of the party, "the minstrel of the troop", was
taken ashore near his home, and the future poet and his com­
panions rowed off gently, listening to his friend playing
the flute,

    oh, then, the calm.
    And dead still water lay upon my mind
    .... and the sky
    Never before so beautiful, sank down
    Into my heart, and held me like a dream! 2

Recalling such scenes, and other experiences in nature, he
says,

    Thus daily were my sympathies enlarged
    Refined or strengthened, ... the senses trained
    To nice observance and the mind to thought. 3

The strengthening and refining of the affections and sym­
pathies by natural objects and events further enhanced the
value of those natural objects in the youth's mind and heart,
and prompted him to closer observation and greater love of
nature.

1 P. I, 599-612. My italics.
2 P. II, 170-174.
3 P. II,A 181-3,.B3 variant, p.50 de Selincourt.
Wordsworth believed that love of nature led to love of man. He tells us that in boyhood he first loved man— not for man's own sake, but for the surroundings in which he first beheld him ("his presence in his own domain").

Shepherds, dwellers in the valleys, men
Whom I already loved;— not verily
For their own sakes, but for the fields and hills
Where was their occupation and abode.¹

Elsewhere, he speaks of the shepherds on the hills, "glorified by the deep radiance of the setting sun."² Hence he owed to nature his early love and reverence for the human form and human nature.

Later, in his period of passionate devotion to nature, the love of nature led him on to love of man through the fancy and imagination. Nature and her objects provided the stimulus for the fancy ("this new power"). The elder-tree, the yew, a foxglove, a wet rock, were all subjects with which his fancy played, and

Engrafted far fetched shapes on feeling bred
By pure imagination:... and with her ready pupil turned
Instinctively to human passions.³

The yew tree had its ghost, the foxglove was transformed by the fancy into a dejected mother surrounded by her thoughtless children, and the wet rock shining in the sun became a burnished silver shield suspended over a knight's tomb. Thus

¹ Michael, 23-26.
² P. VIII, 256-59.
³ P. VIII, 422-5.
nature led him on to think of man and human passion. Man outwardly and inwardly contemplated became for him "of all natures, crown, though born of dust."  

After the storms and stresses of the French Revolution, he was led back to the love of man again, largely through the ministry of nature. The peace and harmony he found in nature composed his mind, and provided an example of enduring things. By this display of permanence and order, as compared to the "mean and vulgar works of man," nature trained the mind to meekness and humility, until it sought

In men, and in the frame of social life,  
What e'er there is desirable and good  
Of kindred permanence.  

He was thus tutored to look with feelings of fraternal love upon the quiet and unassuming objects and workings of nature.

Thus moderated, thus composed, I found  
Once more in men an object of delight  
Of pure imagination, and of love.  

This poet's conception of the ministry of nature to man through boyhood, youth, and maturity can best be summed up in the description and discourse of The Wanderer, who, as a boy, roamed alone among the grand and enduring objects of nature, subject to boyish fears and awe in solitude, but sensitive to nature's power to kindle or restrain his fancy and imagination and his actions.

1 P. VIII, 476-88.  
2 P. XIII, 35-37.  
3 P. XIII, 1-50.
He, many an evening, to his distant home
In solitude returning, saw the hills
Grow larger in the darkness; all alone
Beheld the stars come out above his head,
And travelled through the wood, with no one near
To whom he might confess the things he saw.

So the foundations of his mind were laid
In such communion, not from terror free,
While yet a child, and long before his time,
Had he perceived the presence and the power
Of greatness; and deep feelings had impressed
So vividly great objects that they lay
Upon his mind like substances, whose presence
Perplexed the bodily sense. He had received
A precious gift; for, as he grew in years,
With these impressions would he still compare
All his remembrances, thoughts, shapes, and forms;
And, being still unsatisfied with aught
Of dimmer character, he thence attained
An active power to fasten images upon his brain;...

Such was the Boy...1

In youth, he "felt the sentiment of Being spread o'er all"
and found "bliss ineffable" in his communions with nature,
and his moments of insight into the ultimate.

... for the growing Youth

What soul was his, when, from the naked top
Of some bold headland, he beheld the sun
Rise up, and bathe the world in light!
... Far and wide the clouds were touched,
And in their silent faces could be read
Unutterable love. Sound needed none,
Nor any voice of joy; his spirit drank
The spectacle; sensation, soul, and form,
All melted into him; they swallowed up
His animal being; in them did he live,
And by them did he live; they were his life.
In such access of mind, in such high hour
Of visitation from the living God,
Thought was not, in enjoyment it expired.2

Maturity was a time of peace and meditative cheerfulness, when
he contemplated the inner workings of nature, her laws and her
relation to man, and turned to her as an "unerring rule and

1 The Excursion, I, 126-97.
2 The Excursion, I, 197-213.
For, the Man—

Who, in this spirit communes with the Forms
Of nature, who with understanding heart
Both knows and loves such objects as excite
No morbid passions, no disquietude,
No vengeance, and no hatred — needs must feel
The joy of that pure principle of love
So deeply, that, unsatisfied with aught
Less pure and exquisite, he cannot choose
But seek for objects of a kindred love
In fellow-natures and a kindred joy.
Accordingly he by degrees perceives
His feelings of aversion softened down;
A holy tenderness pervade his frame,
.... all his thoughts now flowing, he looks round
And seeks for good; and finds the good he seeks. 2

Supplementary to Wordsworth's belief in nature as a moral force was his conception of nature as a source of spiritual inspiration to man. Critics have tended to explain this aspect of his nature worship by the theory of sensation and association or to classify it as transcendentalism. His doctrine, however, was not entirely transcendental or associationist, but contained elements of both of these theories.

Wordsworth inherited rationalist and sensationalist philosophy and psychology from the eighteenth century. The associationists believed that all knowledge originated in sense, without which the mind was a blank. They believed that ideas were simply sensations compounded, and that the higher sentiments were built up through association of pleasure and pain with certain experiences. Through this theory Words-

1 E. de Selincourt edn. The Prelude, p. 593, II, 41-55 — "rough draft manuscript which is an 'overflow' from Nutting."

2 The Excursion, IV, 1208-24.
worth explained, as described above, the part played by nature in building character. He believed that the inward faculties must first be aroused by "the speaking face of earth and heaven", that the beauteous forms of nature themselves or a recollection of them in association with some memorable incident (such as he refers to as "spots of time"1), prompted sense impressions which were "felt in the blood and felt along the heart." He found in sense the starting point for his spiritual progress from natural to divine. By the "quickening impulse" of sense impressions, he was made more prompt

To hold fit converse with the spiritual world.2

The senses were to him the portals of entry to the spiritual world.

Though these sense impressions stimulated mental activity, they were not for Wordsworth sufficient in themselves, or in association with pleasure or pain, to account for his mystical awareness or intuition of some source of knowledge "beyond the mind of man." He had early experienced "impulses of a deeper birth", and "swellings of the spirit", and had "received convictions" of a suprasensuous and suprarational force or power in the universe. His was a mind sustained

By recognitions of transcendent power...3

1 P. XII, 208-235.
2 P. XIV., 106-8.
3 P. XIV., 74-5.
He usually experienced this transcendent power in scenes of solitude and silence in the out-of-doors. He recalls going out in the early dawn, and sitting alone in a spot overlooking the vale, when he felt "marvellous things" as a "holy calm" overspread his soul and the outer senses were utterly forgotten. On such occasions he "felt a presence";

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  a sense sublime
  Of something ... Whose dwelling is ... the living air,
  And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
  A motion and a spirit that impels
  All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
  And rolls through all things.  
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His intuitions of this transcendent power came to his mind through some faculty above the "toiling reason", a faculty that selected, integrated, and fused disparate sensations, which singly would have had no spiritual significance.

This faculty, "creative sensibility" or "auxiliar light" was for Wordsworth the imagination.

This spiritual love acts not nor can exist
Without imagination.  

Intercourse with the "active universe" soon imparts to the infant this "poetic spirit," which

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  Both like an agent of the one great mind
  Create, creator and receiver both,
  Working but in alliance with the works,
  Which it beholds.  
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1 Tintern Abbey, 93-102
2 E. XIV., 188-189.
3 E. XIV, 287-60. My italics.
Through this power the mind of man was "a thousand times more beautiful than the earth on which it dwells." It was for him a transcendental force which gave unity to all life and bound man to God. It transformed the sense impressions, and as it had, itself, transcendental roots, added to them a light and gleam not in the objects themselves:

An auxiliar light
Came from my mind, which on the setting sun
Bestowed new splendour;...

The sense impressions heightened by this auxiliar light passed into the purer mind, where, fused with other elements of feeling and of thought, they induced a supersensuous insight, which saw into the life of things:

.... that blessed mood,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened:-- that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,—
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

At such moments the soul "put off her veil" and penetrated into the eternal order, and the poet, sensing the oneness of himself with the universe, needed no rational explanation of the relationship of nature, God and man:

In which we behold, and feel, and are,...

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1 P. II, 368-71.
2 Tintern Abbey, 37-39.
3 P. A XIII, 254-55.
Whether or not one regards Wordsworth as a mystic depends on the definition of the term. Granger defines mysticism as 

... that attitude of mind which divines and moves toward the spiritual in the common things of life...  

and Miss Spurgeon defines a mystic as follows:

The true mystic then, in the full sense of the term, is one who knows there is unity under diversity at the centre of all existence, and he knows it by the most perfect of all tests for the person concerned, because he has felt it.

Under either of these definitions, particularly the latter, Wordsworth can certainly be considered a mystic. He is not, however, a mystic in the Eastern sense, despising and rejecting the material world in striving for absorption into Eternity, or seeking mystical annihilation and loss of identity. He seeks rather a vital union with nature and the Eternal, to live a greater life here and now, through recognition of the spiritual in the common things of life.

Wordsworth found his deepest and most abiding joy in the spiritual experiences described above. The real source of his joy and optimism lay in his recognition, not of the beauties of external nature, but of the life in nature, the life which he felt and in which he shared. To him, "the highest bliss that can be known" was for minds that "hold communion with the invisible world." He remembered his ex- 

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2 C. F. E. Spurgeon, Mysticism in English Literature, p. 11.
periences of insight into nature as periods of "consummate happiness," and recalled them, with thanks
And gratitude, and perfect joy of heart.¹

In the consciousness of the unity of all men in one life, diffused through them and in the unity of them with nature through the same all-pervading power, the soul, he said, reaches its highest state of bliss,

Rejoices as in her highest joy...
And passing through all nature rests with God.²

¹ P. IV, 134-5.
² P. A VIII, 833-5.
Chapter III

THE CONCEPTION OF NATURE IN THE POETRY OF MATTHEW ARNOLD

Matthew Arnold, son of the famous Master of Rugby, was born at Laleham, Surrey, in 1822. Little is known of his childhood and early boyhood. In 1833 the Arnold family moved to Fox How, less than a mile from Wordsworth's home, and according to Mr. Chambers,

We have an early record of a tea-party given by Dora Wordsworth... with Wordsworth himself stretched in the grass, and Mrs. Wordsworth reading to some of the elders some of his manuscript poetry.¹

Apparently Matthew was early acquainted with the great poet, whose work he later loved and admired.

At fourteen, he was sent to school at Winchester, and after spending a year there, in 1837 entered Rugby where he spent five years under the supervision of his father. Dr. Arnold is well known for his stern moral teaching and discipline, and for his revitalizing of the classics and ancient history. His pupils left Rugby with a thorough acquaintance with the classics, a strong moral sense, and an ardent social passion.

This rigorous Rugby method is in striking contrast with the Hawkshead system, which allowed its boys so much freedom in work and play:

A race of real children, not too wise,
Too learned, or too good... yielding not
In happiness to the happiest upon earth.²

² P. V, 411-20.
In 1840 Arnold won the school prize for poetry with his "Alaric at Rome." He won a scholarship to Balliol in 1841, and graduated in 1844. He then taught at Rugby until his election to a fellowship at Oriel in 1845.

His first volume of poems, *The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems*, was published in 1849. His sister wrote of them:

> It is the moral strength, or, at any rate, the moral consciousness which struck and surprised me so much in the poems.¹

Matthew had apparently hitherto hidden his seriousness and moral consciousness beneath his superficial banter, good humour, and gaiety.

In 1837 he was appointed secretary to Lord Lansdowne, and moved to London. He was appointed Inspector of Schools in 1851, a post which he held for thirty-five years.

Matthew Arnold was one of the first admirers and critics of Wordsworth to note the "joy whose grounds are true" pervading his poetry. In fact, he attributed much of the greatness of Wordsworth's poetry to this joy.

> Wordsworth's poetry is great because of the extraordinary power with which Wordsworth feels the joy offered to us in nature....
> The source of joy from which he thus draws is the truest and most unfailing source of joy accessible to man....
> Nature herself seems... to take the pen out of his hand, and to write for him with her own bare, sheer, penetrating power.²

One would expect such a tribute to be made only by a man who

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² *Essays in Criticism*, Second Series, pp. 108-9, 112;
also felt that joy in nature. However, there is certainly very little feeling of joy in Arnold's poetry. The prevailing mood of his poetry is rather one of longing, regret, or melancholy, and at the best an austere and rarified stoical pleasure. This does not suggest that Arnold was insensitive to nature. Indeed, he was a true Englishman in his deep appreciation of the beauties of nature. He observed nature closely and accurately, and what he says of his descriptions in *Thyrsis* is applicable to all his nature poetry: "The images are all from actual observation."¹ In many of his letters to his mother, he described the beauties of various places he visited in his inspection tours. His descriptions in *Thyrsis* and *The Scholar Gypsy* have made him the poet of the Cummor countryside, as Wordsworth is of the Lakes District.

> When garden-walks, and all the floor,  
> With blossoms, red and white, offallen May,  
> And chestnut-flowers are strewn—  
> So have I heard the cuckoo's parting cry,  
> From the wet field, through the vext garden trees,  
> Come with the volleying rain and tossing breeze.²

He wrote also of the gleaming "pale, dew-drench'd, half-shut roses", the "burnished sycamores", "gold-dusted snapdragon", and of sweet-William "with its homely cottage smell." He noticed "the fragrant lawn with its cool trees," and the white anemones that "starr'd the cool turf", the "blue, haze-cradled mountains", the "jasmine muffled lattices", and the "darting swallows" and "bright-eyed squirrels."

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² *Thyrsis*, lines 54-59.
Arnold was as sensitive to "the mighty world of eye and ear" as his great Master. His pleasures in nature were mainly derived from sensuous aesthetic perception of external nature. The quiet, peaceful countryside brought him peace and quiet and sensuous delight. At such times nature became the "calm soul of all things" to which he could retreat from "men's impious uproar" and find a peace of thine.

Man did not make, and cannot mar.

There are affinities with Wordsworth in this contrasting of the quiet of nature with the disquietude of man. Wordsworth praised the mountains and the sounding cataracts for keeping him from "little enmities and low desires"; and Arnold looked to the sun, moon, and stars, "too great for haste, too high for rivalry." For Wordsworth, "the morning shines, nor heedeth man's perverseness"; and for Arnold, "... the same vainly-throbbing heart was there, and the same bright calm moon." This conception of nature is of course more characteristic of Arnold than of Wordsworth.

Arnold wished on his "bed of death" to escape the ministrations of doctor and priest and to see once more,

Bathed in the sacred dews of morn
The wide aerial landscape spread--
The world which was ere I was born,
The world which lasts when I am dead.

1 Kensington Gardens, 37-40.
2 P. II, 431.
3 Quiet Work, 8.
4 P. XII, 31-2.
5 A Summer Night, 24-5.
There let me gaze, till I become
In soul with what I gaze on wed!
To feel the universe my home;
To have before my mind--...

The pure eternal course of life,
Not human combats with death.

Thus feeling, gazing, let me grow
Compos'd, refresh'd, ennobled, clear;...1

In this wish for peace and quiet there was also a deep desire
for permanence and a yearning for a sense of oneness with the
universe. Throughout his life Arnold sought some principle
of permanence on which he could rely, some base from which
to combat,

This strange disease of modern life
With its sick hurry, its divided aims.2

He saw in nature the permanence and peace that he desired.
To him, as to Wordsworth, she

Holds up before the mind intoxicate
With present objects, and the busy dance
Of things that pass away, a temperate show
Of objects that endure.3

In this stability and permanence, Arnold thought, lay
the superiority of nature over man. Nature outlasted the
poet and his themes, outlasted man, and outlasted death.
Arnold found this permanence edifying in contrast with the
transitoriness of man. While the "complaining millions" of men
lived in "labour and pain," nature looked on "mild and inscrut-
ably calm."4 Arnold turned to nature for her exemplary and edify-

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3 p. XIII, 29-32.
4 *The Youth of Nature and The Youth of Men*.
ing aspects. The cosmos carried out its operations above the sphere of man, and could provide him with an example of peace and tranquillity:

One lesson, nature, let me learn of thee—
One lesson that in every wind is blown,
... Of toil unsever'd from Tranquillity...
While on earth a thousand discords ring
Still do thy sleepless ministers move on,
Their glorious tasks in silence perfecting...
Labourers that shall not fail, when man is gone.1

By contrast with man who toiled "with aching hands and bleeding feet", nature performed her work effortlessly and unquestioningly, and in so doing achieved a calm and dignity lacking in man.

Unaffrighted by the silence round them,
Undistracted by the sights they see
These demand not that the things without them
Yield them love, amusement, sympathy.2

Arnold also suggested that nature had once striven like man and had similarly felt "that severe, that earnest air", but had finally achieved peace and tranquillity; and he implies that perhaps man too may find the law of his being.3 Arnold merely suggested this without explanation or development. He could carry the thought no further.

Though Arnold emotionally desired to identify himself with nature and assign himself a place in the permanent cosmic processes, he was intellectually unable to do so. His Empedocles, in Empedocles on Etna, was able to do so only in death.

1 Quiet Work.
2 Self-Dependence, 17-20.
3 Morality, last stanza.
Arnold's enjoyment of nature was, on the whole, a mature contemplative pleasure. In him there was none of Wordsworth's ecstatic delight in nature for her own sake. We cannot imagine Arnold abandoning himself to nature's "aching joys" and "dizzy raptures", nor can we picture him, even as a child, sporting "naked in the thunder-shower", as Wordsworth did. Indeed, nature does not seem to have held much appeal for Arnold as a child:

In many people, perhaps with the majority of educated persons, the love of nature is nearly imperceptible at ten years old, but strongly operative at thirty.

In maturity, Arnold lacked Wordsworth's enthusiasm for nature because he lacked his imaginative insight into nature. Arnold's reasoned deductions about nature carry none of the warmth of Wordsworth's emotional convictions. Arnold turned to nature for moral example, and Wordsworth turned to her for moral help. Wordsworth believed that nature actively participated in the moral growth of man through childhood, youth, and maturity. Nature, for him, was not the cold "uncaring and undelighted" stars of Arnold's Empedocles, nor the solemn hills and lonely sky performing their tasks in stoic resignation, but a warm and glowing universe that enlarged and strengthened the sympathies and affections and stimulated the imagination.

Arnold's rare visionary moments brought him little comfort compared to the joy which Wordsworth derived from similar experiences. Arnold saw through nature

That general life, which does not cease,
Whose secret is not joy, but peace.1

To Wordsworth it was nature's privilege

Through all the years of this our life, to lead
From joy to joy....2

Wordsworth had faith that every flower enjoyed the air it breathed, whereas Arnold observed that the solemn hills and lonely sky seemed to bear rather than rejoice.

Though Arnold found great consolation in Wordsworth's expressions of his faith, he could not accept their premises. He implied that Wordsworth's optimism was possible only to one who could avert his eyes from "half of human fate"3 or put by "the cloud of mortal destiny."4 We must admit that there is a certain amount of justice in Arnold's criticism. Wordsworth inherited the 'Divine Providence' philosophy of the eighteenth century and found no reason to question it seriously. In the seclusion of the lakes and mountains, he could ignore many of the darker aspects of human existence. Disregard of evil, however, was not the sole basis for Wordsworth's optimism and faith in nature. He saw nature as a unified whole, with each element transfused and modified by his conception of the

1 Resignation, 191-2.
2 Tintern Abbey, 124-5.
3 Stanzas in Memory of the Author of "Obermann", 53.
4 Memorial Verses, 70.
complete plan. He thought that there was,

... a spirit and a pulse of good,
A life and soul, to every mode of being
Inseparably linked.¹

He apprehended, as did many eighteenth century optimists, the
good in the whole rather than merely the evil in the parts.
He saw that sometimes pain and wrong were conditions con-
tributing to the happiness of the whole; for example, the
poverty of the Cumberland Beggar disposed the villagers to
virtue and true goodness. It was nature's law that no created
things "should exist divorced from good." Wordsworth had found
joy and happiness the only true life for himself. In his per-
iod of bondage to the intellect, he had been shut off from his
highest moods and clearest moments of insight and rapture,
and suffered despair and lethargy of soul. He had re-estab-
lished contact with his true self only through his feelings,
in contact with nature -- the sources of his former joy. Des-
pair had shut off the avenue to truth; joy had re-opened it.
He consciously strove to obtain joy from everything he per-
ceived. Indeed, he considered it part of the poet's art and
duty to provide joy for man:

The poet writes under one restriction only, namely,
the necessity of giving immediate pleasure to a
human being...²

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¹ The Old Cumberland Beggar, 77-79.

² "Preface to Lyrical Ballade", Poetical Works, ed.
Hutchinson, p. 938.
Arnold did not have Wordsworth's faith nor his philosophic optimism. He did not experience Wordsworth's mystic intuitions of the unity of all life in and through nature, and he did not apprehend the

Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles Discordant elements....

"Rigorous teachers" had early purged his faith and shown him "the high white star of Truth", i.e. truth acceptable to the intellect. He could see no proof of harmony or purposiveness in nature, and was left,

Wandering between two worlds, one dead
The other powerless to be born.

In his duties as Inspector of Schools, he saw all the social evils of a materialist society fostered by the Industrial Revolution. He dwelt with the Philistines in their tents, and had too strong a sense of moral responsibility to shut his eyes to the world in which he dwelt. He took for granted the prevailing scientific attitude towards nature, and for him she was certainly not benevolent and good, but merely indifferent and uncaring. In her very indifference lay her inherent cruelty.

Nature with equal mind,
Sees all her sons at play,
Sees men control the wind,
The wind sweep man away:
Allows the proudly-priding and the founderd bark.

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1 P.I, 347-3.
2 Stanzas from the Grand Chartreuse, 67-69.
3 Ibid. 85-6.
4 Empedocles on Etna, 257-61. Other expressions of this constantly recurring theme may be found in Resignation, Consolation and A Summer Night.
Arnold was unable to decide whether the world was a creation from the "mind of One all-pure", or whether it was but "a wild unfathered mass" with no divine origin.\(^1\) He posed the problem, and was prepared for either alternative, but gave no answer. His uncertain stand was indeed a long step from that of the eighteenth century Deists and of Wordsworth.

For Wordsworth, love of nature led to love and esteem of man; but for Arnold, "Nature and man never can be fast friends."\(^2\) One of the central tenets of Arnold's doctrine of nature was the superiority of man over nature:

\[
\text{Know, man hath all which nature hath, but more,}
\]
\[
\text{And in that more lies all his hopes of good.}\]

Nature was cruel, fickle, unthinking, and indifferent, but man could transcend nature through the 'more' that made him unique in the universe, i.e. his Reason and Conscience. Arnold believed that the potentialities of the human spirit could be realized only through culture. He believed that through culture man could fulfill the law of his being and could transcend nature. Man's task then was to direct his energies to social culture. Nature's ministers again provided man with an example,

\[
\text{In their own tasks all their powers pouring}
\]
\[
\text{These attain the mighty life you see.}\]

\(^1\) \text{In Utrumque Paratur.}
\(^2\) \text{In Harmony with Nature, 13.}
\(^3\) \text{Ibid, 5-6.}
\(^4\) \text{Self-Dependence, 27-28.}
Arnold thought that this culture could be best acquired through a knowledge of "the best that has been said and thought in the world."

The study of letters is the study of the operation of human force, of human freedom and activity; the study of nature is the study of the operation of human limitations and passivity. The contemplation of human force and activity tends to heighten our force and activity; the contemplation of human limits and passivity tends rather to check it.

He said elsewhere that the art, and poetry, and eloquence of men who lived long ago had the power of "refreshing and delighting" us, and that they have also a "fortifying, and elevating, and quickening, and suggestive power." Wordsworth found all these powers in nature. Wordsworth's tribute to the Greeks was to the "unenlightened swains of pagan Greece," who, in rural solitude, through the working of the imagination created myths out of their own experiences -- myths which could serve as moral guides, "outward ministers of inward conscience." Arnold's greatest praise was for the most enlightened Greeks.

The inner consolation which Arnold found in men of the past, Wordsworth found in nature. "In these bad days" Arnold's mind was propped by Socrates, "theclearest soul'd of men", and Wordsworth in his


3 *The Excursion*, IV, 774-846.
Of doubts, disputes, distractions, fears\(^1\)

retained his "more than Roman confidence" in humanity through the ministry of nature:

\[\ldots\text{the gift is yours}
\]

Ye winds and sounding cataracts! 'tis yours,
Ye mountains! thine, O Nature!\(^2\)

Arnold would have man imitate nature only in fulfilling his destiny as nature fulfilled hers. Nature provided the example, and even some inspiration. We begin to get some relief from Arnold's almost overwhelming pessimism, as he finds a source of hope and optimism. He looks now to the calm, untroubled heavens, as

A world above man's head, to let him see
How boundless might his soul's horizon be,
How vast, yet of what clear transparency.

\[\ldots\text{How high a lot to fill}
\]

Is left to each man still.\(^3\)

The very striving to transcend nature would raise him above "the brutes who live without a plan." There was no force outside man to which he could turn for aid,

To its own impulse every creature stirs,
Live by thy light, and Earth will live by hers.\(^4\)

Man had "no title from the Gods to welfare and repose"; he had only the possible Socrates in every man and the collective best self of a nation on which he could rely. Man then, during his

\(^1\) Memorial Verses, 43-44.

\(^2\) P.II, 440-7.

\(^3\) A Summer Night, 80-92.

\(^4\) Religious Isolation, 13-14.
sojourn on earth had this hope, plus the consolation of ex-
ternal nature, limited as it was.

In it so small a thing
To have enjoy'd the sun,
To have lived light in the spring...?1

As he reached the end of his journey, borne down the River of Time, man might even acquire, through the example set by nature, peace of mind and soul, and perhaps catch,

Murmurs and scents of the infinite sea.2

2 The Future, 87.
Chapter IV

CONCLUSIONS

Wordsworth and Arnold were both poets of the countryside, who preferred the consoling loveliness of rural nature to the disturbing drabness of town life. They were both keenly sensitive to the external beauties of the physical world; and both described these beauties simply and accurately. They both turned to nature for solitude, peace, and tranquillity, and for its soothing and healing powers away from a work-a-day world. But in their abstract conceptions of nature the two men differed fundamentally. Although both men conceived of nature as the great example of permanence, peace, and stability, they did not hold identical opinions about nature's regard for man or man's proper regard for nature. Wordsworth's was a doctrine of joy and optimism, and Arnold's one of stoicism and pessimism. Each poet's conception of nature was consistent with his own times, and the reasons for the difference in their doctrines of nature are found in the progress of science and thought from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century.

Wordsworth's conception of nature was consistent with his whole philosophy of life. To Wordsworth, nature was "all in all". One part of Wordsworth's love of nature was due to the freedom of his early life, when as a boy he roamed and played in and around the beautiful lakes and mountains of the Lakes District. Another part sprang from the eighteenth century philosophy of the benevolence of nature and the good-
ness and power of the Deity. In his orthodox Christian home, Wordsworth had been taught to love and reverence God as the all-powerful Deity. The feelings and impulses which he early experienced in his own soul were eventually equated with this all-powerful God. He conceived of God as the life in things, the life in and behind nature - a Deity both immanent and transcendent. By a synthesis of personal experience and eighteenth century philosophy and religion, Wordsworth developed his ethical doctrine of benevolence.

His optimism and joy were based on this conviction of benevolence and good in the world, and on his intuition of the oneness of man and nature. The French Revolution destroyed his faith in pure Reason, and renewed and strengthened his faith in Nature. Through this experience, he recognized that nature, the original source of his happiness, was the true source of Truth and Joy for man. He believed that through nature man could be led to love his fellow men and to love, worship, and obey God.

In Wordsworth's time, it was thought that the laws of nature could be applied to the politics of man to cure social ills. Nature was then the lodestar to human perfection and happiness. At such a time an optimistic view of nature was common and acceptable.

By Arnold's time appeal was made to the laws of nature to justify economic depression and human misery. There was a loss of faith in God, and in a benevolent Deity working in and behind nature. Nature, in ceasing to be divine, ceased
to be interested in human welfare, and there was no longer the sense of a common spirit binding man and nature. The laws of economics, science, and experience had exposed nature as indifferent, cruel, and fickle. The law of the physical world, as of the economic, was the law of survival of the fittest.

Arnold did not unquestioningly accept all the contemporary interpretations of nature, particularly the assumptions of the economists and of those who regarded economic theories as 'natural' laws. He did, however, take for granted nature's cruelty and blindness. He found nothing in his observations or experience to make him think otherwise. Indeed his own pursuit of truth had destroyed his faith in a benevolent Deity behind nature. He regarded nature as a great indifferent force, silently and tranquilly fulfilling the inexorable laws of its being, apart from man. In carrying out its task, nature provided man with an example of steadfastness, tranquillity and resignation, but also demonstrated to man that his survival depended on his own efforts. Arnold believed that in a levelled and mechanical universe, man could become superior only through his own efforts, only by striving to transcend his brute creation, i.e. by striving to transcend nature. If man were to survive, he must survive on the higher level to which he was capable of rising, the level to which man in the past had risen. This level could be attained through culture.
Arnold's pessimistic view of nature seems to be the only tenable one for a man awake to his times in the materialistic world created by science and the Industrial Revolution, particularly for a man with Arnold's strong moral conscience.

Between the time of Wordsworth and Arnold, man lost his place in nature and in the Chain of Being. He who had been the chosen creature and colleague of nature had now become her unregarded servant. There was apparently no longer reason or order in nature. When man ceased to be the main link in the Chain of Being, it collapsed, leaving only a disordered heap of uniformly small links. Man was lost to sight in the tangled mass. Nature had lost her order and teleological purpose and had become an overwhelming and irrational external force which man must strive to overcome. Faith in nature was replaced by faith in man, and there was nothing left in nature but her physical adornments—mountains and lakes, grass, trees, and flowers. These continued to give joy and consolation in an otherwise drear universe, but they were no longer evidence of a divine and benevolent Being in and behind nature.
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III: MATTHEW ARNOLD

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