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"Some people," one reads in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, "would like to know whence the poet whose philosophy is in these days deemed as profound and trustworthy as his song is breezy and pure gets his authority for speaking of 'Nature's holy plan'" (Chapter 3). Hardy quotes from the later text of "Lines written in Early Spring," but his distrust still applies to the original 1798 text to be discussed here. Authority in Wordsworth studies changes with our ways of understanding the statements about nature in the poetry. "Lines written in Early Spring" says, ". . . there was pleasure there." Where? In the twigs. To what extent does Wordsworth believe that? The poem, I will argue, is mined with its own doubts, and the reader has the experience of tripping them all.

One representative paraphrase of the answer expected to the question of the poem's final two lines might be: What man has made of man is un-kind. Just as we have become disconnected from external nature, we have become alien to the human nature that should connect us to our kind. The shared life between man and nature upon which this moral proposition rests involves Wordsworth in animism, it seems. But then, other readers of the poem may respond, not Wordsworth the poet or person, but Wordsworth the dramatic construct or persona is the voice in, not of, the poem. This speaker voices our own doubts—"If I these thoughts may not prevent"—makes us too experience reason's discomfort with animism, with those twigs. It is, as Mary Jacobus puts it, "a poem not so much of belief as of the wish to believe."[1] Dramatic tension and irony save the poem from uncritical pantheism. With the help of recent literary theory, one may deepen these ways of reading the poem and perceive the rather more disruptive character of its structure. By extension, Wordsworthian nature may again be re(-)fused.

A parallel between a familiar concept of linguistics and a major idea of the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* provides my starting point. In Emile Benveniste's opposition between history and discourse, history or narration presents "[e]vents that took place at a certain moment of time," while discourse involves some "intervention of the speaker." Strictly understood, both poles ought not to apply to lyric poetry because the genre exists, according to the letter of the distinction, principally in the discursive "plane of utterance" in which "someone addresses himself to someone, proclaims himself as the speaker, and organizes what he says in the category of person." Even so, as Benveniste himself remarks, "The nature of language is to permit these instantaneous transfers" between discourse and narration.[2] What seems "discourse" often enough contains "narration" within the "category of person." Intersection, both/and, the "interpenetration of these two,"[3] as Tzvetan Todorov says, are the rule rather than the exception. Although Benveniste's linguistic polarity can become a

critical trope of diminishing usefulness if applied formulaically to a literary text,[4] it remains a practical means of recovering from "Lines written in Early Spring" an inner opposition that the more vocal man/nature pair tends to displace. Furthermore, the history/discourse distinction suggests an instructive parallel to an opposition that Wordsworth sets up in the Preface between "action" or "situation" and "feeling" in his poems: ". . . the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation and not the action and situation to the feeling."[5]

As a series of utterances, history and discourse, action or situation and feeling, phenomena as given and as interpreted, "Lines written in Early Spring" continually makes impossible its own manifest desire to make the belief in nature—the speaker's "faith" or discourse or feeling—a fact of nature like the simply given phenomenon or history or situation: "The birds around. . . ." The simplest change to observe from one pole to another is the verb tense shift in the first stanza from "heard" to "bring," from what went on once to what goes on frequently according to the speaker's view of things. The moment and its ongoing significance face each other as clearly as the pleasant/sad antithesis that creates the reader's sense of closure for the stanza. In fact the melancholy crispness that this opposition ensures for the first stanza suppresses the multiplicity of meanings in the poem's opening situation.

The first line, for example, would seem to offer an equally simple differentiation. "I heard . . . notes" is the basic "given" or narrative, while the intervening "a thousand blended" is interpretive discourse about the phenomenon of those notes. "Blended," moreover, reinforces itself as discourse by its own status as metaphor. The blender is really the hearer, he who figures notes. But the more interesting reflexive act of language is in "notes" itself. The word derives from the Latin *nota*, mark, sign, character. The notes are not sung by birds but written by a man, one whose blending of d's and n's in the line is itself quietly notable. We have then in the first line of the poem a crucial metonymy associating hearing with writing, the music of the birds with musical notation and thence with the existence of the writing of "notes" by the poet in the line.[6] On first reading we accept that the poet is writing what he has heard; on second thought, he may have heard only what he is writing. Both possibilities remain, but they necessarily repel each other, because nature cannot be made up of *notae* and still be the evaluative presence the poem requires as the opposite to the moral absence of what man has made of man. The "meaning" of "notes" is not fragments, or the sounds of birds, or marks. Meanings appear from the paradigmatic openness of "notes" and from the undecidability caused by the very differences that inhere in the syntagm "blended notes." That undecidability need not in this case be mystified as "abyssal," but it does comprise a necessary play of signifieds that is aborted if we suppress the arbitrariness of saying that "notes" refers solely, or even primarily, to the sounds of April birds.

The many differences that collide this fully in a single word introduce the play of signifiers that subverts the manifest nature/man opposition in the poem as a whole. In the second stanza, the opposition intermingles rather than separates its own terms when one observes how nature's

"works"—as in the "works" of the poet—connect to the ancient concept of man the maker—*poiētēs*—in the intended climactic refrain, "What man has made of man." The linkage asserted in line 5 thus turns on a catachresis, "her fair works," which combines an age-old figure of nature as woman with the self-reflexive figure of nature as a creator of works. The separation between man and nature therefore elides into the unity of man and nature owing to a posited similar making. The failure to maintain the separation is inevitable in the rhetoric chosen to represent it, and the ensuing excess of grief in line 8 may be said to include the loss of the initial man/nature separation to the fate of binary oppositions in language that tend in just this way to disfigure their own expression. The initial man/nature opposition, then, contains within it its own neutralizing synonymity or reversal. This is not to say that the reversal is the real "truth" of the seeming valuation of nature over man. The point is rather that both "readings" of the opposition inhabit a structure of contradiction that makes each necessary to the radical limiting of the other's claim to authority.[7] To paraphrase rudely line 19 of the poem, one must think, do all one can, to avoid certainty in the matter.

We may make some early conclusions from the preceding look at pivotal words in the first two stanzas. The intended myth or fiction is that there is a presence called nature. Yet the speaker's language-acts continually defer that desired presence by showing its absence in writing, in notes, works, and makings. "Man has constituted himself out of language," according to Todorov,[8] made himself of man the linguistic consciousness, and it is that essential character of "The human soul that through me ran" which blocks and grieves the speaker. For there is no way that the idea or discourse of nature can become a phenomenon or story of nature without that phenomenon being recognized, consciously or not, as itself another act of language.[9] The lines can never be written "in" early spring at all but only alongside it, as is made almost emblematic in the linear gap between discourse and history in the syntax of the title itself: Lines written in / Early Spring.

Man's figures, then, cannot be natural facts, and this central anxiety continues to generate the polarities that produce the poem. That which figurally stands for nature moves toward equivalence with nature; metonymy would be metaphor by a leap of honest faith. In the third stanza, "that" sweet bower and "the" periwinkle, romantic particularities, specify the synechdochical moment that is to argue an acceptance that comes as a simple sequence—"And 'tis my faith. . . ." The movement from "the" periwinkle to "every" flower is in fact more rhetorically crucial to the reader's belief and disbelief than are the expressions of trailing and enjoying in the stanza. For that movement traces the desired shift from association to identity, figure to fact, one flower to all flowers, coordination to cosmological interpenetration.

None of these infirm constructions validates the complex reader over a naive speaker. The latter is, in fact, manifestly tentative, nothing if not conscientiously contingent about the possible life of nature. "It seem'd. . . ." Since the split between mind and nature is his overt subject, he does not exempt his own mind about nature from division. "Their

thoughts I cannot measure," he states in stanza four, a line that gives and then takes away from the play of birds, thereby having it both ways about thinking birds. How one measures the thought of any entity does affect the hyperbole of the line, however; the issue is a denial of positivity that discovers the buried chiasmus of the next line. Motion, not thought, is the primary quality for measurement, and the further displacement of "made" in line 15—"But the least motion which they made"—brings us back to the metaphor of metaphors in the poem as a whole. The birds "make" motion as man has made man, figurally yet at the same time essentially. For as the founding Lockean premise has it, motion is not made by matter; it is a primary quality inherent in matter itself, animate as well as inanimate, birds as well as stones. Here the speaker attributes originative activity to that which has to have it before it can act at all; this redundancy projects the making capacity out into nature, denying mere mechanistic, unconscious laws of motion and thus fixing a mirror activity of human making. Yet because it is a mirror or repetition, the contradictory metaphor of birds "making" motion reflects no source other than the equally unsettled situation of the "making" of man. The knot ties itself this way: man, a man, the speaker, makes the birds make motion, thereby making himself out of a hyperbolical observation, which in turn intensifies the very split between man and nature that the poem would unmake.

The subject here is "metaphoricity," especially the self-reflexive action of figures used to represent the inaccessibly given phenomena of nature.

> The budding twigs spread out their fan,
> To catch the breezy air; . . .

Perhaps these lines directly antecede lines 20-24 of Shelley's "Mont Blanc," for just as in those lines the winds come to hear the "mighty swinging" they cause in the pines,[10] so here the air is caught in the fan it makes of the twigs, and the metaphor cannot but enunciate its own figuration. This doubling back of the metaphor onto itself again severs the proffered linkage between twigs (narration) and fan (discourse), between nature and man, because the identity is only within the metaphor itself. In so overtly calling attention to its own workings, the figure leaves one with the experience of metaphor, not with the experience of nature, with the fan not the twigs.[11] The Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* would have it that "the best part of language is originally derived"[12] from natural objects. Yet this point in the poem tends to show how language inheres in the originative status of such objects, intending their existence rather than being derived from them. Moreover, the ambiguities that this "linguistic moment"[13] in the text contains continue right through the stanza. Is the second clause of "And I must think, do all I can" intensive or contradictory? I have to do all I can to think so, or I have to think so in spite of all I do not to think so? Usefully, both. For either reading of the line reasserts the same intentional condition of thinking, of consciousness in nature that underlay the thoughts of birds. "That there was pleasure there" is a thought hard to sustain on all counts,

especially in that its very expression is so hedged round with the self-conscious devices of the discursive narrator.

". . . in general," William Empson says of another passage in Wordsworth, "the style does not want any concentrated piece of trickery; Wordsworth is trying to state his position, even if he fails."[14] Many less dissecting readers of "Lines written in Early Spring" might find the discussion up to this point more concentratedly tricky than the experience of immanence the poem recalls warrants. Well enough, but certainly a firm case can be made that the final stanza renders explicit what I think is implicit in the complex workings and unworkings of language in the rest of the poem. The deftly involuted "If . . . If . . . Have I not" pattern of the first three lines, interwoven with insistent inversions of normal word order, clearly signals the speaker's participation in the discursive, syllogistic, conditional moods and voices of man's unnatural language. By now "What man has made of man" signifies at least the radical difference between the human linguistic and the naturally given; nature doesn't construct conditions. Thoughts may not be prevented, and the lamentation of reason is that reason laments its own absence from nature. Man the maker "prevents" man the natural presence. The line "What man has made of man" may be said to face up to that disjunction, itself perform it. Man is a poet, a maker or worker like nature but definitively different from nature. His own figures for nature continually reaffirm their own makings and workings rather than any unitary transparence to or reference to the nature outside themselves.

In sum, that "nature" which may or may not be out there is finally not at issue in this poem. Speaker, reader, and poet can very well believe whatever they wish on that score. Rather, the poem represents what it is to say and to read anything at all about nature as subject matter of "thoughts." The "I" of the poem is a locus of two different speech planes, narrative and discursive; he reiterates the two in the reader. The linkage of nature's works to the human soul may or may not be true; what matters structurally is that the two speech planes create the opposition that makes statement—"The birds around"—and counterstatement—"If I"—possible for both "I" and reader. This structurally enabling play of narration and discourse, situation and feeling, makes the authority that Wordsworth has, or to use Hardy's verb, that Wordsworth "gets" in the poem.

"Lines written in Early Spring" packs into a lyrical ballad the issues of nature as writing and writing as nature that contend at nodal points in Wordsworth's entire text. Whereas in Book I of *The Prelude* nature is said to have "Impressed upon all forms the characters / Of danger or desire" (1850, 11. 471-472),[15] the semiotic faculty thus ascribed to nature is reclaimed in Book V almost as a matter of a final mute despair of language.

> Oh! why hath not the Mind
> Some element to stamp her image on
> In nature somewhat nearer to her own?
>
> (11. 45-47)

The great anxiety is that nature may turn upon language, obliterate the "Poor earthly casket of immortal verse," the book in his hand, any book; hence his own "maniac's fond anxiety" to "go / Upon like errand" as did the Arab phantom (1. 141 ff.). There is at the end of Book V the "great Nature that exists in works / Of mighty Poets," who it turns out succeed through "the mystery of words" in presenting winds, things, forms, and substances "as objects recognised, / In flashes, and with glory not their own" (11. 594-605).[16] Book VII extols the "wond'rous power of words, by simple faith / Licensed to take the meaning that we love!" (11. 119-120); and the reader of "Lines written in Early Spring" may be struck by the London child who sat on a theater refreshment board,

> While oaths, indecent speech, and ribaldry
> Were rife about him as are songs of birds
> In springtime after showers.
>
> (1805, 11. 390-392)

The *MS. X* version of the blind beggar episode includes the fear that "The whole of what is written to our view, / Is but a label on a blind man's chest."[17] "In the Wordsworthian moment," Thomas Weiskel observes, "two events appear to coalesce: the withdrawal or the occultation of the image and the epiphany of the character or signifier proper."[18] The transcending signifier, however, is reoriented in the later wish that "a work of his . . . may become / A power like one of Nature's" (1850, Book XIII, 11. 309-312). These passages illustrate a "wavering balance" (Book I, l. 623) between nature and poetry that is no more fixed in *The Prelude* than in "Lines written in Early Spring."

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NOTES

1. Mary Jacobus, *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads, (1798)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 98. Other recent critics who have commented on problematic belief in the poem include Frederick Garber, *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Encounter* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1971), pp. 95-96; Paul D. Sheats, *The Making of Wordsworth's Poetry, 1785-1798* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1973), p. 221; and Heather Glen, *Vision and Disenchantment: Blake's Songs and Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983), pp. 40-42, 247-248.
2. Emile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables: Univ. of Miami Press, 1971), pp. 206-209. For an application of Benveniste's terms to Wordsworth see David P. Haney, "The Emergence of the Autobiographical Figure in *The Prelude*, Book I," *SiR*, 20 (Spring, 1981), 33-63.
3. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1977), p. 26.

4. On this point see Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1975), pp. 197-198.
5. *Lyrical Ballads, 1798*, ed. W. J. B. Owen, Second Edition (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969), p. 159. The text of "Lines written in Early Spring" referred to throughout this essay is likewise that in this edition.
6. In the sense, too, of fragments, pieces of writing toward an integral whole of writing, "notes" indicates the textuality of the heard. And one might include John F. Danby's "'nature-notes'" (*The Simple Wordsworth: Studies in the Poems, 1797-1807* [New York: Barnes & Noble, 1961], pp. 97-98), a kind of picturesque-mongering that would indeed be "thousand" and "blended" at the end of the eighteenth century and enough to bring sad thoughts to the mind.
7. I am indebted here and in the previous three sentences to the general line of argument in Jonathan Culler's *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1982), esp. pp. 150 and 213-214.
8. Todorov, p. 19.
9. In *Wordsworth: Language as Counter-Spirit* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1977), Frances Ferguson writes of Wordsworth's discerning in language "its tendency to convert itself into a counter-spirit which seems always to threaten the possibility of the poet's changing his internal story into an external story" (p. 130); quoted by Haney, p. 44.
10. Earl R. Wasserman, *Shelley: A Critical Reading* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), p. 225.
11. For a view of these lines as signifying "something more than metaphor" and the "metaphysical reality underlying all natural forms," see Alan Grob, *The Philosophic Mind: A Study of Wordsworth's Poetry and Thought 1797-1805* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1973), p. 100 ff. See also Grob's pertinent disagreement (p. 130 n. 19) with Joseph Warren Beach's emphasis on Wordsworth's principle of pleasure in the poem in *The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 180-187.
12. Preface, ed. Owen, p. 156.
13. "By 'linguistic moment' I mean the moment in a work of literature when its own medium is put in question." J. Hillis Miller, "The Critic as Host," in Harold Bloom, et al., *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), p. 250.
14. William Empson, *The Structure of Complex Words* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1951); rpt. "Sense in *The Prelude*," *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*, Norton Critical Edition, eds. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1979), p. 632.
15. Quotations from *The Prelude* are from the edition cited in the previous note.
16. The change from 1805 is emphatic: ". . . as objects recognised / In flashes, and with a glory scarce their own" (11. 628-629). For another view of several of these passages, see Jonathan Wordsworth's chapter on "the question of the relation in Wordsworth's poetry between mind, Nature, and language" (*William Wordsworth: The Borders of Vision* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982] p. 204).
17. *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*, p. 260 n. 7.
18. Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976), p. 175.