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John Cabot University

Department of English Literature

Bachelor of Arts in English Literature
Minor in Philosophy

Nature as Teacher and Preacher: Examining Natural Religion in the works of the British Romantics, American Transcendentalists, and Global Postmodernists

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Abstract

The objective of this thesis is to analyze how nature served as an alternative source of knowledge to that of academic or scientific knowledge in three literary time periods: 18th century British Romanticism, 19th century American Transcendentalism, and 20th century Global Postmodernism. Using the poems of William Wordsworth, particularly “Tintern Abbey” and “The Tables Turned”, of William Blake, focusing on “Auguries of Innocence”, and the essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson, including *The Divinity School Address*, of selected chapters from Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden*, and of Walt Whitman’s poem “Eidólons” from the Deathbed edition of *Leaves of Grass*, and of Italo Calvino’s short story “The Distance of the Moon” in *Cosmicomics*, I denote how each author gleaned moral, philosophical, psychological, spiritual, emotional, sensual and religious insight in their experiences of nature. In Wordsworth, I identify his invention of pantheism as a worship of nature over an omnipotent God by abandoning Christian scripture in favor of poetry through the reflections of the mind on memory. In Blake, I examine a denunciation of the material world, still in favor of nature, but of one that can only be accessed as a mental cavern in our soul, in which we must see beyond the destructive eye of our corporeal existence into eternity. In Emerson, who will build upon Blake’s ideas, I observe a renovation in his assertion that we must embrace the material world, but at the same time, it is only through our transparent eye (that is, our mental faculty of reason) that we can access truth in nature. In Thoreau and Whitman, I will emphasize an integration of the body into nature that Emerson overlooked. We must sensually engage with nature in order to merge the immanent with the transcendent; the mind with matter; the body with soul. Lastly, I will turn to Calvino as a symbol for the severance between the scientific and poetic imaginative world, which is an essential facet of the human’s relationship with nature.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my mother Carolyn Hughes and father Robert Cuozzo who, in permitting their child to attend university in Rome, Italy (4,103 miles from our home in Boston, MA, USA), not only displayed their incredible amount of trust, but more heroically, remained interlaced in every aspect of my psychological, emotional, social, and spiritual life during my time in Rome through their transcendent support. I am incredibly grateful and honored to have such loving parents, and I thank them also for teaching me how to appreciate the wonders of nature.

I would also like to dedicate this thesis to my grandparents Suzanne Winnell Hughes and Peter Hughes, who transferred the microcosm of their British heritage into my childhood environment. You both inspired me to study English Literature, to read (Grandad) and to write (Nana) thoughtfully about the world which surrounds me.

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1. Introduction

Nature is a concept that can an be traced back to Ancient Greece, with the original word being "phusis (φύσις), based on the verbal root for 'growing, producing', and phuein, with a suffix indicating the 'objective realization of an abstract concept'" (Ducarme and Couvet 1). As Ducarme and Couvet note, "nature's oldest known mention is in the *Odysseus*, but still with a primitive meaning ("appearance")– defined between Heraclitus (sixth century BC) and Aristotle (fourth century BC) by linking religion with metaphysics…in Aristotle's *Physics*, he defines nature as 'the essence of things, what they are made of and entail their destiny: the nature of a bed or of a tree is wood'" (Ducarme and Couvet 2). Ducarme and Couvet expand on this etymology, explaining that "in Ancient Rome, nature retained its philosophical meaning through Cicero, a Greek-inspired philosopher who translated it, yet Cicero changed the meaning by "introducing a classical opposition between nature and culture, the first being an initial state devoid of human influence, and the second one corresponding to an appropriation by human societies" (Ducarme and Couvet 2). The Christianization of the Roman Empire led to the Hebrew conception of nature as "the perverted Babylon, opposed to the enchanting wilderness as the place of encounter with God…linked to the Abrahamic idea of 'creation' as 'the mark of an artist on its work'" (Ducarme and Couvet 3). As Ducarme and Couvet claim, "influenced by Plato's dualism placing spirit higher than matter, such religious conceptions led to a certain scorn towards the material world, as God was no more to be found in nature but beyond it…nature was seen as raw material given to men in order for them to 'make the earth full and be masters of it; be rulers over [...] every living thing moving on the earth [...]: they will be for your food' (Genesis, 1, 28)" (Ducarme and Couvet 4). Ducarme and Couvet conclude that this "dualistic

and mechanistic vision of nature, which characterized the classical era in Europe, through philosophers such as Bacon or Descartes, radicalized this trend, along with neo-platonist influences where the material world progressively lost its divine property and moral value in Europe and was entirely open for appropriation and exploitation (with protestant capitalism), nature was no more seen as a process but as a mere initial state (entailing creationism), a decorum, the only force of change and history being Man, under the grace of God" (Ducarme and Couvet 4). But such behaviors induced ecological disasters, and "therefore it is not surprising if the countercurrent romantic vision of Nature was born in the most industrial cities of the 18th and 19th centuries, be it in England (Coleridge, Blake, Wordsworth), France (Rousseau), Germany (Goethe, Schelling), and later America, first with arts (the Hudson River School) and then with philosophy, notably through the transcendentalist movement, as illustrated by Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman who influenced seminal conservationists like John Muir" (Ducarme and Couvet 5). These romantic conceptions of nature contributed to the current global postmodernist definition of nature as a fusion between the classical conception (natural science) and the romantic conception (a sacred church that allowed for spiritual growth).

Nature was seen as offering an alternative source of moral, emotional, and spiritual knowledge that provided authors insights into their own *human* nature. This type of knowledge that is gained from nature has been observed by numerous critics and scholars over the years, beginning with the British Romantics whose, as emphasized by Barry Cerf, "religiosity took the form of an expansive yearning to lose oneself in the universe, becoming a part of the cosmic stream, this desired dissolution being approached only through ecstasy, with two roads to such ecstasy being man and nature- this romanticist religion that we see as early as Blake is exclusively emotional, meaning nothing more than the operation of the senses and a denial of

them as a mental trap for the intellect, but the one conspicuous poet of the romantic school whose religious profundity does not seem to be purely illusory was Wordsworth– who was considered the only outstanding romantic poet who approached this region of spiritual elevation" (Cerf 618). These findings contributed to the ongoing debate concerning the mind and nature, where Enlightenment thinkers argued that such a dialogue should be approached through reason and logic, rather than indulgence in feeling and emotion. Yet British Romantic thinkers rejected this notion by dismantling the Enlightenment ideals in breaking the dichotomy between the material and abstract realms (Hodgson 267). As Harold Bloom notes, Wordsworth wanted to "understand the interplay between Mind and Nature without rationally asking how such dialogue can be, it was a deliberate refusal to seek explanation" (Bloom 133). This same dialogue was revisited in Blake, who implicitly attacked empirical skepticism and instead claimed that the universe itself (and nature) *is* a state of consciousness. Critics have traced this agreement between Wordsworth and Blake who claim that the mind one brings to nature is more important than the material reality; arguing that materialists merely look at the world *with* the eye whereas visionary poets (such as them) look "*Thro* the Eye" and beyond it (Bennett 100). For Blake in particular, materialists are born to "Endless Night" because they are led to believe in the "Lie" that the world is made only of matter, and can only be perceived by the five senses. Yet in contrast, Blake posited that the visionary poet is born to "sweet delight" because they are able to see that the universe ultimately reveals "a Human Form" (Blake, "Auguries of Innocence" lines 36, 125, 131).

Scholars identify a transferal of these British Romantic ideals to America, where the Transcendentalists were influenced by these poets, but renovated their conceptions of nature to include not merely looking beyond the material reality and discrediting empirical knowledge

gained through the senses; but instead justifying the sensual experience as the pathway to spiritual truths (Reynolds and Lynch 150). Scholars, such as Moore, note that "in 1832, the philosopher and poet Emerson was at a crossroads in his life; he was without love, employment, religious conviction, or a true sense of purpose. In need of distraction, he embarked on his first journey to Europe where he met his intellectual heroes– Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth, in 1833" (Moore 181). Moore argues that "Wordsworth's view of nature is partly similar to Emerson's view of nature, but the clear line of difference is there to indicate that each arrived separately at the view; for each of them, God (or Oversoul) penetrates and interpenetrates nature, an Essence ever present. Emerson adds that this Soul is not simply ever present– it is already within us and that the intuition of the heart quite overshadows the impulses kindled by external nature" (Moore 191). While Emerson's conception of God as manifested in nature could only be reached through the powers of the mind and heart, Thoreau, on the other hand, as Smith highlights, emphasized that engaging with the senses– particularly the auditory sounds of nature such as the bird's call- was in effect communing with God (Smith 137). Critic Newman expands on this in claiming that like Emerson,"Thoreau's writing manifests an astonishing openness to the living Wordsworth…Thoreau's attitude toward the elder poet was one of profound identification" (Newman 84). However, the influence of British Romanticism on the third American transcendentalist I will be discussing– Walt Whitman– bended more towards Blake over Wordsworth. As French observes, "in 1868 Whitman responded to A.C. Swinburne's *William Blake* (comparing Whitman and Blake), in claiming that he and Blake were both 'mystics, ecstatics,' but recorded a major difference: while Blake's visions in nature were 'wilful & uncontrolled,' Whitman, 'never once lost control, or even equilibrium'" (French 2).

A century after Transcendentalism, however, the literary era of Postmodernism, suffered a collapse of meaning in nature, where, as Pilz notes "the separation of man from nature; the defeat of reason; history as a series of discontinuous events rather than as process and evolution; fragmentation of branches of knowledge into separate pockets; an alienation in the place of an organic harmony between man and nature" (Pilz 194). Yet Italian writer and scholar Italo Calvino resisted and transformed this paradigm shift in his collection of twelve short stories *Cosmicomics*. As Pilz points out, particularly in his story "The Distance of the Moon", Calvino's "flight into the cosmos as the quest for the reintegration of humanity and nature coincides with the trend in postmodern science that is motivated by the search for a pre-Cartesian concept of an interrelated cosmos, where humanity is part of the cosmos rather than the detached observer of a rational universe…in classical antiquity, the cosmos denoted a unified conception of the universe and all things in it: namely 'the conviction that the entire system of the world forms a single, integrated system united by universal principles,' in which 'Humanity and Nature participated in a single, common order.'" (Pilz 194).

Despite the fact that many studies in the relevant literature support this claim, the interpretation of nature and the types of knowledge it produces varies significantly across these three literary periods. The British Romantics consider nature as a nostalgic state of mind in which the imagination looks beyond the material world in order to view the divinity of childhood innocence as a model for morality. The American Transcendentalists consider nature as the physical, sensual immersion between the self and landscape, with an emphasis on the interconnectedness of the universe in which the cathedral of nature provides us a space to nourish our own inner divinity and the divinity of others. The Global Postmodernists consider nature as a conjunction between the two; where the retention of a pre-fallen state of inner

divinity is coupled with the humility that comes from a realization of something beyond ourselves– that there is a physical distance between the humanity and the cosmos; between the metaphysical and the physical that can never be fully crossed. This paper will serve to further examine the many types of knowledge that can be gained through a sensual and imaginative interaction with nature; which offers these authors (and us as readers) intellectual, spiritual, and moral insights into our own human natures.

1. 18th Century British Romanticism:

William Wordsworth & William Blake

1.1 Introduction to 18th Century British Romantic Poetry:

English Romantic poetry, as Harold Bloom has argued, is an extension of radical Protestant tendencies, a way of making divinity and spiritual transcendence directly available to the individual self and soul. Martin Luther's Protestantism made God directly available to Christians by dispensing with the intermediary clergy, urging Christians to read the Bible for themselves, to experience divinity through the experience of reading. Romanticism– in poets like William Wordsworth (1770-1850) and William Blake (1757-1827)– went further in the deinstitutionalization of Christianity, urging people that they need not even read the Bible because they could experience a moral force– some kind of indwelling spirit– directly in nature (Bloom 130). For Wordsworth, nature is imbued with this immanent spirit which speaks directly to the human soul, informs it without words of compassion, kindness, and moral understanding.

Wordsworth's first major statement of poetic purpose (in collaboration with Coleridge) is *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), a book that is more political than purely spiritual. Most of Wordsworth's contributions to the volume are in praise of poor, country people, their virtues, simplicity, and way of life. Such are ballads such as "Simon Lee", "Good Blake and Harry Gill", "The Thorn," and "We Are Seven". These poems display Wordsworth's sympathies for the poor, the peasantry, in the context of the French Revolution, about which he was still unambiguously enthusiastic. But just before the publication of *Lyrical Ballads,* Wordsworth included another poem, in a more sophisticated, autobiographical style which has become one of his most famous,

"Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" (1798). This poem is not about the simplicity and virtue of rustic folk, but about his own experiences of spiritual inspiration in the presence of nature. It is the most seminal poem of Romantic natural religion. In it he testifies to having gleaned moral instruction directly from nature, first in his youth by communing with it in both scenes of ecstasy and guilt, later from reflecting upon it philosophically through memory. It is possibly the most influential poem of natural, post-Christian religion in the English canon.

In my examination of Wordsworth in this chapter, I will show that "Tintern Abbey" is anticipated by simpler poems such as "The Tables Turned" in which the poet already expresses a preference for spiritual communion with nature over academic study or science. But it is only in "Tintern Abbey" that he more fully expresses his idea, which he will expand upon in *The Prelude*, that his imaginative and spiritual life have been deeply intertwined with his experiences in nature, including his memories of childhood and his relationship with his sister Dorothy. In this chapter I will connect Wordsworth's manifesto of natural religion in "Tintern Abbey" with its development in the poem "The Tables Turned".

After studying Wordsworth's idea of natural religion in some of his major poems, I will turn to contrasting him with his near contemporary William Blake, who shared many of Wordsworth's sympathies, such as his celebration of simplicity, innocence, and the divinity of the child as being closer to nature, to pre-fallen innocence. However, Blake was ultimately hostile to Wordsworth's idea of divinity dwelling in Nature. Like Wordsworth, Blake distrusted rationalism that displaced or belittled imagination and spontaneous joy (for Wordsworth, in *The Preface to Lyrical Ballads* (1800), he describes true poetry as "a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings"). However, Blake begins from a radically different cosmological, ontological understanding of the universe from Wordsworth's. Indeed Blake is radical from nearly any other

Western thinker, denying the existence of the material world known to the human senses or to science. For Blake, nature that we perceive by our senses is an illusion, a limited perception that confines us when we are dominated by one of our "Four Zoas": the four aspects of the human psyche; of which he calls Urizen, Tharmas, Luvah, Zoa– which can be read under a Freudian lens as the superego, the id, the libido, and the ego (Bloom 91). He mockingly calls the rationalistic side of human thinking, "Urizen"– a pun on "your reason" – and thinks of it as a mental trap that makes us dependent on science at the expense of imagination. In the second section of this chapter, I will explore his mythological and spiritual manifestation of his imagination in his poem– "Auguries of Innocence" (written 1803, but due to Blake's financial instability, the poem was not published until after his death in 1863 when it was found in his manuscripts). Blake denotes that we are trapped in the observation of Nature through this destructive "eye" of our corporeal existence, but there is still room for our soul to exist through or beyond this eye, to experience an "apocalypse" of the soul's opening.

I will examine Blake and Wordsworth through the lens of the past, where each of them used memory, combined with the poetic device of the imagination, to gaze through the lens of the past. Yet at the same time, each seems to be capable of collapsing these artificial markers of past, present, and future, in order to create a sensation of eternity, an eternity that can only be experienced through a recollection of and simultaneous spiritual transcendence beyond Nature.

1.2 William Wordsworth's "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798"

One avenue of Romantic scholarship has pursued the idea that Romantic religion is an assertion of the spiritual self against the Enlightenment's excessive devotion to reason. At the

same time, such critics suggest that this spiritual self seeks transcendence outside institutionalized religion, even without the name "God." Barry Cerf describes this process as pantheism:

> Romantic religiosity, originating from pantheism, aimed to dissolve oneself in the universe through ecstasy, with two roads to this ecstasy being man and nature… [It is] a state of mind that enables man to reach spiritual peace through supersensuous faculties" (Cerf 618).

Cerf complains that in our own environmentalist age scholars have mistakenly classified Wordsworth as a "nature poet," implying that Wordsworth deified Nature itself, as if it were an external divinity separate from humankind. Yet Cerf vouches that Wordsworth is instead a spiritual humanist who was interested in nature only in so much as it enabled him to commune with his own human soul:

> [Wordsworth's] genius was misunderstood, as he was a conservative, interested in man, and a priest of nature. He preached the gospel of the senses and was introspective, promoting the wisdom of unthinking men and children. Wordsworth's decline in poetic power is an inevitable outcome of his antinomy between his doctrines and his own convictions (Cerf 630).

When Cerf distinguishes "doctrine" from "conviction" he means that Wordsworth the young, liberal intellectual thought he wanted to commit to the liberating doctrines of the French *philosophes*, to radically abandon religion and social hierarchy. Yet Wordsworth was instinctively a conservative, who was not ready to fully abolish the clergy; rather he wanted to take their place, to be as he says, a "priest of nature." As Cerf explains, for all his talk of "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," Wordsworth never really relinquished his sense of

himself as a holy preacher to the less enlightened, he "made his muse the handmaid of certain definite doctrines; he became a preacher, not a poet" (Cerf 631). Here, Cerf suggests that the way in which Wordsworth was given to free expression of emotion was merely that his own soul was particularly fine, and that his utterances, even when improvised and personal, implied sermons that would enlighten the rest of the world. Thus, even looking at daffodils, which anyone might do, became a kind of Sermon on the Mount when he was the one looking at them.

Another critic, Crystal B. Lake, furthers the idea that Wordsworth trusted his own feelings and life experiences as a valid substitute for liturgically-based sermons. She notes that Wordsworth made a bold move setting "Tintern Abbey" in a place famous for the ruins of its abbey, and then, unlike other poets, proceeded to omit any physical description of the abbey (the title of the poem is the only mention of it) (Lake 459). Lake argues that Wordsworth does this because he sees his own personal, poetic history of the Wye Valley as being a greater moral instructor than that of the stone ruins of the abbey (Lake 460). In this way Lake responds to Cerf's claims in asserting that Wordsworth's aim in "Tintern Abbey" was to silence the ruin's history by "refusing to replicate the ruin's power as an object to inculcate more ruin and offers instead a personal poetic history that 'half-perceives' and, importantly, 'half-creates', a moment to stop 'things fall[ing] apart' and bring them to new life" (Lake 461).

As Lake notes, in *The Prelude,* Wordsworth's political ideals and loyalties were vexed, especially in the wake of the French Revolution. He returned to England, despondent and conflicted about his political ideals and loyalties (Lake 462). Wordsworth made his first visit to the abbey in 1793, and by the time he returned in 1798, he had experienced a transformation (Lake 465). Wordsworth's poem "Tintern Abbey" aims to create something better by writing a different kind of poem about the abbey, giving its objects a different literary history with which

readers might be impressed and from which better things might come. Lake sees the crumbling abbey as an image that resonates with the apparent crumbling of Catholic authority in France. She argues that Wordsworth had conflicted feelings about the anti-religion fervor of the revolution. On one hand, he was in favor of making divinity an unmediated presence that could be experienced in nature without clerical intervention. On the other hand, he had reservations about revolutionary violence and the radical abolition of institutions. By ignoring the physical ruins of the abbey, he doesn't need to adore the ruins nor celebrate the abbey's disintegration. He simply replaces that vexed symbol with something he does believe in, the spiritual value of his own personal feelings and history.

While Wordsworth found value in his own feelings, thoughts, and personal history, he never presents himself solipsistically, as if his feelings radiated merely from himself. Rather, he insists always that what is worthwhile in his poetic expression derives from a dynamic of self-perceiving the right objects. This is why Nature is essential to Wordsworth: it is the object necessary to achieve feelings of the sublime. The importance of the object as the origin of the feeling is formulated repeatedly, as in the phrase "half create, half perceive." This central idea in Wordsworth can be traced to the influence of David Hartley who theorized in his *Observations on Man* (1749) that what people feel is a kind of impression or impact of objects on the organs of human perception, an impact that resonates from body to soul, from sensual to spiritual experience (thus a combination of Newtonian physics and Lockean models of cognition with psychological observations):

> An object acts on the senses when its atoms or corpuscles cause the nerves to vibrate like so many finely tuned violin strings. These vibrations shifted the particles of the body and passed through the nervous system to the mind where an impression was created and an

> idea generated. This model gave special agency to objects, investing them with the power to engender thought by virtue of their atomistic, material interactions with the body. This eighteenth-century 'thing theory', objects literally reproduced themselves in the brain as tiny characters, stamps, or brachygraphia. Such models of cognition gave objects (such as the abbey) so much sway as to make them seem responsible for ideas. Individuals, such as Wordsworth were powerfully affected, seemingly unwittingly, by the external objects with which they came into contact (Hartley 57).

For Hartley, Wordsworth turns to the River Wye and away from the abbey because the River Wye is the *right* object: its atoms vibrating from the nervous system to the mind will engender the pure, uplifting spirituality of nature. The abbey, on the other hand, is a vexed and problematic object, one that will send conflicted feelings to the mind. It is, Hartley would suggest, an object Wordsworth pointedly turned away from. Written the day before the French storming of the Bastille on July 13, 1798, “Tintern Abbey” offers a stark contrast to the mob scene in Paris. While the sans-culottes were rioting in the streets, Wordsworth was contemplating a peaceful woodland scene that he associates with memories of his childhood. The juxtaposition highlights how distant Wordsworth’s project of revolutionary consciousness was from the political revolutionary programs of the Jacobins. Wordsworth sympathized with egalitarian goals of the revolutionaries, curbing the abuses of the rich and empowering the poor; he thought of his own revolutionary role in poetic terms.

In the renewed presence of a remembered scene in which he had visited the River Wye as a child, Wordsworth comes to a fuller understanding of his poetic self. As critic Harold Bloom notes in *The Visionary Company*, this revelation “though it touches on infinity, is extraordinarily simple…all that Wordsworth learns by it is a principle of reciprocity between the external world

and his own mind, but the story of that reciprocity becomes the central story of Wordsworth's best poetry" (Bloom 132). In the interaction between poet and landscape, the human mind and nature complete each other. Neither can be realized without the other. Thus the landscape is "half create[d] and half perceived." When the heart opens itself to nature, nature never fails to open itself to the human heart. The result is the poet's sense of both love and beauty, inextricably bound. Aesthetic, moral, and emotional intensity are part of one complex feeling which is sometimes called the "sublime":

> —Once again
> Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
> That on a wild secluded scene impress
> Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
> The landscape with the quiet of the sky...
> Once again I see
> These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines
> Of sportive wood run wild: these pastoral farms,
> Green to the very door; and wreaths of smoke
> Sent up, in silence, from among the trees!
> With some uncertain notice, as might seem
> Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,
> Or of some Hermit's cave, where by his fire
> The Hermit sits alone. (Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey" lines 4-8, 14-22).

The present moment of beholding nature and past memories of this scene need to blend with each other for Wordsworth to arrive at the enhanced meaning of this patch of nature: the exuberance of youth must mesh with the philosophical and reflective powers of adulthood. The "thoughts of deep seclusion" are "impressed" simultaneously on the "landscape" and on its human perceiver– Wordsworth. Wordsworth, upon hearing the "soft inland murmur" of The River Wye in mid-Wales which flows to the border between Wales and England, mimics the river's sound with the flowing cadence of his verses, written in a mellifluous iambic pentameter. The indwelling spirit of nature is evoked through the poetic device of memory, when, glimpsing into the past, he reflects on what has changed about the landscape as well as what has changed about himself. Wordsworth's image of the "wreaths of smoke" references the off-product of the industrialization in which the "vagrant" poor community in England were put out of work by the industrialization, yet they now retreat to rural environments where they live in harmony with nature. Wordsworth's pastoralism in his elevation of the rustic population is also seen in his invocation of the "Hermit", who may be read as an alter-ego for Wordsworth in that his chosen "cave" of solitude is a voluntary decision, rather than an imposition.

As a poet, Wordsworth's ethos as the priestly visionary poet is evident in that he projects himself into the allegorical figure of the "Hermit" who, in the Christian tradition of eremitic life, was understood as an early form of monastic living before the invention of the cenobium. In *The Rule of St. Benedict*, an 8th century (c.530) book of precepts for monks living communally under an abbot, hermits are listed under the four types of monks, and similarly, in the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches, hermits or "solitaries" are recognized as an integral part of the Canon Law in that they are believed to impart wise spiritual advice, and thus are sought out by the laity (Thompson 8). Yet Wordsworth's Christian symbolism is non-committal in that it transfers the

Christian Holy Spirit to the in-dwelling spirit of Nature; placing the authority not on the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but on the God of Nature. By doing this, Wordsworth can relinquish himself from the biblical knowledge which must be gained from scripture and instead, transfers the truths of scripture to knowledge gained from poetry. Knowledge that is gained from Wordsworth's personal philosophy– which may be seen as semi-Platonic in its clear allusion to Plato's allegorical "cave"– becomes his prophecy is that he, in projecting himself into the image of the "hermit", illustrates himself as necessarily *outside* his "cave", he is not trapped inside to viewing projected shadows on the wall (as one in the crumbling "Tintern Abbey" might), but out in nature, "by his fire" pondering the effects of his mind through "Thoughts" of his past and its eternal truth:

These beauteous forms,
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind
With tranquil restoration...Nor less, I trust,
To them I may have owed another gift,
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight

Of all this unintelligible world,

Is lightened… (Wordsworth, “Tintern Abbey” lines 23-42).

Lake notes that here, Wordsworth invocates the traditional Lockean model of cognition, where “the ‘forms’ that ‘have not been...a landscape to a blind man's eyes’, signals the poem's theme of renegotiating the object-based epistemologies of the eighteenth century…according to Locke and others, the blind were thought incapable of knowing certain properties of objects, such as colors, since they had never had sensory experiences of those properties” (Lake 462). Wordsworth, raised as an Anglican who is now renegotiating his religious convictions, dispels the omnipotent God and replaces it with the God of Nature. This process of reinterpretation is seen in his biblical echo to John 9: 13-14 in which God healed a blind man by “mak[ing] mud and open[ing] the [blind] man’s eyes”, but, here, replaces God’s healing with the Nature’s “tranquil restoration”, which can evoke “sensations sweet” that are “felt in the blood” and “heart”, “In hours of weariness” when the “din” noise and chaos of London disillusions his reality. These childhood memories of himself in nature as a boy are a “gift” which he instructs his readers to retain, to access, just as he does, through the powers of the “mind”. Memories of Nature can elevate your soul to an “aspect more sublime”, a “blessed mood” that can counter the “weary weight/Of tall this unintelligible world”, he preaches to his readers.

What can Nature teach us? Later in the poem, Wordsworth reflects that even having been away from the River Wye for several years, his continued imagining of the memory has lifted his spirits, and this comfort will extend into his future- he can always return to the emotions and sensations of childhood. From this it is clear, that Nature teaches us a moral truth– one of romanticized Pastoralism- that the rusticity of the child sensually interacting with nature can, to put it in religious terms, “fill our cup” (Psalms 23:5-6), and in Wordsworth’s terms:

While here I stand, not only with the sense

Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts

That in this moment there is life and food

For future years. And so I dare to hope,

Though changed, no doubt, from what I was when first

I came among these hills; when like a roe

I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides

Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams…

–That time is past,

And all its aching joys are now no more,

And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this

Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur; other gifts

Have followed; for such loss, I would believe,

Abundant recompense. For I have learned

To look on nature, not as in the hour

Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes

The still sad music of humanity…

—And I have felt

A presence that disturbs me with the joy

Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime (Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey" lines 64-71, 85-93, 95-97).

His childhood memory in Nature is his “life and food/ For future years”– thus, memory is a storehouse of divinity for the poetic imagination to transport us to the past, and allows us to satisfyingly re-enter the present. It is important to note that here, the “sublime” is not so much in the grandeur of the landscape (as in Shelley’s Mont Blanc) but in a collapse of tenses: past, present, and (hopes for) future years are experienced at once and as one. One might describe the collapse of tenses as a kind of eternal moment in which all phases of a life merge. In the exuberance of his youth, having “bounded o’er the mountains” as a shepherd grazing over his fields, the interior lives of the “deep rivers” and “lonely streams” spoke to him, but even now, looking back as an adult, though the “time is past”, the oxymoronic “aching joys” (i.e. the joys of youth coupled with the pains of growth) are “no more”, “other gifts have followed”. The gifts are those of poetic powers of matured reflection; of re-accessing those all-encompassing feelings of being in nature which provide him with “Abundant recompense” and can thus, silence the “still sad music of humanity”. Thus, as he will say in 1807 in his later poem “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood”: “ Though nothing can bring back the hour/Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;/We will grieve not, rather find/ Strength in what remains behind (Wordsworth, “Intimations Ode,” lines 177-180).

Thus, in the final stanza of “Tintern Abbey”, Wordsworth connects this childhood memory to his sister Dorothy, sharing the poetic vision he had while walking with her:

> My dear, dear Sister! and this prayer I make,
>
> Knowing that Nature never did betray
>
> The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,
>
> Through all the years of this our life, to lead…
>
> Of past existence—wilt thou then forget

That on the banks of this delightful stream

We stood together; and that I, so long

A worshipper of Nature, hither came

Unwearied in that service: rather say

With warmer love—oh! with far deeper zeal

Of holier love. Nor wilt thou then forget,

That after many wanderings, many years

Of absence, these steep woods and lofty cliffs,

And this green pastoral landscape, were to me

More dear, both for themselves and for thy sake! (Wordsworth, “Tintern Abbey,” lines 124-127, 152-162).

Wordsworth addresses his sister Dorothy in conveying that even when they are separated by time, distance, or the grave, Dorothy can still remember him, and that in this, they become part of the landscape. They become part of the memory, the spirit of the place will incorporate them along with the land, the stream, the woods. Wordsworth’s desire for solidarity with his childhood memories in Nature does not express loneliness, but rather the opposite– the romantic idea that you are never alone if you can connect with Nature. Nature is a repository for the poetic, childlike self which is accessed through memory. Wordsworth’s memory is of divine connectedness– which was felt through the purity of a child’s sensations of Nature. Wordsworth affirms that through thoughts and memory, the reader too can connect to this ideal. The ideal of nature is more important to Wordsworth than the material nature of the wilderness itself because the Romantic project was about tapping into ideals, not material realities. As a poet, Wordsworth (and us as readers) must constantly remind ourselves of the presence of Nature’s beauty and

sublimity, of the need to be awake to it, to see through the blurriness of the world in order to see into the spirit of Nature.

1.3 William Wordsworth's "The Tables Turned"

Building off of the idea of Nature's spiritual power in which he addressed in "Tintern Abbey", in the poem he wrote next, "The Tables Turned" (also published 1798 in his collection *Lyrical Ballads*), Wordsworth responds to a friend who chides him for idling away his time looking at nature rather than studying for exams. (The friend seems to be a Cambridge classmate). Wordsworth's retort is that there is more to be learned directly from nature than from reading about it in books. Walk, smell, and look, he admonishes his friend, instead of growing "double" (hunchbacked) by poring over your books. In nature, the priests are the "woodland linnets" who preach "sweet music". For Wordsworth, "knowing nature" means not to study and analyze it scientifically or academically, but to engage with it emotionally, through the senses– to see, hear, touch, smell, and taste the pleasures of nature. He argues that the sermons and lectures of a bird are more pleasurable than that of the institutional church or classroom. Proclaiming "Let Nature be your teacher", Wordsworth expresses nature as replacing books of moral theology and philosophy. But Wordsworth clarifies that nature is not a thing that has value in itself; but rather, the value of nature is its effect on human beings– this is the only way its true worth can be measured. In contrast to studying in the academic setting, which weighs down the minds of students with thoughts, engaging with nature invokes a spontaneous happiness:

> One impulse from a vernal wood
>
> May teach you more of man,
>
> Of moral evil and of good,

Than all the sages can (Wordsworth, “The Tables Turned” lines 21-24).

Wordsworth suggests that going into nature is likely to teach you “more of man” than traditional academic learning will; but it is important to note that this knowledge is not of God, but of a secular culture. The repository of meaning is in human terms: “of man”, “of moral evil”, “of good”– which reiterates the notion that the way in which to measure the value of nature is its effect on the moral fiber of human beings. However, Wordsworth doesn’t imply that nature is the *same* as man:

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;

Our meddling intellect

Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:—

We murder to dissect. (Wordsworth, “The Tables Turned” lines 25-28).

Here, he shows that humans and nature are made of the same substances, but by measuring nature’s virtues in relation to their effect on humans, we overindulge and exploit nature for our own intellectual progress (for example, geologists, botanists etc… exploit nature for research purposes). “Our meddling intellect” refers to our scientific rational empiricism which “mis-shapes” our emotional relationship with nature. Wordsworth claims that “we murder to dissect”; to look at nature through the scientific mind is to kill it, so therefore:

Enough of Science and of Art;

Close up those barren leaves;

Come forth, and bring with you a heart

That watches and receives (Wordsworth, “The Tables Turned” lines 29-32).

Wordsworth argues for an end to the liberal arts (“science and of art”) by closing up the “leaves” of books and instead advocates for an emotional appreciation of nature which can be shaped by

our cheerful mood. If you go out in nature merely to, for instance, trap butterflies with nets and press them under glass and anatomize their parts (as lepidopterists do), then you have committed murder because you have gone into nature as a scientist, as an intellect with the mere purpose of dissecting it. Wordsworth objects to this behavior in that scientists fail to know nature truthfully, as an experience to be felt emotionally. However, Wordsworth's love of simplicity has to strike a compromise with literary sophistication. He can only denounce bookishness up to a point. After all, Wordsworth is a writer, his work is the writing of books. He could not have written his poetry without having read many books, and can have no purpose as a poet without readers. He admired the simplicity of rustic folk (in poems such as "Goody Blake and Harry Gill", "The Idiot Boy"), but also the sublime rhetoric of "organ-mouthed" Milton: "Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour: / England has need of thee!" (Wordsworth, "London, 1802" lines 1-2). Like the reciprocity of mind and nature which is an endless conversation in Wordsworth, so too is the weighing of academic knowledge with direct experience, rustic simplicity with poetic intelligence.

In fact, in *The Prelude*, Wordsworth makes clear the imaginative relationship between Nature and literature (Book V), when an Arab Bedouin presents him with a stone beneath one arm, and a shell of surpassing brightness in the other, telling him that the stone is "Euclid's Elements" and the shell is "something of more worth": poetry. When Wordsworth puts the shell to his ear as commanded, he hears:

> A loud prophetic blast of harmony;
> An Ode, in passion uttered, which foretold
> Destruction to the children of the earth
> By deluge, now at hand (Wordsworth, *The Prelude* lines 95-98).

In this sense, as Bloom claims, "the seashell participates in both the land of reasoning and the sea of apocalypse, of primal unity, which makes it an ideal type of poetic Imagination…yet the passage clearly sets high value on geometric as well as instinctual truth…the stone is the gray particular of man's life, which poetry must cause to flower" (Bloom 150-151). Thus, both mathematical knowledge and the poetic imagination are needed for man's absorption into Nature.

1.4 William Blake's "Auguries of Innocence"

Until quite recently, the average view has been that of J. G. Davies, that man "possesses over and above his five senses a latent power by means of which he can communicate directly with eternity: this is the faculty of Imagination or Spiritual Sensation…It is this view which gave rise to the critical insistence on Blake's mysticism, on his Wordsworthian ability to 'see into the life of things' by being 'laid asleep in body' and becoming 'a living soul'" (Bennett, ___). Wordsworth's contemporary, William Blake conceived of the "ancient Poets" as living in a kind of Eden or Eternity, in which all sensible objects were living forms, that is, when personification was identity, not a poetic device of similitude (Gleckner 2). As critic Gleckner observes, "Blake believed that when the five senses are expanded or multiplied infinitely, the points of intersection between inner and outer reality expand to the point where both cones cease to be conical and their bounding lines are obliterated by infinity" (Gleckner 3). At the Biblical Fall of man, the senses rushed inward and obliterated mental vision and life. Thus, Blake's idea of the origin of organized religion and priesthood is that all religions were one until the limitation of vision to the

five senses, and that all religions are the adaptation of the Poetic Genius to the weaknesses of every individual (Gleckner 4).

Blake believes that the limitation of human perception is caused by the process of abstraction, which he equates with the teachings of Newton and Locke. This process is seen in the "Human Abstract" of *Songs of Experience*, where the priests enslave the vulgar by abstracting mental deities from their objects. Similarly, Urizen, Blake's arch-priest, enslaves others by building a temple in the image of the human heart. The priests and Urizen are also enslaved by the system they create. Blake criticizes the systematizing of religions, which he believes is driven by ambition and avarice (Lefcowitz 6). He argues that the personifications created by priests in their fables substitute for the true spiritual mystery and real visions of the one true religion. Blake sees the pre-Biblical Druidical age as a closing of the senses and a turning of mental signification into corporeal command, as Bloom notes, "he believes that the fallen state of man is a result of creating a God outside himself in his own image. The restoration of man's unfallen state is not achieved by destroying the senses and reason, but by improving sensual enjoyment and expanding and cleansing the senses. This will reform the eternal senses of man to their imaginative wholeness" (Bloom 122).

In "Auguries of Innocence" (published after his death in 1863), Lefcowitz posits that Blake claims that the universe itself (and nature) *is* a state of consciousness (Lefcowitz 7). *How* one sees nature, which is a visible state of consciousness, depends on the state of one's own imagination. The opening couplets begin with a series of warnings that relate the wandering of any part of creation to a larger marring of nature:

> To see a World in a Grain of Sand
>
> And a Heaven in a Wild Flower

Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand

And Eternity in an hour

A Robin Red breast in a Cage

Puts all Heaven in a Rage

A Dove house filld with Doves & Pigeons

Shudders Hell thr' all its regions

A dog starvd at his Masters Gate

Predicts the ruin of the State

A Horse misusd upon the Road

Calls to Heaven for Human blood (Blake, “Auguries of Innocence” lines 1-12).

As Harold Bloom notes in *Blake’s Apocalypse*, “the grain of sand is an emblem of dehumanization, yet once it was part of a human world. The “Wild Flower” is an organic growth, natural and not human, yet unlike the sunflower of Experience, the wild flower can be a portent of a human and active heaven”. The “how” is explicit; this can be done by overcoming the fallen categories of space and time, by seeing what Wordsworth called a “spot of time”, a vision of eternal here and now, not there and when (Bishop 51). However, while Wordsworth had his vision through the mediation of memory, Bloom notes that Blake sees what can be seen in an immediacy– “Blake’s quatrain is urgent, for if the infinite and the eternal are not to be participated in by the poet’s vision here and now, then they are never to exist at all” (Bloom 303). Blake declares that the five senses are the bars of a prison that prevent people from seeing nature at its highest level; birth, death, seasons, even the beauties of nature, seen by an empiricist are less than what they can be if you open your visionary eye (sometimes referred to as the “third eye”):

Each outcry of the hunted Hare

A fibre from the Brain does tear

A Skylark wounded in the wing

A Cherubim does cease to sing

The Game Cock clipd & armd for fight

Does the Rising Sun affright

Every Wolfs & Lions howl

Raises from Hell a Human Soul

The wild deer, wandring here & there

Keeps the Human Soul from Care

The Lamb misusd breeds Public Strife

And yet forgives the Butchers knife

The Bat that flits at close of Eve

Has left the Brain that wont Believe (Blake, "Auguries of Innocence" lines 13-26).

Here, Blake imitates a Biblical rhythmic style in a way that sounds proverbial– he describes the consequences of hurting animals– that by committing a crime against an animal, you are hurting heaven and hell (which are interchangeable in Blake's conception). When you hurt animals, at times, you tear "A fibre from the Brain", other times, you "Keeps the Human Soul from Care". In this way, Blake creates a scattershot of all the consequences that hurting nature has upon our soul, on both heaven and hell, our brain, and our moral conscience both in and out of ourselves. For Blake, all of these concepts become synonymous with each other, though all the repositories of consciousness are different from one another. For Blake, the whole world pulsates and throbs

with consciousness so that heaven, hell, the human soul, brain, and social infrastructure all seem to be part of the same fabric, thus creating an interconnected moral ecosystem.

In this sense, Blake saw the fabric of the universe as spiritual rather than material, as a state of consciousness rather than one of matter:

> He who Doubts from what he sees
>
> Will neer Believe do what you Please
>
> If the Sun & Moon should Doubt
>
> They'd immediately Go out (Blake, "Auguries of Innocence" lines 107-110).

Blake attacks empirical skepticism, a doubt based upon what can or cannot be observed and demonstrated. He claims that "he who doubts" the existence of angels, God, or eternity will never "Believe". The fabric of the universe must be based on a kind of belief in eternity, not the solipsism that defines narcissism as the psychological belief that you are at the center of the universe. The "Sun" and "Moon" are visible states of consciousness that, when accessed, by seeing beyond the destructive eye of our corporeal existence, can peer "out" into infinity.

Blake ends his prophetic passion– his claim that we must abandon the shadowing gourd of our corporeal existence in order to reach an apocalyptic opening of our soul's cavern– in the final lines of his poem by climaxing with a chant based on the Book of Jonah. As Bloom notes, " "Jonah, angry that his prophecy against Nineveh had not been filled, went out to the city, to rest under the shadow of a gourd that the Lord made to come up over him. When God's worm 'smote the gourd that it withered', Jonah made angry again, to be taught the lesson of the true uses of prophecy in Jonah 4:10-11: 'Then said the Lord, Thou has had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not labored, neither madest it grow; which came up in night, and perished in a night:

And should I not spare Nineveh, that great city?'" (Bloom 303). Here Blake satirizes this Biblical premise:

> Some are Born to sweet delight
>
> Some are Born to sweet delight
>
> Some are Born to Endless Night
>
> We are led to Believe a Lie
>
> When we see not Thro the Eye
>
> Which was Born in a Night to perish in a Night
>
> When the Soul Slept in Beams of Light
>
> God Appears & God is Light
>
> To those poor Souls who dwell in Night
>
> But does a Human Form Display
>
> To those who Dwell in Realms of day (Blake, "Auguries of Innocence 122-132).

The irony here is directed both against a mistaken notion of prophecy (that it foretells an inevitable future, rather than the decisive power of the eternal now) and against the desire for destruction that wills a premature apocalypse, without waiting upon the fulfillment of time. In the passage that ends Blake's "Auguries" the bodily "Eye" is identified with the Biblical shadowing gourd, born in the night of our fall to perish in the night of our destruction. As Bloom observes, "Blake's irony is at its subtlest as he plays with the equivocal 'beams of light' that blind us in our wilful darkness. The eye of our corporeal existence, a narrow opening in our material cavern, was born when our 'soul slept' in the heavenly 'light'. If our soul had kept awake in that light, we would not have fallen, and would now have an eye to see with, rather than one we must see through ('thro'), if we are to see our own relation to what we were"

(Bloom 305). Bloom expands that, like Jonah, we are poor souls dwelling within the mental cavern or whale's belly of the night, the dark forest in which the "Bard of Experience" saw his "Tyger" (as in Blake's 1794 poem "The Tyger"). As God taught Jonah the humane view of apocalypse, so now Blake seeks to teach it to himself. God appears as a light shining into our darkness if we insist upon dwelling in darkness. But, as Bloom concludes, "if we see through the eye, then we see auguries of a second Innocence, and dwell in the clear realms of day, where the Tygers of Wrath are anything but fearful, and where God displays the form of the human" (Bloom 308). Thus, Blake believes that nature is something that one should contemplate and marvel in. His idea that one can "see a world in a grain of sand" and "Heaven in a wild flower" is to see the macrocosm of nature in its finest minutiae. However, Blake does not believe that nature even *exists* in its biological, physiological sense as a complex of material that should be understood scientifically. For all that Blake may look wild, wooly, and out of his mind, we are now in a position to think of him as wildly and improbably insightful. For example, Einstein's physics which sees matter and energy as interchangeable ($E=mc^2$) might be compatible with the idea that matter is consciousness, a kind of mental energy. One might also say that Blake understood the danger of making imagination servile to science and rationalism, in the same way Wordsworth condemned that "we murder to dissect".

2. 19th Century American Transcendentalism:

Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman

1.1 Introduction to 19th Century American Transcendentalism:

By the time Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) published his first series of essays in 1841, English romanticism had already run its course. All of the major English romantic poets, except Wordsworth, had already passed away. But the spirit of Romanticism continued in American Transcendentalism in many key points, particularly the love of nature as a source of moral and imaginative wisdom. In order to understand the way in which English Romanticism passed to America one notes that it passed particularly from Coleridge, the most philosophical of the English Romanticists, to Emerson, the most cerebral and philosophical of the American Transcendentalists. Thus, the transmission of romanticism to America happened largely as by transmission of ideas rather than as one of poetic style. And even the transmission of ideas went through transformations from England to America. Coleridge remained, to the end of his career, a Christian philosopher for whom the organic world, and nature, were part of the great "To Be" of God. Emerson became an evangelist of self-reliance, a worshiper of divinity within the self, so that by the end of his career he could only dubiously be called a Christian.

In this chapter, I will explore how Emerson, taking inspiration from his intellectual idols– Wordsworth and Coleridge, developed his own, more self-oriented idea of the divine in nature in *The Divinity School Address* (published 1838). Unlike Wordsworth who recounts being nursed by the lessons on nature during childhood, Emerson writes of a divinity in nature that speaks to the already developed philosophical mind. Before his *The Divinity School Address,* Emerson had

already conceived in his earlier essay on *Nature* (published 1836) that the body should be reduced to a "transparent eyeball" which could "see all", becoming "part or particle of God", but in The *Divinity School Address,* he reinstates this representation of the self as an intellect who must distill the world rationally, through the powers of the mind. Thus, the differences between Wordsworth and Emerson are crucial to the differences between English Romanticism and American Transcendentalism and the way each related to nature. There was always an anxiety in English Romantic poets, even the most atheistic Shelley, of not allowing individual imagination to overwhelm the Spirit that is immanent in Nature. Wordsworth carefully and repeatedly renegotiates the formula of "half-create" and "half-perceive," hoping to steer clear of purely egotistical sublime. For Emerson, who located divinity within himself– not identical with his worldly self, but instilled within that self– would dare to go further in denying and defying scripture and church. Nature for Emerson was but a toy for the self to play with in order to realize its own genius.

In this way, while Emerson praised Wordsworth most among contemporary English poets, his radical poetic vision of transforming the landscape sometimes comes closer to Blake's revolutionary sensibility. It is known that Emerson owned a copy of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, and thus, saw himself in conversation with Blake. While Emerson would suggest in *Nature* that the poet exerted a kind of ownership over the landscape that overrides the property deeds of "Miller, Locke, and Manning," Emerson would never share Blake's radical distrust of the material world altogether (Emerson, *Nature* 3). He might criticize institutions and the narrow-mindedness of materialism, but would not challenge the basic epistemology of the senses, nor dismiss the work of science and technology. For Emerson, the soul, and what he calls "reason" (in the Kantian sense) relies upon material stimulus to reach its truths. Going out into

nature may not be an end in itself, but it is, as in Wordsworth, a necessary step toward philosophical truth, a way into the wisdom of the "Self."

Given that Emerson was more cerebral, abstract, and introspective than the British Romantics (with the possible exception of Coleridge), it is ironic that his two greatest disciples, Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) and Walt Whitman (1819–1892), were more practical, materialistic, and sensual than any of the English Romantics (with the possible exception of Keats). For Thoreau and Whitman, nature and the world are palpable, to be known first (though not always foremost) by way of not only the senses but also by means of measurement, survey, and physical work. Thus, Thoreau, in *Walden* (published 1854) and Whitman, in *Leaves of Grass* (first edition published in 1855, last "Deathbed Edition" published 1891-92), took Emerson's "transparent (and purely philosophical) eyeball" and added a body to it– emphasizing that the divinity could be accessed through a physical immersion with nature; an activation of the senses through the water, the mud, the plants, the animals, the land. As literary scholar Baum notes, "for Emerson, the philosopher, nature is the reality or illusion through which a man discovers Nature (of which man is the conscious, reasoning part) or the Infinite (Oversoul)...Emerson vows that through a close scrutiny of nature, through the establishment (and re-establishment) of a harmony between man and nature, man can obtain a momentary insight into the organic wholeness of the universe, this insight occurring infrequently and being a glimpse of the Infinite…for Emerson, it is through man's sight primarily that he is able to attain spiritual awareness (Baum 39).

However, as Baum distinguishes, for Thoreau and Whitman, the activation of *all* the senses in nature is also a means through which man can glimpse the Infinite and discover (realize) the organic wholeness of the universe (Baum 40). Baum claims that Thoreau and

Whitman are not concerned with the danger of the universe; of confusing reality and illusion, and perhaps because they are the active rather than the metaphysical men, are more confident of man's ability to know (Baum 41). Thoreau and Whitman– the practical men, the naturalist-philosophers, and the sensual men– examine the many relationships possible between man and nature and offer a kind of practical handbook for men, like themselves, who wish, as in *Walden*, to "hoe a half-cultivated field", and in *Leaves of Grass*, to engage his "tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil"; to combine and enjoy the domestic and wild in nature. Thus, in the second part of this chapter, I will explore how, in selected chapters of Thoreau's *Walden* (1854 edition) and selected poems in Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1891-1892 deathbed edition), man experiences Nature through all of the senses– sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste– and on various levels.

1.2 Ralph Waldo Emerson's *The Divinity School Address* (1838)

In 1840, Emerson was able to declare in his "Thoughts on Modern Literature," that "the fame of Wordsworth is a leading fact in modern literature…more than any other poet his success has not been his own, but that of the idea which he shared with his coevals, and which he has rarely succeeded in adequately expressing" (Emerson 4). As scholar Lance Newman claims, "the 'idea' in question is a complex of attitudes that Emerson conveyed as: 'Wordsworth's poem 'The Excursion' awakening in every lover of nature the *right* feeling. We saw the stars shine, we felt the awe of the mountains, we heard the rustle of the wind in the grass, and knew again the ineffable secret of solitude. It was a great joy. It was nearer to nature than anything we had before'" (Newman 71). For the New England Transcendentalists, particularly for Emerson, Wordsworth was above all the Prophet of Nature. As Newman observes "one of Wordsworth's

deepest beliefs was in the beneficent ministry of nature to the soul of man....Nature is for him never dully and densely material, but radiant and glowing with spiritual meanings" (Newman 72). However, Emerson differed considerably from Wordsworth in his views of nature propounded in his essay *The Divinity School Address* (1838) because he set forth his faith that nature is designed to be of use to man. It is made for the purpose of teaching humankind; yet nature is neither the last nor the deepest source of religious truth (for Wordsworth, the spirit eminent in nature *is* God; religious truth). Emerson justifies the mightiest revelations as coming directly from God– whom he calls the Oversoul– to the heart that awaits him, professing that there is God in us, and there is God working through nature to help us. As critic John Brooks Moore notes:

> Positively as Emerson is convinced of nature's significance for man, of man's education as nature's chief excuse for being, still he leaves us in not the least doubt that nature is secondary, God within us being primary. Wordsworth scarcely conveys any such distinction in his poems…if Emerson followed him, it was chronologically rather than logically or psychologically. Wordsworth is decidedly and professedly pantheistic; whereas Emerson, though occasionally approaching pantheism, cannot justly be said ever to have identified God with nature (Moore 187).

The move Wordsworth made in his philosophical poems and in the context of English Protestantism was to put nature in the place of the Bible. The individual in English Protestantism was already an independent soul who could read the Bible for himself. Wordsworth suggested that the Christian could do better to read himself into nature than into books. Emerson in a sense departed from church Christianity in a different, radical way in his declaration of the divinity of the self. The Protestant self looks at nature in order to look into his or her own self (British poet

and clergyman George Herbert might have said heart) to find something within that corresponds to the Oversoul, the abstract intelligence that created the universe. Thus, in the English Christian tradition of George Herbert and Robert Herrick, one admires nature in order to admire God, the ultimate source. For Herbert, humans are part of creation and ultimately to be judged by God. However, in Emerson, even more than in Wordsworth, contemplation of Nature leads one to formulate the moral laws of Nature by one's own intellect. Thus, boldly and even shockingly for a conventional Christian, Man becomes his own God: "a man is made the Providence to himself, dispensing good to his goodness and evil to his sin". Emerson centered his *Divinity School Address* around this sentiment and thus, delivered the *Divinity School Address* (formally known as "Acquaint Thyself First Hand with Deity") as a speech to seven graduating seniors of Harvard Divinity School (which was, at the time, centered around Unitarian thought), as well as their professors, and local ministers on July 15, 1838:

> See how this rapid intrinsic energy worketh everywhere, righting wrongs, correcting appearances, and bringing up facts to a harmony with thoughts. Its operation in life, though slow to the senses, is, at last, as sure as in the soul. By it, a man is made the Providence to himself, dispensing good to his goodness, and evil to his sin (Emerson, *The Divinity School Address* 3).

"This rapid intrinsic energy" is intrinsic in the sense that it requires no external deity to enforce it. It is a moral law, like gravity, that has its own karma and logic. Good engenders good and evil engenders evil with the same inexorable force that acceleration and gravitation exert on physical matter. The person who learns it, like the student who learns the laws of physics, frees himself from the external judgment of God, whom Blake calls "Nobodaddy". Blake would have been sympathetic to the phrase "man in made the Providence to himself" because he would have

understood that this could happen when the parts of humankind– such as reason, emotion, sensuality, and imagination– are brought together. Blake felt that the narrowing of human perception was a matter of human aspects separating from each other. When the rational mind, the mathematical mind, tries to subjugate the moral and imaginative aspects of the self, it becomes like Isaac Newton in Blake's famous painting of him, potentially heroic in form, but crouched and downward-looking, trapped at the bottom of a sea:

Figure 1: Blake, William. *Newton.* 1795-c. 1805, Tate Britain, London, United Kingdom. https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/blake-newton-n05058

In this way, we hear the percussions of Blake's satirization of the scientific approach to the world (evidenced in his painting of *Newton,* and in "Auguries of Innocence"), as being too reductive- a mere fixation with mathematical calculations. This is what Emerson here calls "thought" that works so "cold and intransitive in things", with "no end or unity" that it blinds one to the world of nature:

> The perception of this law of laws awakens in the mind a sentiment which we call the religious sentiment, and which makes our highest happiness. Wonderful is its power to

> charm and to command. It is a mountain air. It is the embalmer of the world. It is myrrh and storax, and chlorine and rosemary. It makes the sky and the hills sublime, and the silent song of the stars is it. By it, is the universe made safe and habitable, not by science or power. Thought may work cold and intransitive in things, and find no end or unity; but the dawn of the sentiment of virtue on the heart, gives and is the assurance that Law is sovereign over all natures; and the worlds, time, space, eternity, do seem to break out into joy (Emerson, *The Divinity School Address* 4)

What I noted in the previous chapter, how in "Auguries of Innocence", Blake identifies the eye of our corporeal existence with a kind of shadowing gourd, that was blind to a narrow opening that was born as our "soul slept in heavenly light", and that if only our soul had kept awake in that light, it would not have fallen. There is a clear correlation Emerson is making implicitly to Blake's apocalypse here– what Emerson calls "the dawn of the sentiment of virtue on the heart" echoes Blake's visionary eye, which, if it can transcend the mental trap of the five senses, can see into eternity. Here, however, Emerson's transparent eye opposes not specifically our corporeal existence, but rather, the greedy instruments of the institutionalized material world. Emerson contends that it is only through our philosophical ponderance of nature that one can see into "all natures"; "the worlds, time, space, eternity". We see here that while the experience of eternity in nature could only be externally achieved *beyond* our corporeal existence in Blake, here, Emerson contends that eternity is an internal experience, one that is stimulated internally by the powers of the philosophical mind.

Another key distinction that splits Blake's functioning of eternity in nature from Emerson's is that while Blake conceived of the past, the ancient poets as living in eternity (Eden), and that, following the linear chronology of the bible, when man bit into the apple of

knowledge, the fall of man meant that the senses rushed forward; thus obliterating our mental vision of eternity, and thus. eternity was purely nostalgic; accessible only through the past (memory), here, Emerson's eternity can be accessed now- in the present moment.

Emerson's further claim against the institutionalization of religion in America is cemented in his exploration of the "sentiment of virtue" law as a moral knowledge which is known directly in the sublimity of nature:

> But with whatever exception, it is still true, that tradition characterizes the preaching of this country; that it comes out of the memory, and not out of the soul; that it aims at what is usual, and not at what is necessary and eternal; that thus, historical Christianity destroys the power of preaching, by withdrawing it from the exploration of the moral nature of man, where the sublime is, where are the resources of astonishment and power. What a cruel injustice it is to that Law, the joy of the whole earth, which alone can make thought dear and rich; that Law whose fatal sureness the astronomical orbits poorly emulate, that it is travestied and depreciated, that it is behooted and behowled, and not a trait, not a word of it articulated. The pulpit in losing sight of this Law, loses its reason, and gropes after it knows not what. And for want of this culture, the soul of the community is sick and faithless. It wants nothing so much as a stern, high, stoical, Christian discipline, to make it know itself and the divinity that speaks through it. Now man is ashamed of himself; he skulks and sneaks through the world, to be tolerated, to be pitied, and scarcely in a thousand years does any man dare to be wise and good, and so draw after him the tears and blessings of his kind (Emerson, *The Divinity School Address* 13-14).

The “tradition” of “historical Christianity” in which detached priests preach from pulpits; separated both physically and psychologically from the congregation as they “withdraw” from the “moral nature of man”, is to overlook, or subconsciously pass up the opportunity to experience that which is “eternal” and “sublime”– nature. Emerson urges his Harvard graduate audience of future priests to see into nature and to learn from it– to use it as a tool to undo “cruel injustices” and to enrich the mind. Learning from nature means to observe the “astronomical orbits” and articulate the sublimity of the universe; which in turn will lead to an awareness of the self in relation to it. When one rationally contemplates nature, a feeling of “joy of the whole earth” arises, similar to Wordsworth’s notion of the “joy/Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime” that I highlighted in my analysis of “Tintern Abbey” (Wordsworth, “Tintern Abbey” lines 96-97). We see here a clear influence of Wordsworth’s ideas of nature on Emerson, who “met and talked with Wordsworth in 1833 at Rydal Mount; and again in 1848 at Ambleside” (Moore 180). Although, where Wordsworth would ordain Nature as the priest, Emerson ordains the self rather simply one whose unfaltering adherence to the ancient bible “gropes after what it knows not what”. Wordsworth, as I noted, was writing at a time of European revolution– both political and industrial– and with this came the collapse of Christianity (as represented in the physical ruins of Tintern Abbey).

Here, Emerson also writes during a time of revolution- but rather, the revolution for Emerson is not simply external (in regards to the cultural American revolution), but internal– it is a self which must turn away from the emptiness of institutional “Christian discipline” which shames its followers into “skulking and sneaking through the world” for fear of being reprimanded by God. For Emerson, once the self is freed from the “pity” and fear that institutional Christianity instills in its believers, man will “draw after him the tears and blessings

of his kind". In other words, stepping outside the materiality and pettiness of pulpits and priests, and into the realm of nature will stimulate an awareness of the divine self. The currents of this God will circulate through the self, and in turn, will spread and permeate through others. This divinity; this awareness of the soul in relation to its cosmological connection to the universe, will morally improve society in that all hierarchies will be overcome; power will rest internally on the foundations of self-reliance without the imposition of sin or providential punishment.

1.3 Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854)

From these Emersonian premises, Thoreau, in his pursuit of a deliberate and meaningful life of self-reliance, turned a severe and critical eye on the institutions of business and commerce. He did this by retreating to the woods of *Walden* in Concord, Massachusetts: a perch from which he could use his own "experiment" in living as a point from which to disparage the capitalist assumptions of his townsmen. Rejecting the resignation and quiet desperation inherent in conventional living, he proposed instead the sublime hypothesis that life's essence depends on the mind one brings to nature rather than nature itself. In this way, like Emerson, Thoreau opposes the institutions of commerce and business for pure profit, claiming that workers lead lives of "quiet desperation" (Thoreau 8), what Wordsworth called the "still sad music of humanity" ("Tintern Abbey" line 93) when they become mere instruments to the economy of capitalism for profit.

Thoreau departs from Emersonian theory in that he brings Emerson's abstract philosophical ideas down to a concrete reality– proposing that the body should physically engage with the natural world. The bodily senses should be in a state of constant stimulation through outdoor work; through activities such as sweating and hoeing a bean field,

coming face to face with a loon, sinking his feet into the mud, surveying the depths of Walden Pond, building his cabin, and touching the trees. Thoreau's anti-Platonic revelation that the natural material world should not be abandoned fully, but rather, should be used as a passage to the divine is clearly denoted in his description of the railroad tracks, which, at the time of Thoreau's stay in 1847, were being built by Irish immigrants who became the exploits of the American industrial revolution:

> If the engine whistles, let it whistle till it is hoarse for its pains. If the bell rings, why should we run? We will consider what kind of music they are like. Let us settle ourselves, and work and wedge our feet downward through the mud and slush of opinion, and prejudice, and tradition, and delusion, and appearance, that alluvion which covers the globe, through Paris and London, through New York and Boston and Concord, through church and state, through poetry and philosophy and religion, till we come to a hard bottom and rocks in place, which we can call reality…Be it life or death, we crave only reality. If we are really dying, let us hear the rattle in our throats and feel cold in the extremities; if we are alive, let us go about our business (Thoreau, *Walden* 99).

His purpose for retreating to the woods to:

> live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived"; to "live deep and suck out all the marrow of life…to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion (Thoreau, *Walden* 93).

is clearly denoted in the railroad passage as a desire to escape appearances in order to experience the raw, unfiltered truth of reality. The body must physically merge with nature, it must "wedge" its feet past the "mud and slush of opinion, and prejudice, and tradition, and delusion, and appearance", wash away the "alluvion which covers the globe", which covers the institutions of "church and state", the delusions of "poetry, philosophy and religion" in order to reach "a hard bottom and rocks in place, which we can call reality". Here, the need to escape societal distractions; the noise of the "engine" and the "bell" in order to physically engage with the earth mimics Wordsworth's inclination towards country over city life; that the rustic "hermit" who resides in the solitude and "impulses" of nature knows more of "man/of moral evil and of good" than "all the sages can" (Wordsworth, "The Tables Turned" lines 22-24). However, while Wordsworth's Nature could be accessed through the poetic device of memory, here Thoreau stresses the need for physical engagement; one must get their hands, feet, and entire body dirty, to sweat and struggle in their quest to uncover the underlying truth.

Being a Harvard graduate, Thoreau studied Wordsworth's ideas; his "personal library included a copy of the 1837 edition of the Complete Works" and, as Newman notes, "Wordsworth appears consistently in Thoreau's early essays…the 'Poet of Nature' is always described, either explicitly or implicitly, as one of the most important English writers" (Newman 84). Like Emerson and the rest of his contemporaries, Thoreau "read Wordsworth's poems through the lens of a deep interest in the poet's life and public persona; the poet's role as a public intellectual, as what Percy Bysshe Shelley called one of 'the unacknowledged legislators of the World'" (Newman 85). However, Thoreau often complained, again like Emerson, that Wordsworth's poetry did not match the stature of the public man:

> In the early essay, 'Homer Ossian Chaucer,' Thoreau specifies the terms of his admiration: Wordsworth embodies 'a simple pathos and feminine gentleness.' This is not, though, a genteel or trivial emotionalism. Thoreau goes on to stress the radicalism of Wordsworth's preference for 'his homely but vigorous Saxon tongue, when it was neglected by the court, and had not yet attained to the dignity of a literature' (Newman 85).

In other words, Thoreau valued Wordsworth on the poet's own terms, as expressed in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*: Thoreau appreciated the democratic implications of Wordsworth's decision to write in "a selection of language really used by men," a decision that reflected a poet's "rational sympathy" for "the great and universal passions of men.", but Thoreau did indeed see Wordsworth's democratic sentiments as a necessary corollary of a close relationship with nature (Newman 85).

Like Wordsworth, Thoreau challenged the Western literary tradition, by burrowing into the earth for empirical truths, reversing the emphasis on the abstract over the concrete. In his critique of the superficiality of "easy reading", he urges his readers to confront and wrestle instead with nature, aligning this connection with the spirit of "sucking the marrow out of life" (Thoreau 91). Thoreau's disdain for mere bookish knowledge extends to a critique of cultural stagnation, comparing it to the mechanical digestion of literature by those with "saucer eyes" (Thoreau 105), similar to Wordsworth's academic figure who "grow[s] double" from reading too much (Wordsworth, "The Tables Turned" line 2). But Thoreau adds another layer to Wordsworth's narrative, advocating for a universalized knowledge that can be gained through man's necessary *sensual* and *immediate* connection with nature, rather than Wordsworth's Nature accessed purely through the mind; through memory.

For Thoreau, time functions chronologically, but when it is seen philosophically, that is, when one fully immerses oneself in the present moment, then every minute becomes part of eternity:

> Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains. I would drink deeper; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars. I cannot count one. I know not the first letter of the alphabet. I have always been regretting that I was not as wise as the day I was born. The intellect is a cleaver; it discerns and rifts its way into the secret of things. I do not wish to be any more busy with my hands than is necessary. My head is hands and feet. I feel all my best faculties concentrated in it. My instinct tells me that my head is an organ for burrowing, as some creatures use their snout and fore-paws, and with it I would mine and burrow my way through these hills. I think that the richest vein is somewhere hereabouts; so by the divining-rod and thin rising vapors I judge; and here I will begin to mine (Thoreau, *Walden* 98).

Thoreau's idea that “Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in” paints time as a tangible and flowing entity that Thoreau actively engages with. He sees time not as an abstract concept, but as something to be experienced physically, just as one might dunk themselves into a river. As he continues, Thoreau describes how he “drinks” from the stream of time. This drinking is not just metaphorical; it's a sensory, physical experience as he drinks from the stream of the pond. However, even as he drinks, he doesn't lose sight of the tangible reality of time – he can see the “sandy bottom” and its shallowness. Here, Thoreau’s eternity in nature may be contrasted to Blake’s eternity, which can be seen “in a grain of sand” because here, Thoreau’s immersion in the present moment does not preclude his intellectual engagement (Blake, “Auguries of

Innocence" line 1). Thoreau is simultaneously attuned to the physical and the philosophical aspects of his experience. Thoreau's desire to "fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars" further illustrates his yearning to extend his physical immersion into the celestial realm, but still to experience direct physical engagement with the natural world.

As I explained in the previous chapter, for Blake, the visionary eye must see beyond the mental trap of the senses in order to experience eternity (and thus is purely abstract; metaphysical), but for Thoreau, his concrete physical engagement with the world is his pathway to eternity. It is through his corporeal eyes which peer into the reflection of the pond that he is able to see into infinity. Thoreau's assertion that his "head is hands and feet" reinforces his belief in the unity of the two realms: the metaphysical and the physical– he sees thinking as a tool for discovering reality, and his "head" is not detached from the rest of his body but fully integrated into the physical experience of nature. Thoreau is challenging the long tradition of prioritizing the abstract over the concrete, the intellect over manual force, and the mind over the body that had been prominent in Western thought. The passage embodies a shift that was taking place in the 19th century when thinkers like Marx, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche were challenging the dominance of abstract and intellectual constructs, promoting physicality over traditional Western philosophical values. Thoreau's celebration of strength, his courage in confronting the wilderness, and his direct physical engagement with the natural world align with this shift.

1.4 Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1891-92 'Deathbed' edition) poem "Eidólons"

Whitman is perhaps the most body-oriented, physical poet among romantic poets (English or American), the one who would "sing the body electric" and with a "barbaric

yawp." Yet Whitman had moments in his career in which he abstracted himself from the poetry of body, of physical contact, particularly in poems like "Eidólons."

Across all of the editions of *Leaves of Grass,* nature for Whitman will signify an interlacing of time and space: he will "bequeath [him]self to the dirt to grow from the grass [he] love[s]", and in turn, future generations can connect with him through the grass that grows "under your boot-soles". However, while in the earlier editions of *Leaves* (particularly the 1855 edition through the 1860-61 edition), nature is the setting in which Whitman's body and soul will engage in sexual intercourse, Whitman by the edited publication of his "Eidólons" poem in the 1891-92 Deathbed edition of *Leaves of Grass* was, as Whitman scholar Asselineau (in collaboration with Ed Folsom) in his work *The Evolution of Walt Whitman* states:

> …detaching himself more and more from the actual, from the material, in order to devote himself exclusively to the spiritual. This tendency to spiritualization is particularly marked in the poem with the curious title "Eidólons" where objects are replaced by their eternal archetypes. Evanescent material appearances give way to the true reality which is spiritual. The ideal triumphs over the real. Instead of celebrating the vigor and magnificent nonchalance of the oxen as in the 1855 edition of *Leaves*, Whitman now reserved his admiration for the old farmer who dominates them with all the spiritual force which is in him…Whitman's tone becomes increasingly intellectual in his later editions of *Leaves:* "Eidólons" is characteristic of his new manner. He no longer concerned himself now with the concrete details which swarmed in "Song of Myself"; he preferred to philosophize. His instinctive pantheism became a kind of dessicated Hegelianism. This intellectualization can be seen also in the suddenly increased proportion of prose in his work (Asselineau et al. 220)

Thus, more and more, he detached himself from and lost interest in his body which undoubtedly became calmer with age and ceased to be for him alternately a source of intense joys and intolerable torments. As Asselineau notes, “the stroke of paralysis which left him infirm and diminished must have reinforced that tendency toward spiritualism which reached its full flowering in 1876 in “Eidólons”. By this curious word of Greek origin, which is the doublet of ‘idol,’ he means images, the ethereal essences of things” (Asselineau et al. 29).

As Ed Folsom denotes, Whitmans “Eidólons,” poem was “first published in the New York *Tribune* on February 19, 1876, and again in 1876 in the volume *Two Rivulets*. The manuscript was likely composed in 1875 or early 1876. The order of the manuscript has been established based in part upon the order of linegroups in the poem as initially published, though not every line-group is represented in this draft. Almost every line-group is on a separate scrap of paper, which, together with the evidence that Whitman cut through one leaf in order to move a

group of lines, indicates that Whitman was experimenting with multiple arrangements as he cut scraps and pasted them to other scraps" (Folsom 2).

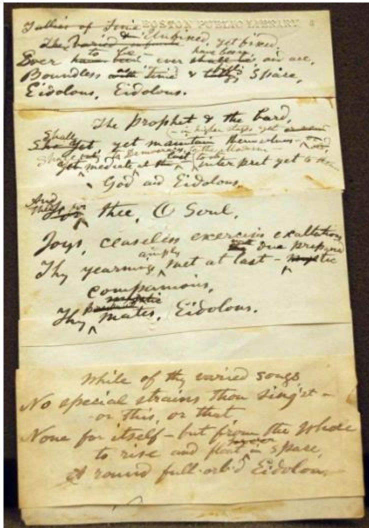
BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY
Boundless, in time & space,
Eidolons, Eidolons.
The prophet & the bard,
God and Eidolons.
thee, O Soul,
Joys, ceaseless exercises, exaltations,
Thy yearnings amply fed at last
companions,
Thy mates, Eidolons.
While of thy varied songs
No special strains thou sing'st –
or this, or that
None for itself – but from the Whole
to rise and float in space,
A round full-orb'd Eidolon.

Figure 2: Whitman, Walt. "Eidólons". 1875-1876, Boston Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts, United States. https://www.bpl.org/archival_post/whitman-walt-1819-1892-collection/

In "Eidólons", Whitman celebrates these ethereal essences, and it seems that the physical world disintegrates and dissolves before the reader's eyes as matter disappears:

Ever the dim beginning,

Ever the growth, the rounding of the circle,

Ever the summit and the merge at last, (to surely start again,)

Eidólons! eidólons!

Ever the mutable,

Ever materials, changing, crumbling, re-cohering,

Ever the ateliers, the factories divine,

Issuing eidólons…

The ostent evanescent,

The substance of an artist's mood or savan's studies long,

Or warrior's, martyr's, hero's toils,

To fashion his eidólon.

Of every human life…

In its eidólon (Whitman, “Eidólons” lines 12-16, 21-28).

Here, objects are only “the ostent evanescent”, and time and space are filled by myriads of “eidólons”, the universe itself is only an immense “eidolon” and the essential Me, “the real I myself,” which is no longer the body, but the immaterial body hidden inside the body, is only “an image, an eidolon”. Yet, Whitman, as in the project of *Leaves*, continuously evokes a sense of evolution in his anaphoric phrases “ever”, “ever”, “ever”, in which the “rounding of the circle” refers to a Euclidean geometry, which Whitman implies will lead the reader to the “summit”; where imagination (metaphysical) can “merge” with the material experience in order for us to discover the true essence of things (i.e. “eidólons”). Whitman’s word picture of the spinning wheel inside the “factories divine” reflects his own evolution of thought in that Whitman devoted himself “to fashion his eidólon”; to the project of “changing”, building, evolving his collection of poems *Leaves of Grass* in which he presented America, and most crucially to this thesis, nature as a dynamic, growing, evolving macrocosm, a universe with which we must “merge” with.

As Asselineau notes, “consequently it seems that at the end of Whitman’s evolution he reaches a state of absolute subjective idealism, but, at the very moment when we believe him finally settled and in possession of a well-defined monistic philosophy, he slips away and

escapes us again" (Asselineau 29). For in the course of the same year that he composed– or at least published "Eidólons" in 1881-1882, he wrote in the preface to the sixth edition of *Leaves of Grass*:

> It was originally my intention, after chanting in *Leaves of Grass* the songs of the Body and Existence, to then compose a further, equally needed Volume, based on those convictions of perpetuity and conservation which, enveloping all precedents, make the unseen Soul govern absolutely at last (Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* 1881-1882 ed., 2).

However, I disagree with Asselineau's assertion that Whitman's "Eidólons" dismisses materialism *entirely* in order to favor the metaphysical, in that Whitman, the poet "of the body" and "of the soul", never devotes himself to either side of the polarized nodes of materialism and idealism; mind and matter; but rather, constantly presents himself as suspended between the two forces, swinging, as a pendulum does, between scientific fact and imaginative poetry – for, as is quintessential to understanding Whitman, he is "large", he "contain[s] multitudes" (Whitman, "Song of Myself" lines 1326-1327). Thus, Whitman, in "Eidólons" swings also between past, present, and future in the setting of nature:

> The old, old urge,
>
> Based on the ancient pinnacles, lo, newer, higher pinnacles,
>
> From science and the modern still impell'd,
>
> The old, old urge, eidólons.
>
> The present now and here,
>
> America's busy, teeming, intricate whirl,
>
> Of aggregate and segregate for only thence releasing,

To-day's eidólons.

These with the past,

Of vanish'd lands, of all the reigns of kings across the sea,

Old conquerors, old campaigns, old sailors' voyages,

Joining eidólon (Whitman, “Eidólons” lines 29-40).

Whitman’s backward turning philosophy, in recalling the “ancient pinnacles”, takes the reader back to the “old, old urge” of the Biblical tradition as it mimics the opening lines of Genesis: “in the beginning….” (Genesis 1). But Whitman swiftly transitions to the “present” as the only conceivable reality; there is no such thing as the past or future, but only the “now”. Thus, America for Whitman is a nation that is dynamic; it is a “teeming” democracy. Yet there is still a tension between the isolated individual “segrate” and the whole; the group, the “aggregate”, much like the tension between the solitary hermit (Whitman) and the masses. The reconciliation between the individual and the group; the physical and the metaphysical is interpreted in Whitman’s mind as an America that, much like *Leaves*, grew out of the ancient civilizations of “vanish’d lands”, of “reigns of kings”, “conquerers”, every marker of history has led to this moment. Whitman then turns exclusively to a celebration of the natural world:

The noiseless myriads,

The infinite oceans where the rivers empty,

The separate countless free identities, like eyesight,

The true realities, eidólons.

Not this the world,

Nor these the universes, they the universes,

Purport and end, ever the permanent life of life,

Eidólons, eidólons (Whitman, “Eidólons” lines 53-62).

The symbolic “oceans and “rivers” reflect Whitman’s own changing evolution– he both literally went up and down the Mississippi River on his way to New Orleans and was blown away by the river’s power, but he also uses the river metaphorically as a symbol of progress (much like we saw in “Tintern Abbey” where the gurgling River Wye flowed toward progression). Thus, Whitman’s “Eyesight” combines both Emerson’s “transparent eyeball”, Wordsworth’s ability to “see into the life of all things”, and Whitman’s known studies of Plato’s Republic in which “perspicacity” shows that humans are not only given outsight but, more importantly for Plato, “insight” (wisdom which, for Whitman, means understanding “eidólons”). Whitman’s ecstatic repetition of “eidolons” reigns throughout the poem as a mantra, as he wishes to unpack the ultimate reality of nature, behind appearance as he begins to transcend the material world:

Beyond thy lectures learn'd professor,

Beyond thy telescope or spectroscope observer keen, beyond all

mathematics,

Beyond the doctor's surgery, anatomy, beyond the chemist with

his chemistry,

The entities of entities, eidólons (Whitman, “Eidólons” lines 63-68).

Here, Whitman echoes back to his earlier poem “When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer” in dismissing the authority of academic knowledge. As he claimed in “Learn’d Astronomer”:

When I heard the learn’d astronomer,

When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,

When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them,

When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much applause in the lecture-
room,

How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,

Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,

In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,

Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars. (Whitman, "When I Heard the Learn'd
Astronomer" lines 1-8).

Again, much like Wordworth's "The Tables Turned", Whitman discredits academic knowledge; more specifically, knowledge learned exclusively through the lens of mathematics and science without the experience of being immersed out in nature, of looking "up in perfect silence at the stars". It is implied here that Whitman's fragility in his lack of formal education is communicated as a subconscious insecurity, after all, much like Wordsworth, his poetry relies on its readers and thus, bookish knowledge must be given a voice. Thus, behind all of academic studies, there is a unifying principle ("the entities of entities") which is trying to discover through writing *Leaves of Grass*:

The prophet and the bard,

Shall yet maintain themselves, in higher stages yet,

Shall mediate to the Modern, to Democracy, interpret yet to them,

God and eidólons

Whitman is attempting here to resolve the tension between the priest or "prophet", and the singer or "bard"– that is the "skilled strategist" in the *Odyssey*, the passageway that civilization must go through. On one hand there is "the prophet" (the priest who is backward looking; more conservative), and on the other hand, there is "bard"; the singer; the poet who is forward

looking): as was the central conflict in the Odyssey. Thus, Whitman is attempting to navigate through these straits which must be "mediated" in order to achieve the "Higher stages"– which, knowing Whitman read Plato profusely, refers to Plato's higher knowledge of the Forms, which then again, must be balanced, "meditated" with Whitman's erotic, material world:

> Thy body permanent,
>
> The body lurking there within thy body,
>
> The only purport of the form thou art, the real I myself,
>
> An image, an eidólon (Whitman, "Eidólons" lines 79-82).

Whitman must mix his "body permanent" with his soul; the "body lurking there within my body", he is emphasizing the fusion between mind and matter, the physical and the metaphysical, between the eminent and the transcendent– which can be communed together in nature where:

> Thy very songs not in thy songs,
>
> No special strains to sing, none for itself,
>
> But from the whole resulting, rising at last and floating,
>
> A round full-orb'd eidólon (Whitman, "Eidólons" lines 83-86).

Whitman communicates that his poetry is not self-aggrandizing, he was not simply seeking fame in composing "thy songs" of *Leaves of Grass*. Rather, he notes that patience has been "rising at last" in that it took Whitman his entire lifetime to get to this Deathbed edition of *Leaves*; he had to devote his "body" and "soul" to the production of poems. But most crucially, he understood that there is a reason for waiting in that it leads to something complete, something "fully-orb'd"– much like that of the two halves of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* which balance each other– Whitman epiphany is in his revelation that the material world of Nature (that of science; mathematics) is in harmony with the immaterial concepts of "joy"; and that dwelling in

the enigma; the unknown mysteries of the universe in nature is an essential gift of the human condition.

3. 20th Century Global Postmodernism:

Italo Calvino

1.1 Introduction to 20th Century Global Postmodernism:

By the 20th century, the initial British and American Transcendentalist movements moved on to another phase of nature writing in the context of Modernism, sometimes called late Romanticism, in which nature writing begins to include a scientific view alongside the emotional and spiritual symbiosis of poet and nature characteristic of Wordsworth. The best example of this is the late A. R.Ammons who moved easily between scientific and poetic views of the natural world, one sees it too in Robert Frost for whom John Keats' "negative capability"– the ability to live with ambiguity, without reaching scientific fact– corresponds to the thinking of 20th-century theoretical physicists like Bohr, Schrödinger, and Heisenberg. By the time we get to Italo Calvino, a Postmodernist rather than Modernist writer, imaginative writers are beginning with a notion that everything one says about the universe and nature is predicated upon a provisional and imaginary set of scientific premises, that everything we know about nature is necessarily fragmented and hypothetical.

The writers this thesis has dealt with thus far– Wordsworth, Blake, Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman– had very different ideas about how poetic consciousness interacts with the material world of nature. However, they did have much in common: for one thing, they all assumed that the universe, of which nature is part, was whole and coherent, and theoretically knowable not only scientifically, but emotionally, imaginatively, and philosophically. Some, like Blake and Wordsworth, wanted to relegate science to a secondary form of knowledge

subordinate to imagination, thus lines like "we murder to dissect" (Wordsworth, "The Tables Turned" line 28). Whitman too made sure to subordinate the lecture of his "learned astronomer" to a secondary place after his own poetic capacity to stare in wonder at the stars in the "mystical moist night air" (Whitman, "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" line 7). Even Thoreau the accomplished botanist and surveyor felt that imaginative, philosophical, and poetic understanding was at least as important as anything science could teach. However, by the time Italo Calvino was writing in the 1960s, it was no longer clear that the universe could be known as a coherent, organic whole. What we know of nature, twentieth-century science and Postmodernism suggest, is a collage of fragments, of ideas derived from varied and unreconciled frames of reference.

It is a given of contemporary theoretical physics that different views of the universe coexist and cannot always be reconciled. For example Newtonian and Einsteinian physics obey different laws, and string theory has yet to definitively reconcile them. Similarly the experiments that treat light as particles (photons) and as waves are based on different "paradigms" about light, and are demonstrated by different kinds of experiments. One sees the new scientific paradigm– a universe not knowable as a coherent or cohesive whole– reflected in writers like Calvino (Postmodern by disposition) who introduce science into their works as an "Uncertainty Principle".

Italo Calvino (1923-1985) was born in Santiago de Las Vegas, Cuba, of Italian parents. In his works major works– such as the *Our Ancestors* trilogy (1952–1959), the *Cosmicomics* (1965), *Invisible Cities* (1972) and *If on a winter's night a traveler* (1979), Calvino repeatedly suggests that knowing the world (to the extent that it can be known) asks for an interdisciplinary mind, "a dialogue of literature, science, and philosophy" as the only way to save

culture from a radical instability of meaning, an ideological and epistemological impasse of uncertainty (Pilz 193-94).

Like Blake, Wordsworth, and Emerson, Calvino sees literature as cosmology, writing that gropes toward revealing the nature of our knowledge of the universe. He sees the two branches of human knowledge– one mathematical and scientific, the other poetic, linguistic, and imaginative– as picking up each others' burden at the point of exhaustion. At the moment when science seeks meaning, at the moment when language exhausts itself from a history of misuse, the other arrives to rejuvenate it. He put it this way in his delivery of the Norton Lectures at Harvard in 1984:

> [the] propulsive spring for the scientist: as an example of courage in the imagination, in bringing to the extreme consequences a hypothesis. And so in other situations the opposite can happen…the model of mathematical language, of formal logic, can save the writer from the attrition in which words and images have expired for their false use" (Italo Calvino, *Collection of Sand: Essays* translated from Italian 103).

Wordsworth, in Book Five of *The Prelude* imagined the stone (scientific knowledge) and the shell (poetic knowledge) as somehow complementary, but did not really think about how they would complement each other. Calvino has thought about what the dynamic of their partnership looks like in the service of writing a twentieth-century cosmogony, saving each other from descents into meaninglessness or falsity.

1.2 Italo Calvino's *Cosmicomics s*hort story "The Distance of the Moon" (1965):

In his collection of short stories *Cosmicomics* (first publication in 1965), intellectual writer, journalist, and political activist Italo Calvino constructed his twelve stories around

circulating scientific hypotheses. Calvino's declared aim in writing *Cosmicomics*, as critic Sbragia states, was “to show that myth and imaginative literature can spring from any soil, even the technical language of science” (Sbragia 285). In his short story “The Distance of the Moon”, he constructs his narrative around the theory of tidal acceleration which was published nearly a century prior to *Cosmicomics*, known as Sir George Howard Darwin’s (son of Charles Darwin) *Origin of the Moon by Fission*. In Sir George Darwin’s announced theory in 1878, he posited that the moon once orbited the earth more closely than it does now, until tidal forces pushed that orbit farther outward to its present circumference. In this way, Darwin “treated the Earth as a homogeneous rotating viscous spheroid, and assumed that the Moon moves in a circular orbit in the plane of the ecliptic. Taking the viscosity of the Earth large enough to give the observed (apparent) secular acceleration, he could work back to a state in which the Moon moved around the Earth as if rigidly fixed to it in a period of 5 hours 36 minutes. This would have been at least 54 million years ago, and the Moon's center would have been no more than 6000 miles from the Earth's surface; both period and distance would be smaller if the Earth were not homogeneous” (Dempster 378). This hypothesis, however, was later discredited in 1929 by published scientific evidence by British geophysicist Harold Jeffreys and physicist astronomer James Jeans who instead theorized the “Giant Impact Hypothesis” in which the formation of the moon followed a “giant impact that ejected portions of the differentiated Earth’s mantle and parts of the impacting body into circumterrestrial orbit. The Moon must have accreted subsequently from this circumterrestial disk” (Hartmann et al. 59).

Like most of *Cosmicomics*, the “Distance of the Moon” is primarily narrated by character “Qfwfq”, a congenital know-it-all who feels compelled to respond to Calvino’s scientific assertions with stories from his direct experience, which, he will claim across the *Cosmicomics*

stories in the form of a novel, to be an "experienced beginning" pre-big bang inside a gravitational singularity in traversing time and space and through forms of evolution as a fish, as a dinosaur, etc…, in which all forms progress towards the transmogrification into some modern humanoid form. In this particular short story, "The Distance of the Moon", Calvino presents his character Qfwfq as a humanish creature who finds himself in the company of personified seafarers, who, on monthly expeditions to the moon, sail under it, and send participants up to collect what they refer to as "moonmilk" from the moon's scales. Calvino's "moonmilk" is a pasty substance made from bitumen fish liquid and other matter that is drawn onto the moon by its gravitational pull where all the fish liquid ferments.

Though moon's milk is imaginary, Calvino writes about it precisely and technically as if it were real, as if he were describing a real phenomenon and real operations of retrieving moonmilk. Yet at the same time, the characters within the story are able to poeticize the moon– as character Qfwfq projects his love for Mrs. Vhd Vhd (the Captain's wife) onto the body of the moon; thus turning the moon into a symbol of his love for Mrs. Vhd Vhd as Keats turned to Cynthia, the goddess of the moon, to further his love (Keats, "Endymion" line 170). But Calvino, having introduced a moon-love goddess mythology pulls the plug on it by having Qfwfq, the unreliable narrator of the story, literalize his love quest by actually going to the moon with Mrs. Vhd Vhd where he is disappointed and frustrated that he cannot get back to Earth. In effect, the moon-struck poet has been able to subject his fancy to a scientific trial to thus discover that while he can go to the moon, he cannot realize there his dream of love. Worse still, he finds that on the moon he loses his identity, is bereft of the poetic self who longed in the first place for love on the moon.

Calvino takes the science-poetry further than the Romantics had in the sense that he writes his fiction in such a way as to make it possible to pass back and forth between scientific and poetic constructions of the world, and forces them to check or thwart each other. The natural or material world in Calvino has no meaning without the human consciousness that projects its feelings and desire onto it. On the other hand, the material world, put in contact with the human dreams that give it meaning, necessarily cancels them out. Having been given transport to the moon, Qfwfq is merely an exile from his own imagination, an impoverished and disoriented seeker like Samuel Beckett's "Vladimir and Estragon" in *Waiting for Godot*.

Far as we seem to have come from Romantic poetry, Calvino's idea of Qfwfq exiled on the moon is also connected to a Romantic idea of exile. Blake comes particularly to mind, who thought that human life as he knew it in London in the 1780s was the tragedy of people in exile from their imaginative paradise, the integrated man, the "Human Divine" (Blake, "The Divine Image" line 11). All of Blake's poetry is, in fact, about a return to a lost paradise of the imagination. Wordsworth is less relevant here because he did not think that human beings were generally in exile, only the people who lived in cities were, those who had lost touch with nature, rustic ways, and the simplicity of the Northumberland cottage dwellers.

Qfwfq is an unreliable narrator who often confesses his faulty memory and his uncertainty of the facts. In other writers, the unreliable narrator is usually a mark of a particular sort of person, or of a peculiar person, such as author Vladimir Nabokov's "Humbert Humbert" in his 1955 novel *Lolita*. However, in Calvino, the unreliable narrator is a figure for everyman, for all human beings, all narrators, and the limitations of all human knowledge, including the limits of science.

Calvino's perceived Postmodernism, through his employment of an unreliable narrator with flawed memories, is sought through, as critic Pilz states “his effort to escape an anthropocentric understanding of the world, his flight into the cosmos in the quest for the reintegration of humanity and nature coincides with the trend in Postmodern science to return to pre-Cartesian forms of understanding and to reevaluate cosmology and cosmogony as absolutely modern sciences” (Pilz 194). Calvino, through his detailed descriptions of the mining of moon milk, of characters pushing and pulling up and down the ladder to the moon as they cross the gravitational threshold, of the gravitational love triangle in which barriers can be crossed through the push and pull of human attraction, and of the presentation of Qfwfq as a memory broker who presents questions asked by younger characters, but leaves the reader with no answers, begins by asserting himself as the authority on the subject of the narrative:

> How well I know! – *old Qfwfq criêd* – the rest of you can't remember, but I can…
>
> But the whole business of the Moon's phases worked in a different way then: because the distances from the Sun were different, and the orbits, and the angle of something or other, I forget what; as for eclipses, with Earth and Moon stuck together the way they were, why, we had eclipses every minute: naturally, those two big monsters managed to put each other in the shade constantly, first one, then the other (Calvino, “The Distance of the Moon”, 3).

Calvino, through his character Qfwfq, immediately asserts his authority on the subject, but his specificity falters with the introjection “I forget what”. This *in media res* opening reflects the mind’s oscillation between the emotional pull of memory and its pushing of objective reality aside; which aligns with the gravitational push and pull between the earth and the moon. Critic Stephen Toulmin claims that in this opening “the return to the cosmos and cosmology is

identified as a markedly Postmodern trend, motivated by the search for a pre-Cartesian concept of an interrelated cosmos, where humanity is part of the cosmos rather than the detached observer of a rational universe" (Toulmin 223). In classical antiquity, he explains, "the cosmos denoted a unified conception of the universe and all things in it: namely the conviction that the entire system of the world forms a single, integrated system united by universal principles, in which Humanity and Nature participated in a single, common order. This connectedness collapsed with the beginning of modernity and the introduction of the Cartesian and Newtonian dualisms and dichotomies, separating Humanity from Nature, Mind from Matter, Rationality from Causality" which means that "it was then understood that the world view of Descartes and Newton no longer represented a genuine cosmos" (Toulmin 224). This re-negotiating of the self in relation to natural science was touched upon in my analysis of Blake, who, in denying the reliability of the senses (and thus, denying empirical science), distanced the visionary poet from the overscrupulous scientist (as seen in his "Auguries of Innocence"), and thus, widened this boundary between mind and matter, the human and the physical natural world. Calvino, in assigning Qfwfq as an unreliable narrator with a selective and falsifiable memory, acknowledges that the distance between fact and fiction, poetic discourse and scientific evidence can fluctuate, and historically, has been widening and narrowing, their forces pushing and pulling each other.

Beginning with the traditions of myth and fable which speculated on the nature of human morality and emotion, which evolved into early Pagan, Judeo-Christian religions (where truth could be gleaned from Biblical myth), the reality of nature, when it comes to the scientific dissection of it, has historically been prone to falsification. This systolic diastolic vacillation between fact and fiction, from a nature that is experienced through the senses, to an intellectualization of it into scientific laws, to a physicist reduction of these laws, shows that

neither node of the spectrum– neither abstract thinking and intellectual comprehension, can be fully known, and thus the truth in nature becomes relative to its observer– the point Calvino explicitly makes in his use of Qfwfq as the unreliable narrator. Calvino chooses to tell this story of a falsified hypothesis to read as if it is going to be a myth:

> This is how we did the job: in the boat we had a ladder: one of us held it, another climbed to the top, and a third, at the oars, rowed until we were right under the Moon; that's why there had to be so many of us (I only mentioned the main ones). The man at the top of the ladder, as the boat approached the Moon, would become scared and start shouting: "Stop! Stop! I'm going to bang my head!" That was the impression you had, seeing her on top of you, immense, and all rough with sharp spikes and jagged, saw-tooth edges. It may be different now, but then the Moon, or rather the bottom, the underbelly of the Moon, the part that passed closest to the Earth and almost scraped it, was covered with a crust of sharp scales. It had come to resemble the belly of a fish, and the smell too, as I recall, if not downright fishy, was faintly similar, like smoked salmon (Calvino, “The Distance of the Moon” 4).

Here, “the job” refers to the participants pulling some phosphorescent objects back down to the earth. In Qfwfq’s attempt to explain this process, he fragments the continuity of the narrative in describing five people on the boat, yet only three jobs. Calvino’s “man at the top of the ladder” alludes to the The Tower of Babel. In Genesis, a divinity capable of emotions angrily thwarts human hubris. In Calvino, there is no punitive, personified God. Rather, humans are thwarted by impersonal natural forces, like the gravitational pull of the moon. Calvino’s ladder cannot reach the moon any more than the tower in Genesis can reach the heavens. But the limits to ambition in the two stories speak of different moral conclusions. The Bible asks for humility, to not

challenge the authority of God. Calvino stares at the limits of knowledge built into the very fabric of the material universe: it is not immoral to climb, but rather, merely impossible.

A year after the publication of *Cosmicomics*, in 1969, Neil Armstrong, Edwin 'Buzz' Aldrin, and Michael Collins would transfer Calvino's imaginative prose into the spheres of reality– thus, his scientific questions about the nature of the moon would be partially answered. However, Calvino, like his characters who hover over the threshold between the earth and the moon, presents himself as suspended between science and the poetic imagination. Though he allows his readers to learn and understand the organic nature of the biological cosmos under a scientific lens (through his inclusion of Sir George Howard Darwin's theory), he continually destabilizes our trust in these scientific laws– which are continuously being discredited, disproved, renovated, and evolved with exposure to new research and evidence. Thus, Calvino presents scientific knowledge gained through nature as a kind of myth, in which storytellers begin to develop tropes across time and space, only to renovate, and reinterpret them based on their updated belief systems. Thus, as Postmodern theorist Roland Barthes would conclude, the author cannot detach him/herself from their socio-political context, and thus are inextricably bound to the texts of the past, whose ideas subconsciously re-introduce themselves, regardless of whether it was their intention. This "Death of the Author", thus produces a "Birth of the Reader", as there are as many readers as there are interpretations, which base themselves off of an individual's social, class, race, age, gender, etc… perspective (Gass 10). As critic Siegel points out, "Roland Barthes, articulates a desire to escape from the tyranny of signification altogether: 'Sometimes he feels like letting all this language rest—this language which is in his head, in his work, in other people, as if language itself were an exhausted limb of the human body; it seems

to him that if he could take a rest from language, he could rest altogether, dismissing all crises, echoes, exaltations, injuries, reasonings, etc.'" (Siegel 48).

Calvino's feminization of the moon through Qfwfq's yearning of its charms, his desire to be "on" her just as the moon is on them is shown through his erotic imagery of Mrs. Vhd Vhd's "round and firm" breasts which have "an attraction as strong as the Moon's" (Calvino 9). As Curtis White notes, "Qfwfg's attraction for Mrs. Vhd Vhd's moonlike breasts point to his desire for 'a happy original state': Thus, Calvino's cosmic character settles on the breast of the lover, in the breast of the mother, in the breast of nature, in the breast of the cosmos" (White 136). In response to White, Siegel responds, "Mrs. Vhd Vhd, however, loves the Deaf One who, in turn, is in love with the Moon. For each of them—Qfwfq, Mrs. Vhd Vhd and the Deaf One—desire organizes itself around lack. Mrs. Vhd Vhd—like the moon—symbolizes the potential for wholeness as well as a type of radical otherness. When Qfwfg attempts to satisfy his desires by possessing Mrs.Vhd Vhd on the moon's alien surface, he finds the only way to completely unite with the Other is to relinquish self, a form of death" (Siegel 52):

> I should have been happy: as I had dreamed, I was alone with her…Mrs Vhd Vhd was now my exclusive prerogative, a month of days and lunar nights stretched uninterrupted before us…and yet, and yet, it was instead, exile.
>
> I thought only of the Earth. It was the Earth that caused each of us to be that someone he was rather than someone else; up there, wrested from the Earth, it was as if I were no longer that I, nor she that She, for me. I was eager to return to the Earth, and I trembled at the fear of having lost it. The fulfillment of my dream of love had lasted only that instant when we had been united, spinning between Earth and Moon; torn from its earthly soil, my love now knew only the heart-rending nostalgia for what it lacked: a

where, a surrounding, a before, an after (Calvino, “The Distance of the Moon” 15-16).

Here, the shattering of Qfwfq’s sense of self is disillusioned by the loneliness of the “lunar nights” which “stretch uninterrupted,” in which Calvino directly emphasizes the human condition as a quest for meaning; that if human desire for knowledge did not exist, we would live in a kind of “exile” from both ourselves and reality. The distance, (again recalling the titular “Distance of the Moon”), between our human desire in which we emotionally envision and long for someone (in this case projected onto nature) and its actual reality is vast. Thus, the organic connection between these two realms– imaginative dream and reality, the physical and the metaphysical, the earth and the moon, the spoken word and non-verbal communication continues to expand, both in the sense of the literal space (the cosmos expanding) and the psychological space of the human intellect which can never fully unlock the mysteries of nature. Thus, when floating on this lunar surface, Qfwfq’s desire for “Earth”, where the self can be recognized as a “someone”, becomes a flipped paradoxical desire. As critic White states, at this point the reader, in the words of Borges’, has “‘dreamt the world. We have dreamt it as firm, mysterious, visible, ubiquitous in space and durable in time; but in its architecture we have allowed tenuous and eternal crevices of unreason which tell us it is false’...if, couched in our Postmodern period, we may not speak of origins, or dream the world as ‘ubiquitous in space and durable in time’ without tainting ourselves with theology and metaphysics, how shall we explain the ‘presence’ of things in our stories?...The ultimate thrust of the deconstructions of Calvino is to cut us off from time, space and matter, that is to say, from the mimetic impulse” (White 131).

Thus, amidst this overwhelming chaos of nature, Calvino’s ordering of reality comes with his circular time, which loops back to the beginning, back to Qfwfq being on earth and

reminding us that we are reading his story through a myth-based frame. As scholar Sbragia states:

> Synecdoche and mise en abyme are Calvino's unruly tools in his attempt to impart order to his fictional universe…Calvino uses them to probe the contiguous and metaphysical boundaries of literature, 'the universe and the void,' as he puts it, 'between which the target of literature swings back and forth' ("Multiplicity," Six Memos 113). Used alone synecdoche and mise en abyme succumb to the chaos they would try to order". But perhaps…Calvino suggests that 'the solution, the order, lies in their interaction (Italo Calvino 95). This echoes the position of that version of chaos theory which argues that chaos begets creation through repetition and variety…where. the contiguous irregularities impart change and evolution to the bedrock of symmetrical order that holds the universe together. The result is creation (Sbragia 301).

Thus, the ending of "The Distance of the Moon" imparts the evidence that human desire for meaning can never be fully satisfied. Calvino's fiction tries to find a way to bring the severed realms of the earth and the moon, the physical and the metaphysical, and the internal and external worlds back into a relationship. Yet this relationship is utopian in its imagination, while on the other hand, never lets its readers forget that that connection has been severed and can never be recovered. The inkling of a solution Calvino offers is that it is only through a particular type of fantastical fiction that this relationship between man and nature can be recovered. In a Blakean sense, it is the poetic visionary who can escape the mental cavern of the whale's belly (in reference to Jonah in "Auguries of Innocence"), and thus, can see through the eye into the clear realms of day; of a God who displays the human form.

4. Conclusion

The period of British Romanticism elevated nature as a concept which could displace the authority of Protestantism and the Church of England's power over shaping human knowledge as a morality of sin and punishment by replacing these doctrines with an alternative knowledge that could be learned from nature, "preached and teached" not by rectors, but by poets like Wordsworth and Blake. Wordsworth's innovative project was to dispense this new knowledge of nature as a repository for poetic imagination and "blessed mood", in a language "really used by man", in which the visionary poet could speak universally as "man speaking to men", though with more "lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind" (Wordsworth, "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" 6). Thus, Wordsworth, the enlightened poet, ordained himself as a priest of nature, dispelling its truths in the style of sermons in poems such as "Tintern Abbey" where his childhood experiences in the woods surrounding The River Wye became his own Nicene Creed. In "The Tables Turned", Wordsworth went further in his rejection of institutionalized religion, escalating his claim that not only should readers walk out of the churches, but the classrooms too. With a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling", Wordsworth's philosophy of nature urges its worshippers to get "Up! up!" and "quit your books", in order to "Let Nature be your teacher" (Wordsworth, "The Tables Turned" lines 1, 16). Nature, for Wordsworth can be a moral teacher in that it can retain a childhood innocence and divinity which can become the storehouse; the food for future years when one finds themselves disillusioned by their adult reality. However, while Wordsworth's knowledge from nature embraces the material world, his contemporary Blake, comes along to reject the physical natural

world and urges instead that we must look beyond nature. We must abandon the mental trap of our sight, taste, touch, smell, and sound in order to see “Thro” the eye of our corporeal existence into eternity (Blake, “Auguries of Innocence” line 26). What can glimpsing into eternity through nature teach us? Blake answers that it will allow an opening in our soul to see visions; spirits who hover inside trees and float inside the petals of flowers. These spirits can impart to us a wisdom of innocence, of man’s Edenic state before the fall.

This revolutionary spirit of British Romanticism was transferred to the continent of America in which American Transcendentalism was birthed out of writers who grew up reading the poems of their intellectual idols– Wordsworth, Blake, Coleridge etc…, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman. Emerson would take Blake’s conception of eternity and bring it down into a tangible concept that could be achieved simply by viewing nature through a “transparent eyeball” in which the self, rather than looking outside for an external divinity, spirit, or God, could locate within himself his own divinity. Thus, nature would become a tool for realizing one’s own genius; through the mind’s receptors of rationality. Thoreau and Whitman, on the other hand, would point their philosophic cameras at the body– emphasizing that it is not just through the powers of the mind that one could explore and learn from nature but, most essentially, through the body’s sensual engagement with it. Thoreau, in camping out in the woods of Walden, would impart to his readers that sweating over his work in building a cabin, mushing his feet into the mud, touching the trees, and listening to the loon were all activities that taught him how to read nature not as “a mere fragment of dead history” but as “living poetry like the leaves of a tree” (Thoreau, *Walden* 309). Whitman, would push this idea further, emphasizing that the democratic spirit of nature is rooted in the earth; the *Leaves of Grass* which can be accessed through the communion of body and soul and the harmony

between the abstract and concrete worlds; which form a “full-orb'd” ideal (Whitman, “Eidólons” line 86).

Finally, this tension between the literary and scientific worlds; the poetic imagination and factual reality in nature is once again revisited in the 20th century, where Postmodernist writers recognize a radical instability of meaning in the limits of human knowledge of nature; more expansively, of the cosmos. The issue of cosmology has been negotiated and re-negotiated across the time and space of literary history, as was in Blake– where he conceived of ancient poets as the original creators who lived in a state of eternity, and the cosmos was created as this Eden but was lost when God made humans outside of himself, yet still in his image. Cosmology was again renegotiated in Emerson, where the mind was opened to the universe and thus opened our desire to discover the truth in nature. In Thoreau, one’s retreatment into nature in solitude and the eternity of the night sky was the only cosmic continuity and did fulfill the purpose of moral hope to awaken the “sleepers” beneath the railroad tracks. Whitman would view cosmology as “All space, all time,/ The stars, the terrible perturbations of the suns…Fill'd with eidolons only” (Whitman, “Eidólons” line 49-52). That is, would see the past, present, future as inextricably bound, thus pointing to a God in everything, in everyone who created the cosmos. In Calvino, all of these epistemologies of the cosmos are reinterpreted, that is, through the style of myth, Calvino dispenses a spiral process of orbiting around a truth over historically progressive scientific evidence, yet never landing on a definitive answer to the mysteries of nature, of the cosmos. In Calvino, reaching for this truth in nature becomes the process in which humans create meaning.

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