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**CHILDHOOD IN WILLIAM WORDSWORTH'S
POETRY**

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Jiřina Karasová

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis deals with children in William Wordsworth's poetry. I consider poems from the early phase of his career, especially from the *Lyrical Ballads*, sections of *The Prelude* and above all "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood". The thesis is divided into three chapters; the first part describes how the Romantics in general represent childhood. The two following chapters are dedicated to selected poems of William Wordsworth and his treatment of the child. The second chapter deals with the child in nature and the third part depicts the child in the family.

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1. Introduction

William Wordsworth's poems often deal with themes such as nature, children, memory, mortality, humanity and transcendentalism. It was partly because of the change in thinking about childhood during eighteenth and nineteenth century and partly because of the influence of his own life that he frequently chose the topic of childhood.

This influence of Wordsworth's life is depicted in *The Prelude*, also called *Growth of a Poet's Mind; An Autobiographical Poem*. He lost his mother at the age of eight and after that he lived without his parents; he also lived without his sister for a long time. He looked for compensation in nature where he spent much time as a child. Therefore he was able to understand the great importance of nature in children's upbringing, but also the importance of family which he missed in his youth. He later restored an unbelievably close relationship with his sister, and his life with his wife and children was very happy.

This thesis will concentrate on children in Wordsworth's poetry against the background of nature and family. I will depict his treatment of children based on his general ideas about these themes, which he expressed in poems such as *The Prelude* and the "Ode". Beside these, I will draw on poems from the early phase of his career, especially from the *Lyrical Ballads*. The first chapter will deal with the general view of the Romantics of childhood. That will express the ideas of his contemporaries. Every Romantic author had different view of children. I will emphasize the difference between the earlier view and the view which arose around eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and I will discuss how Wordsworth helped to form a new style of writing about children. The child in nature is the topic of the second chapter, and I will also deal with the difference between child's understanding of nature and the depiction of nature by the adult mind. In the third chapter I

will describe how Wordsworth expressed the struggles and pleasures of a child in its family relations.

2. Childhood and Romanticism

Around the middle of the eighteenth century in Britain there arose a completely different way of thinking about childhood. The previous belief was that all people are born sinful as a consequence of original sin, as depicted in the works of authors such as John Milton or John Donne (they believed that sin is inherent and consequently a part of our soul). The topic of original sin might be seen in Milton's *Paradise Lost* as well as in Donne's "A Hymn to God the Father" which expresses the speaker's worry that he is born already sinful since Adam and Eve have sinned against God as it is written in Genesis in the Old Testament in the Bible. A lot of previous literature instructed children on this point, showing them how to behave.

However, in the middle of the eighteenth century the belief that all people are born sinful was fading; instead, children were connected with the qualities like innocence, creativity, emotionality, enthusiasm and spontaneity. The main idea behind this came from the work of the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau – *Émile, or On Education* (1762). It rejects the idea of Original Sin and claims that children are not born sinful; in the beginning they are completely innocent and through the experience of the world they become corrupted. Rousseau stated that "God makes all things good; man meddles with them and they become evil" (5). Therefore, the only possible way how to avoid degenerating the child is to let him to grow up in the nature and to free him from all restrictions of his behavior. "Childhood is the sleep of reason" (71); one should not be afraid to let his child "spend his early years doing nothing" (71). It is not nothing to "run and jump all day" (71). The child "will never be so busy again all his life long" (71).

Emile, or On Education influenced the representation of childhood in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries; the immediate effect was visible on the English Romantic

authors. William Wordsworth presented a new style of writing poetry in his “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800). He did not agree with the ideas of Enlightenment which held that rationality should be emphasized; he “struggled with these ideas because he believed that one could only learn what it means to be human through a relationship with nature” (Mason, 24). Emma Mason claimed that for William Wordsworth living “was a process of accidents, chance happenings and arbitrary events that could not be explained in any simply rational way” (24). Therefore he chose spontaneity rather than rationality and behaving according to diction; in his “Preface” (1800) Wordsworth wrote that good poetry should be “Spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (60).¹ It seems that spontaneity is much closer to the nature of children than to the nature of adults. Therefore, even in the decision to use the spontaneous style of writing there might be seen the infantilization of the literature. However, it is not only the spontaneity which resembles the childlike style of writing in William Wordsworth’s poetry. Another feature which he chose in his “Preface” (1800) was simplicity; the style of the poetry should be more “simple and unelaborated” (59). Simplicity evokes the idea of nakedness, purity and thus also the childhood. Humble and rustic life was another feature chosen for the poetry. He claims that “in that condition men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature” (59). Rustic life may be understood as the opposite of modern life and it may be claimed that rustic life is an infant of life. Rowland points out that in the lowest and most vulgar conversation is the highest use of figures (96).

Childhood in Romanticism does not have to be just about the humans; A.W. Rowland points out the fact that infancy becomes “an important way of understanding and representing origins” (28). Romantic writers use the term “infancy” not only for the beginning of human life but also to refer to the primitive stages of human history and by using the same name for

¹ *William Wordsworth: 21st-Century Oxford Authors*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). All subsequent references to this book will be given directly in parentheses.

both of them they try to connect these two together (Rowland 28). Children in the early stages of their development are very similar to the people in the primitive stage of history. Children are not under any restraint, which, according to Wordsworth, means they can speak “a plainer and more emphatic language” (59); and that is exactly the language which he chose for his poetry.

The poems are full of childlike expressions; by using them the authors try to get back to the roots of our society as well as to the roots of their own life. In the beginning, everything is originally good, however, gradually all things may change. Rousseau claimed that “at first, only poetry was spoken” (qtd. in Rowland 96). This statement was supported by the idea that the primitive man used mainly figurative language which is the language of poetry. Primitive men would dance, sing and gesticulate if they wanted to say something. Poetry is not explicitly written as well. Rowland suggests that the authors have infantilized the literature by introducing trivial and insignificant subjects, and they “diminished the strength, refinement and high seriousness of style, and returned literature to an earlier, more primitive state” (4). They wanted to get back to the stages of their development when they felt carefree, innocent and still uncorrupted by the society. Romantic poetry became the medium for those. Romantic authors helped readers create the atmosphere of their own childhood and to experience the songs of their nursery again.

Although William Wordsworth may be considered one of the pioneers of Romanticism, he was very cautious about the new interest in children. In a letter to his friend he wrote that “Formerly, indeed till within these few years, children were very carelessly brought up; at present they too early and too habitually feel their own importance from the solicitude and unremitting attendance which is bestowed upon them” (qtd. in Byatt 175). With the rising importance of children’s upbringing, there arose a lot of schools and the education

became an integral part of children's development. He argued that it is senseless to put children into infant schools and thus separate them from their mothers.

2.1 The Romantic Child

The Romantic Child is an important figure in the Romantic period as it represents the “ideal innocence who must be nourished, protected and set apart because of its guiding influence on later, adult life” (Rowland, 25). Wordsworth is often considered as the discoverer of the Romantic Child. Therefore, his famous line from the poem “My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold” where he stated that “The Child is Father of the Man” is critical in understanding the concept of the Romantic Child. It is often misunderstood; however, it is Wordsworth's great legacy which still endures. Nowadays when people visit psychologists, they are often asked by the therapists about their childhood. The patients turn to the events which were significant for them and which might have been important in their development. Here is obvious that the experiences in childhood forms partly the adulthood. From this point of view it might be claimed, that Child really is father of the man. Rowland suggests that the Romantic authors used “a notion of childhood and development to articulate new notions of history” (65). She claims that “the individual development from childhood to old age is no more natural or inevitable than a society moving from the pastoral to an agricultural stage” (65). In this case, the child is society in its primitive stage, i.e. it was prior to our modern society and since it stood in the very beginning, it is also paradoxically considered to be the father of the man – mankind.

The Romantic child may be found in a high number of Wordsworth's poems. The poems will be later analyzed in the thesis. He uses the Romantic child in a connection with death to underline the difference between uncorrupted, irrational child who does not understand the notion of death in the same way as the rational adult. He emphasizes the gap between adult and child. Adults can never fully regain the psychological state of their

childhood; they are forever sundered from the innocence and purity of child. However, adults can recall childhood memories and therefore experience again a state of tranquility and joy. Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality" offers an example of this mutual relationship of child and adult, which is proximal and estranged at the same time. The speaker mourns that "The things which I have seen I now can see no more" (281). He can hear the voice of child, which allows him to feel joy again; however, when the voice fades, he is not sure if it was only a dream. For the speaker the child is close, but unreachable at the same time.

Wordsworth's child is surrounded by nature and close to God since it is uncorrupted by the society and retains all the qualities from the eternal world. The child is irrational and therefore struggles when it interacts with rational adults, as depicted in the poem "Anecdote for Fathers". From "Tintern Abbey" we learn that Wordsworth's children are not only heroes but also victims, since they are unable to understand the real value and influence of nature.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge had a close relationship with Wordsworth and was highly influenced by Wordsworth's ideas. Along with Wordsworth, Coleridge's childhood directed him towards poetry. Coleridge claimed that childhood shapes the destiny of an adult, and since he considered his own childhood as marred by life in the city (for him it was important to raise his own son in the countryside). In Coleridge's view, a close relationship with nature brings happiness. Through his relationship with his son, he is able to relive the carefree and innocent childhood which he did not experience as a child. Coleridge's hopes that his son would have an idyllic childhood may be seen in "Frost at Midnight" and "The Nightingale". In these poems Coleridge also explores the theme of innocence and happiness. Innocence cannot be understood as ignorance or simplicity; it is rather the pure relationship to nature with no barriers of the social world. The innocent being's thoughts and emotions are unified; it has no experiences with the social world which would cause a conflict between these two notions. The relation of child with nature is explored in many of Coleridge's poems, such as

“Frost at Midnight” or “Sonnet: To the River Otter”. The speaker is often nostalgic and moons over a simpler, purer, and carefree past; and it is the simplicity, purity and carefreeness which Coleridge associates with childhood.

William Blake’s poetry differs a little from the poems of other Romantic authors, yet he also reflects the change in the perception of childhood. Some children in his poems are innocent and carefree, such as those in “Nurse’s Song” from *Songs of Innocence*. These children care only about childlike things such as having enough time to play outside. Some of Blake’s children, on the other hand, are concerned with more serious things. One example is “The Chimney Sweeper”, where the children work hard in the chimneys and probably will soon die; their childhood is marred by the needs of adults. Blake explores the abuse of children in a number of his poems, using irony, and introduces chimney sweepers or a black boy, to show how the society damages the children’s innocence, carefreeness and purity by ignoring their needs. Blake is not concerned only with children, but society’s abuse of the pure child is a sign of the world’s more general corruption. Children here are superior to the adult, due to their incorruptibility. Despite society’s influence, the child will never be corrupted in the way the adults are.

2.2 Criticism of the Simple Style

In the “Preface” (1800) to *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth introduced a new style of poetry which was simpler, unelaborated and used the language of real men considering real subjects. He did not want to write about human complexities; his intention was to look below these complexities to find the real truth, the pure spirituality and simplicity of human beings. Helen Darbishire claimed that Wordsworth “sought the truth and tried to express it with the least possible deviation” (qtd. in Sarker 371). He chose the “low and rustic life” (59) as subject matter and he explained that the reason is that “in that condition the feelings exist in a simpler form, and may, therefore, be contemplated with clearer accuracy, and communicated

with greater force” (Willmott 245). These simple feelings are typical for the manners of rustic life, easy to comprehend, most enduring, and the men living this rustic life are connected with the most beautiful and eternal forms of nature.

Nevertheless, Wordsworth’s simple style was misunderstood, mocked, and criticized. “What the poets call a turn toward natural expression and a simplicity of language and subject matter” (Rowland 3) the critics called “childishness and triviality” (Rowland 3). In a letter to Professor Smyth Wordsworth mourns: “how men undervalue the power of Simplicity! But it is the real key to the heart” (Willmott 246). It might have been predictable that the new simple style would not please the readers. People were used to read elaborated embroidered poems and he introduced poems which differed from “the popular Poetry of the day” (61). Coleridge claimed that *Lyrical Ballads* were an experiment to show them how far the readers were able to accept the simple style. (qtd. in Woof 43)

Lord Byron considered the style of Wordsworth’s poems “language not simple, but puerile” and “neither more nor less than an imitation of such minstrelsy as soothed our cries in the cradle, with the shrill ditty of ‘Hey de diddle, the cat and the fiddle’” (qtd in Rowland, 2). Byron did not understand why Wordsworth spent time to write about such irrelevant subjects. These subjects were a frequent target of Wordsworth’s critics, who thought such subjects the product of infantile sensibility or of the nursery. Francis Jeffrey followed Lord Byron in the criticism of the silly and childish style and he suggested that “no poetry can be long or generally acceptable, the language of which is coarse, inelegant or infantine” (qtd in Rowland, 2). Jeffrey compared Wordsworth’s poetry to the “namby-pamby” (Woof 191) songs of nursery, but although he called Wordsworth’s poems too simple, he pointed out that some of them are at the same time incomprehensible. Of the “Ode: Intimations of Immortality”, which is Wordsworth’s crucial poem, Jeffrey said that “This is, beyond all doubt, the most illegible and unintelligible part of the publication. We can pretend to give no

analysis or explanation of it; – our readers must make what they can of the following extracts” (Woof 199).

The thing which the readers were missing in Wordsworth’s poetry was, according to Jeffrey, “delicate feeling and original fancy” (Rowland 3). Some of his sonnets were admired since Jeffrey pointed out that they contain some of the mentioned fancy style; however, they still found the style “quite lost and obscured in the mass of childishness and insipidity” (Rowland 3). The childlike style as well as the simple subject matter of Wordsworth’s poems was incomprehensible for the readers; and the connection of these two things – the childish subject and the childlike style was unacceptable. Jeffrey called *The Prelude*, which is a good example of that connection, “ineffable composition” (qtd. in Rowland 3), suggesting that such absurdity made him speechless. Many of the critics, including Jeffrey, would consider Wordsworth’s poetry good if he would “throw aside his own babyish incidents” (qtd. in Rowland 2).

Quincey stated in one of his later criticisms of Wordsworth that it took approximately forty years for the readers to admire Wordsworth’s poems. Quincey claimed that people needed some time to understand the truth in Wordsworth’s poems. He suggested that “Whatever is too original will be hated at the first. It must slowly mould a public for itself” (Ray 89). As soon as people recognized the truth in his poems which “is really permanent in human feelings” (Ray 89), he became highly appreciated.

2.3 Literature about Children and for Children

Eighteenth and nineteenth century literature not only dealt with the theme of childhood, but romantic authors wrote also books specifically for children. Children’s literature developed rapidly. The reasons for this rapid growth might be several – the growth of the middle class for which this literature was intended or the new educational theories and

the new attitudes to childhood. It was necessary to educate the children and to guide them morally, and to express the religious topics also.

Even though children's literature has changed in the middle of the eighteenth century and differed from older books for children, since the authors realized that it would be more effective to educate through entertainment and that the children could learn by experience, this shift was not well accepted by the Romantic authors. Wordsworth, Coleridge and Blake argued against these didactic books for children, suggesting that this change is a "struggle between imagination and instruction" (Murray 179). In their view, the children were taught social rules but true morality was suppressed. It was not only morality, but also the imagination of the children which was suppressed by preferring these didactic books to the fairy books.

Blake wrote *Songs of Innocence and Experience* as a reaction to the didactic book *Divine and Moral Songs* by Isaac Watts. Blake puts a child in the center of his poems instead of a preaching adult. He wrote those poems for children; however, to the displeasure of his readers, it was not moralizing, and if it was, it was ironical. Blake suggested that a child is as important as an adult which angered his readers. Therefore, Blake never publically admitted that his *Songs* were intended for children. Blake admired Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations", and as in the "Ode", his songs depict children as still very close to the eternal world and associated with all the qualities such as "innocence, nature and divinity" (Murray 181) while adulthood is associated with "experience, the city, corruption, and loss" (Murray 181).

Wordsworth and Coleridge were also influenced by the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and wrote poetry that represented the child as an innocent being, close to nature and God, still retaining the qualities of eternity from where it recently emerged. In their view, the childhood was valuable for itself, not only as a preparation for adulthood. They celebrated the overwhelming spontaneity, imagination and innocence of this period in human life. Even

though their works should have been a pleasure for children to read, especially Blake's *Songs*, at that time didactic literature for children still predominated. It was not until around the middle of the nineteenth century that there arose a new kind of literature for children which corresponded with the views of Romantic authors. The authors of didactic books were trying to prepare children to be good adults; however, the Romantic authors were against that since they believed that children should not be subordinated to adults' authority and should rather choose their own path. In Book Five of *The Prelude* Wordsworth spoke ironically of the educated child who is "child, no child/ but a dwarf man" (368). Alongside he contrasts this child with himself and his mates, a "race of real children" who were "not too wise, / Too learned, or too good; but wanton, fresh, / And bandied up and down by love and hate" (371).

Wordsworth claimed that his own childhood deeply influenced his choice to become a poet. Coleridge, on the other hand, was convinced that childhood had not given him access to nature and therefore he was deprived. While Wordsworth gained access to the emotions of childhood through memory, for Coleridge it was the birth of his own son, Hartley. Educating Hartley allowed Coleridge to experience a Wordsworthian childhood through his own son. In the poem "Frost at Midnight", Coleridge expressed the memories of his own childhood and voiced his fear that his son would grow up like him, separated from nature. Wordsworth followed Rousseau's philosophy when educating Basil Montagu, and with Dorothy he found it best to "teach him nothing at present but what he learns from the evidence of his senses" (Murray, 180). Coleridge guided his son Hartley with the idea that "children [should] be permitted to read Romances, & Relations of Giants and Magicians & Genii" (qtd. in Murray 180), and thus there is "no other way of giving the mind a love of 'the great', & 'the whole'" (qtd. in Murray 180).

Eighteenth century didactic literature for children did not last forever; it started to change slowly into a literature, which would be more entertaining and less didactic, and the

new books contained the old fantastic and “wild” elements which endeared these books even to Romantic authors. The most influential work was of two German brothers, Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm, whose fairy tales spread into the whole world and were translated into a great number of languages. The tales which I discussed earlier were now written on a paper and “valued as a pure expression of national culture” (Murray 183). It influenced a great number of authors throughout Europe and America, such as Christian Andersen from Norway or Nathaniel Hawthorne from America. Johann Gottfried Herder claimed that these folktales expressed people’s “intuitive sense, creative energy and instinctive behavior” and that they originated in “a stage of consciousness in which men dreamt what they did not know, believed what they could not see and in which a man’s actions involved his whole being because it was still untouched by any cultural influence” (Murray 183). These tales succeeded in the Romantic period and finally, there arose bond between children and the “pure, uncorrupted folk culture” (Murray 183) which is one of the typical features of Romanticism.

In this chapter I have discussed the importance of childhood in the Romantic period. The eighteenth and nineteenth century was a crucial period for literature. William Wordsworth invented a new style of poetry introducing simple style and subjects, and influenced many other Romantic authors. He may also be considered as the inventor of the figure of Romantic Child which can be found in the poems of Coleridge, Blake and other authors of the Romantic period. However, people were not prepared for such change in poetry and therefore, Wordsworth’s work was underappreciated at first. During the nineteenth century there also arose a new kind of literature for children. Romantic authors were against the didactic literature since they followed Rousseau’s ideas. Nevertheless, authors of books for children soon realized that children should be educated through entertainment and the literature finally became appreciated by the Romantic authors and became part of the folk culture. The following chapter will deal with the topic of childhood more concretely; I will

concentrate on the child in Wordsworth's poetry specifically. This chapter explained the figure and the background of the Romantic Child in general, but what happens when the Child in Wordsworth's poetry goes out into the natural world?

3. The Child in Nature

What is the meaning of nature in Wordsworth's poems? An amount of criticism asks this question and comes up with many contradictory ideas. Arthur Beatty claims that he uses the term 'Nature' in two different ways in his poetry. He inherited these ideas from eighteenth-century philosophers. The first is derived from Bacon, Hobbes and Locke, who said that "nature is held as the source of truth and reason" (*William Wordsworth* 132). The second view is taken from Rousseau who claimed that "Nature is opposed to man, in that it is always good, while man as he is in society is evil" (*William Wordsworth* 134). In "Tintern Abbey" Wordsworth expressed his love for it when he said that "nature then ... To me was all in all" (51). He claims that nature helps people to avoid loneliness. It is the best moral guide, it has healing power on the soul of man, and it leads to "Love of Mankind" (413). Beautiful descriptions and celebrations of nature may be found in many of his poems. His belief that nature is a source of inspiration, imagination, passion and joy is rooted in his childhood experiences. Therefore children in Wordsworth's work are surrounded by nature which cares for them and gives them joy. Children might be deprived of nature which may consequently lead to selfishness and immorality in later life. From "The Ode" we learn that as a child grows up it becomes aware of the dangers in nature, and it is no longer able to control it. The growing child suddenly feels that there is something to fear in nature, "the things which [it has] seen [it] now can see no more" (281). Nature is not always only peaceful; it is also mysterious and might be dangerous. The thoughts of joy change into "thoughts of grief" (281).

In this chapter I would like to deal with the poems which contain the child situated into nature. Wordsworth claimed that nature is the best tutor for a child and there is no need of any preaching adult when the child is taught by nature. The child learns simply by experience

and imagination. According to him, “childhood permits an idealized vision of life that is gradually eroded by experience, the once ‘dream-like vividness and splendour’ of the world necessarily fading as we encounter bereavement, sorrow and injustice” (Mason 56). In his poetry childhood symbolizes a magical time of innocence. Children are connected to nature, able to feel there the innocent joy of every experience. Children seem to be more a part of the natural world, rather than a part of the human world; however, as children mature, they lose the connection to nature. He expressed loss in his “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood”, where the speaker mourns that “The things which I have seen I now can see no more” (281). For the speaker the child is present since he can still hear the “Child of Joy” (281); by the power of his memory he may recall all the feelings that he felt when he was young. These feelings are not strong enough and they soon fade away, leaving the adult abandoned in the human world with a question: “Where is it now, the glory and the dream?” (282). Even though the adult is able to reawaken the feeling of his childhood, he is not able to fully reach the state of childhood again; there is an interesting mutual closeness and estrangement between childhood and adulthood at the same time.

In the fifth stanza of the “Ode” Wordsworth distinguishes three stages of development – Boy, Youth, and Man. It is important to be aware of the stages before and after childhood in order to study the relationship between child and nature, which is similar to the relationship of mother and infant. The infant absorbs the love of his mother unconsciously just as the child absorbs the influence of nature. These three phases are also mentioned in Book Eight of *The Prelude*. He calls childhood an “unripe time” (424), when nature was “secondary to my pursuits / And animal activities, and all / Their trivial pleasures” (425). The child lacks consciousness. In Book One Wordsworth describes himself, a ten year old boy, considering him still being a child:

Yes, I remember, when the changeful earth,
And twice five seasons on my mind had stamped
The faces of the moving year, even then,
A Child, I held unconscious intercourse
With the eternal Beauty, drinking in
A pure organic pleasure from the lines
Of curling mist, or from the level plain
Of waters coloured by the steady clouds. (316)

The child is an unconscious creature, a part of nature, enjoying all the beauties of it. The Youth is the time when nature “for her own sake become ... joy” (425). In the Book Five of *The Prelude* Wordsworth claims that it took him thirteen years to gain the consciousness and to move from the state of child to the state of youth. To the youth he wrote:

I mean to speak
Of that delightful time of growing youth
When cravings for the marvellous relent,
And we begin to love what we have seen;
And sober truth, experience, sympathy,
Take stronger hold of us; and words themselves
Move us with conscious pleasure. (374-375)

The young boy is able to perceive beauty consciously; feelings towards nature deepen and he is able to appreciate all the things that nature offers. Wordsworth defines the particular time when the youth matures into a man: “not less / Than three and twenty summers” (425). In this stage of development, man is “subordinate” (425) to nature, and falls into the common life with “calmer habits and more steady voice” (384).

In the “Ode” Wordsworth also refers to the period before childhood, to the time until a child enters the earth; the children who are not born yet are purer than those already born – “our birth is but a sleep and forgetting” (282). Children are suffused with magic and innocence since they still retain some memory of the place where they come from – “From God, who is our home” (282). They are connected to the divine until they get the human form, and after the birth the inevitable development consisting of the three mentioned phases starts. The magic gradually dies and “shades of the prison-house begin to close / upon the growing Boy” (282). The phrase ‘Prison-house’ may be understood as the ordinariness of common day, however, the boy is not imprisoned in the ordinariness; he still “beholds the light ... in his joy” (282). The youth is still informed by nature, and when the boy matures into a man, he “fade into the light of common day” (283). Arthur Beatty points to the positiveness of the “Ode” since “the love, the intellects, the emotion, of maturity are all of more profound importance than those of either childhood or Youth” (83). Wordsworth suggests that we should not mourn, but rather have hope, since the deep joy will remain forever: “We will grieve not, rather find / Strength in what remains behind, / In the primal sympathy” (285). The mature man is, unlike a child, capable of greater insight, and due to the consciousness which the child lacks, he is able to feel “thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears” (286). According to Wordsworth, maturity enables a man to have deeper emotions and thoughts, and thus understand the men and human life more profoundly. The pleasures which are perceived consciously create deeper emotions, highly influence mankind and are more permanent. Yet some of the feelings of unconscious childhood will not be understood again in the state of consciousness. In Book Five, he mourns:

I am sad

At thought of raptures now for ever flown,

Even unto tears I sometimes could be sad
To think of, to read over, many a page,
Poems withal of name, which at that time
Did never fail to entrance me, and are now
Dead in my eyes as is a theatre
Fresh emptied of spectators. (375)

There is an interesting relation between childhood and adulthood. Maturing causes inevitable losses, yet brings emotions and feelings which could not be acquired in the previous stages of development. Wordsworth claimed that this state of mutual estrangement and proximity between his childhood and adulthood made him feel as having two personalities:

The vacancy between me and those days
Which yet have such self-presence in my heart
That sometimes when I think of them I seem
Two consciousnesses, conscious of myself
And of some other being. (176)

These different stages of development are also contrasted in "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey". On the one hand there is childhood, for which nature is "secondary to my own [Wordsworth's] Pursuits". On the other there is youth:

For nature than [during youth]
(the coarser pleasures of my boyish days,
and their glad animal movements all gone by)
To me was all in all. (51)

The animal movements seem to point to the physical activities during childhood, and nature is present, but not primary. As an animal, the child acts according to its instincts, responding to the extraneous stimulants. The coarser pleasures involve more physical senses and only then thoughts and emotions. The interaction of the child with nature is unconscious; the child is “drinking in / a pure organic pleasure”. The child concentrates on its own activities which satisfy its senses, and is unaware of the influence of nature upon it; therefore he calls the childhood an “age of sensation” (Beatty, 74). Nature is the basic environment for him and is thus unable to escape from its influence. Wordsworth claimed that no matter how important are the other stages of development, “Our simple childhood sits upon a throne / That hath more power than all the elements” (374). He describes in his poems the simple joy and the tight bond of children with nature and the losses which maturity brings. The child may be understood as a hero, capable of simple joy, and on the other hand as a victim, incapable of greater insight.

3.1 The Legacy of Childhood

Not all of Wordsworth’s poems that contain ideas about childhood deal directly with a child. Although childhood is a short stage of life, it leads to the triumphal stage of life when childlike joy and mature consciousness join together. That is one of its effects. For Wordsworth childhood is not only a stage of life, it is a spiritual connection with nature, and through it we may achieve spiritual awareness which consequently leads to the unity with nature. The child is in touch with the spirit yet not conscious of that connection. That consciousness is gained through maturity, after that man begins to be aware of the power of nature. It is the human mind which allows the adult to reconnect with nature spirit again. The human soul will merge with the spirit only after death, which is not the end of existence, but a reunification with nature. A simple flower in nature contains in its essence sublime and spirit which may evoke in a man emotions similar to ecstasy. The child would notice this flower,

yet an adult is likely to miss it; he tries to point out these beauties of nature which are reminiscent of those feeling that the adult felt when he was playing in nature as a child.

Robert Woof explains the importance of pre-existing memories of childhood. Wordsworth could have written poems where he would celebrate the beauty of flowers and connect it with laughter; however, he would be likely to fail, since the association of flower and joy might not be understood. When he connects childhood feelings and activities with the voice of cuckoo or the sight of a butterfly, readers will likely remember these days when they chased the butterflies or imitated the sounds of birds (221). Using the figure of child and the memories from childhood enables him to make us understand the beauty of nature and experience joy in nature. The memories, whether from childhood or closer past are important since, as the speaker says, he wishes his days to be “bound each to each by natural piety” (264). A man should not be fragmented, but he should be continuous, consisting of his past self, present self and potential future self. In “My Heart Leaps up” he expresses this by suggesting that the same rainbow he saw as a child sees now and will see in the future.

In *The Prelude* Wordsworth expresses how childhood experiences form our identity, making each man “a memory to himself” (336). Stephen Gill claimed that “it is through sights, sounds and sensations ... that the deep patterning of consciousness is established” (Gill, “The Noble Living and the Noble Dead” 64). These memories refresh adults (“thence would drink / As at a fountain” [494]). Their significance is realized only retrospectively, providing strength and hope. The whole *The Prelude* depends on Wordsworth’s memories. His family died when he was young and that is why he was forced to spend his childhood alone in nature. From these memories and experiences springs Wordsworth’s imagination. His communion with nature in his early years shaped his poetic imagination. As an adult he is able to reconstruct his earlier feelings and stress the importance of the influence of nature on child’s mind. It is the child which inspires him, yet it is him as an adult, who is able to realize

the real importance of nature. The actual emotions of a child and the comments of an adult are two integrated things which contribute to the triumph of his poetry. In “My Heart Leaps up When I Behold”, the line “The Child is father of the Man” is characteristic of Wordsworth’s general view on childhood which may be found in *The Prelude*. He recorded the development of his self as well his imagination and emphasized that it was his childhood and the early communion with nature which influenced him in becoming a great poet.

Nature evokes in Wordsworth memories of his childhood; in “To the Cuckoo” the voice of the bird reminds him of the days when he listened to that sound and sought the bird everywhere. The narrator never saw the cuckoo, and therefore he calls it “an invisible Thing, / A voice, a mystery” (267). His wish – all “days to be / Bound each to each by natural piety” (264) seems to be fulfilled. The voice of the cuckoo which he heard as a child he still hears as an adult and recalls “that golden time [childhood] again” (268).

3.2 Carefree Joy in Nature

Wordsworth’s poems which deal with children in nature concentrate on their energy and activities rather than on the beauty of nature. In “To a Butterfly” he recalls chasing of the butterfly, not the beauty of the animal.

Oh! pleasant, pleasant were the days,
The time, when in our childish plays
My sister Emmeline and I
Together chased the Butterfly!
A very hunter did I rush
Upon the prey. (264)

In “The Sparrow’s Nest” Wordsworth mentions his sister Emmeline who helped him (when they were both children) to see all the beauties of nature. “She gave me eyes, she gave me ears / ... And love, and thought, and joy” (266).

Wordsworth depicts the happiness of children playing outside in the natural world. These situations could possibly lead to a sad ending, yet he merely observes the beauties of this carefree behavior. Drowned or kidnapped children frequently provided the theme for romantic poems (for example Charles Lamb’s “To a River in Which a Child was Drowned”). For Wordsworth, nature is the best tutor for a child, and even death cannot separate the child from nature – it becomes even closer since the child then return to the world before life.

Although Wordsworth is not worried about the dangers of nature, in the poem “To H.C., Six Years Old” he considers the grief and trouble that such a happy child will encounter in future life. Nevertheless, he suggests that nature will protect Hartley by taking him away from this world before the world will bring him grief, or it will keep him as a child forever and protect him by “individual right” (223). Coleridge claimed that Hartley was an abnormal child, and this fact emphasizes how Wordsworth respected the individual worth of every child. He did not deal in his poems with the training of children and their potential future; he was rather interested in their present state, “wanton, fresh, and bandied up and down by love and hate” (371). In “To H.C., Six Years Old” he calls Coleridge’s son Hartley a “Faery Voyager” (223), brought “from afar” (223), from a pre-existent world which he mentioned earlier in his “Ode”, and his boat seems to float rather “on air than on an earthly stream” (223). The individuality of the child is “exquisitely wild” (223), he is a “happy Child” (223).

Wordsworth suggests that childhood has passed too quickly. From *The Prelude* we learn that at the age of thirteen he does not call himself a child anymore, and in the poem “To a Butterfly” he sighed: “Sweet childish days, that were as long / As twenty days are now!” (268). He mourns that the children too quickly rush into the adulthood, not realizing what they

are losing. Parents and society force the child to grow too quickly and to forget what it once knew; however, the lost innocence cannot be retrieved.

3.3 Poverty

For Wordsworth “the most sacred of all property is the property of the poor” (qtd in Snow 100), he shows sincere sympathy for all unfortunate beings. Child poverty is explored in “The Brothers” and “Alice Fell”. In a letter to Charles James Fox he explains that he wrote “The Brothers” to express “that men who do not wear fine cloaths can feel deeply” (qtd in Snow 100). The poem “Alice Fell” depicts an orphaned child, Alice Fell, whose cloak got tattered and therefore she weeps. She did not only cry, but it was a grief which “could never, never have an end” (230). Since she has no parents and no home, the cloak is all for her. Losing the cloak was “as if she’d lost her only friend / She wept, nor would be pacified” (230). While the speaker generously gives her a new cloak, he can do no more. Wordsworth expresses the deep emotions of Alice and the impact of the largely uncaring society. Poor children are also depicted in the poem “Beggars”. Alice differs from those children, as she does not fool the man to get the cloak, and her passions are not feigned. The beggars, on the other hand, try to fool the traveler in order to get more money from him. The traveler gives the beggars a generous gift, remarking “sweet Boys, you’re telling me a lie” (228). These beggars are gypsies, full of joy and energy. He admires this, depicting their carefree nature, and avoiding moral reprimand.

3.4 Eternal Childhood

The tight bond with nature which a child possesses is connected with the notion of death. Wordsworth claimed that his interest in death was rooted in his childhood when he found it hard to differ between material and immaterial.

Nothing was more difficult for me in my childhood than to admit the notion of death as a state applicable to my own being ... I was often unable to think of external things

as having external existence & I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from but inherent in my own immaterial nature. Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality. (qtd in Mason, 55)

Emma Mason tries to explain Wordsworth's interest in death, loss, grief and nature by pointing to the importance of his own childhood, and concretely to the early death of his parents. Mason suggests that his poetry is a result of this early distressful experience, and a way of fighting against it and transforming the feelings of sadness into feelings of joy. Therefore, his narrators are guarded rather by nature and the divine than by parents. "In doing so, Wordsworth strives to transform feelings of despair and sadness into joy by creating the conditions in which individuals might become conscious of and then accept their emotional state, and in doing so make peace with it" (56).

In "We Are Seven", the child is unable to differentiate between life and death, and is puzzled by the argument that "If two are in the church-yard laid, / Then ye are only five" (22). She sees no difference between her dead and living; all of them are present to her. Death is not an evil for her, "God released her of her pain, / And then she went away" (22), and to support her truth, she points to the graves saying "Their graves are green, they may be seen" (22). In Book Five of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth describes a similar situation which happened to him as a child when a drowned man was taken from water.

No vulgar fear,
Young as I was, a Child not nine years old,
Possessed me, for my inner eye had seen
such sights before. (372)

He is not incapable of emotions; he has idealized that scene by his imagination and therefore romanticized the situation with the drowned man.

Thence came a spirit hallowing what I saw
With decoration and ideal grace;
A dignity, a smoothness, like the works
Of Grecian Art, and purest Poesy. (372)

It is the conscious and rational adult who sees the death in evil terms, and the child cannot differentiate between death and life since it lives in a world of imagination. Therefore the dead cannot be deleted from its memory. The conscious Wordsworth exclaimed through the adult in "We Are Seven": "A simple child ... What should it know of death!" (21).

In "Lucy Gray" and "The Boy of Winander" Wordsworth expresses a similar view of death. J. Robert Barth claims that the death of Lucy Gray and Winander boy was inevitable due to their too deep communion with nature: "His intimacy with nature, like hers, is so deep that it can be fulfilled only by death"(Barth 35). These children will stay forever young since they never achieve consciousness. Geoffrey Hartman claims that Lucy like the Boy of Winander "die before consciousness of self can emerge wholly from consciousness of nature"(21). Lucy Gray got lost in the woods and was never found; therefore, Wordsworth explains her eternal bond with nature: "She is a living Child, / That you may see sweet Lucy Gray / Upon the lonesome Wild" (108). She died in the phase of unconsciousness and will forever stay in that stage of childhood. Adelman calls the death in Wordsworth's poems to be a "total union with nature" (142), and the children will thus stay in eternal childhood and will merge with nature. In contrast, the opening of "Three Years She Grew" describes her beautiful relationship with nature. However, Lucy did not stay a living child, since nature let

her mature, to be conscious of all the beauty in it. After that the “Nature said ... This Child I to myself will take / She shall be mine, and I will make / A Lady of my own” (119).

Nature is important for William Wordsworth since it shaped his poetic imagination. It is the best background and tutor for a child and therefore he situates the children in his poetry into nature. The children are not aware of the influence of nature upon them; this consciousness is gained only through maturity. He admired the insouciant energy of children beside the power of nature. Childhood memories are highly important for adults; through them they are able to be closer to nature. For Alice Fell, the charitable act was all he could do; he stressed the impact of uncaring society. The beggars, on the other hand, are full of energy and joy, although they are very poor and brought up without any care. The death of children is not viewed negatively by Wordsworth, since when they die they merge with nature, remaining children forever. Nature cares for children and even death may be an act of nature how to save them from the grief in future life. He compared the relationship of nature and child to the relation of infant and mother. The maternal and paternal relation was highly important for him. In the following chapter I will deal with the child in the family; what are the impacts of family on the child and what does the child mean in family relations?

4. The Child in Family

Wordsworth stressed the importance of family unity; in his works he emphasized especially the paternal and maternal bond. In *The Prelude* he expressed his grief over his mother's death. She died when he was only eight years old, and to her death Wordsworth wrote: "[she] was the heart / And hinge of all our learnings and our loves" (367). His family split due to her death, and for nine years he did not see his sister Dorothy with whom he had a deep relationship. Of Wordsworth's family Coleridge once remarked that they were "the happiest Family, I ever saw" (Mason 10). Gill claimed that everything that Wordsworth wished for was a stable family living together (*William Wordsworth: A Life* 240). Any death in Wordsworth's family was hard for him; of the death of his brother John he wrote: "there is something cut out of my life which cannot be restored" (qtd. in Gill, *William Wordsworth: A life* 240). The importance of nature in children's upbringing may be compared to the importance of family. Wordsworth compared the relationship of nature and child to the relationship of mother and infant. The children in his poems are therefore often encountered in families, beloved of their parents and siblings. Knoepflmacher expressed an interesting idea, he claimed that children in Wordsworth's poetry "are egotists consumed by their oneness with Nature" (392). He illustrated this with several examples – Johnny Foy forgot what his mother told him since he was absorbed by the landscape; Lucy Grey fled from life with her parents to life with nature; and Edward in "Anecdote for Fathers" and the girl in "We Are Seven" defy the rational mind of adults and live rather in their own instinctive world (392). Although Wordsworth emphasized the importance of nature for children's upbringing, the family unity was equally important for him. Therefore he depicted children in families and stressed the importance of maternal and paternal bonds with their beauties and struggles.

4.1 Paternal Bond

Wordsworth's paternal feelings were extremely strong. Stephen Gill claimed that Wordsworth was an obsessively anxious father, and fretted over the upbringing of his children. He worried over their education. Although Little Basil Montagu was not his son, he tried hard to transform the child into "the most contented child" (*William Wordsworth: A Life* 103). Gill stated that Wordsworth worried about his children "in a way that most parents have stopped doing at least ten years earlier" (*William Wordsworth: A life* 400). It is hard to understand the role of father in his poems. In *The Prelude*, he stressed the role of mother, while the father is hardly mentioned. Almost the only time when he speaks about his father is in Book Eleven where he wrote about his death. Wordsworth's father was absent from Wordsworth's life. That might be why he often depicted fathers suffering due to separation from their families. He himself suffered both as a child and as well as a father. As a child he was separated from his family after the death of his mother and as a father he lost his first daughter and was forced to leave his pregnant lover.

The bond between a child and its father may be seen in "Michael" which Wordsworth intended to be about "Two of the most powerful affections; the parental affection, and the love of property, landed property, including the feelings of inheritance, home, and personal and family independence" (739). Judith Page claimed that "The father-son relationship is rooted in Michael's love of his land" (Page 49), and in their shared work on this land: "Soon as Luke, full ten years old, could stand ... He with his Father daily went" (139). The presence of Luke was restorational for Michael:

From the Boy there came
Feelings and emanations, things which were
Light to the sun and music to the wind;
and that the Old Man's heart seemed born again. (139)

Wordsworth wrote that Luke was for Michael “the dearest object that he knew on earth” (138). It was the presence of Luke which gave Michael hope: “A child, more than all other gifts, / Brings hope with it, and forward-looking thoughts” (138). However, Luke had to go to work in the city to help his father to pay his debts. Michael therefore had to deal with the hardest decision: to lose his property or to lose his son. Michael is considered one of Wordsworth’s most famous suffering fathers. Judith Page considers his father-son relation “unusually profound” (49) since he described Michael as performing maternal ‘acts of tenderness’” (49). On the one hand this poem emphasizes the legacy from father to son and on the other the feminine character of the relation. Judith Page calls the relation feminine due to the nurturing character of love which the father expressed (49). For Michael it was important to put the cornerstone of the sheepfold before Luke leaves. The sheepfold was in that moment a symbol of family unity and the tight bond between Luke and Michael. It should have been an anchor and shield for Luke; during his life he was sheltered from evil of the outside world (the sheepfold was intended to give him some certainty and reason to get back to his father). Through the legacy Michael tried to express his love of Luke. He thought that Luke would come back one day and finish the sheepfold. He wanted Luke to continue in the tradition, and consequently create a bond not only paternal but also a bond through nature. However, at the end of the poem we learn that the sheepfold is not a symbol for the family unity; it turns out to have a sad ending. It tells us that “many and many a day he thither went, And never lifted up a single stone” (146). Luke never came back to finish the sheep-fold with his father. This sheepfold is still a powerful sight for Michael but now it stands as a symbol for loss. At the point where all is lost in the poem, Wordsworth reminds us that “[t]here is a comfort in the strength of love” (145) that makes “a thing endurable, which else / would break the heart” (145). For seven years Michael suffered at the unfinished sheepfold until he died. Although Luke broke the bond of love and agricultural legacy, and all the wishes and hopes of his father

were destroyed, the poem will forever remain as a symbol of paradigmatic father representing the ideals of Wordsworth. "Michael" is full of Wordsworth's love of humanity. Through this poem he fulfills the promise which Luke did not fulfil in the poem; he inspired the following generation of poets.

Similar paternal affection, love of property and father who is not able to hold his family together is depicted in "The Last of the Flock". The shepherd has ten children and no money; therefore he has to sell his sheep to feed his children. He faces the same problem as Michael. The shepherd has to make a hard choice between the love of property and the parental affection towards his children. The poem is sad; the shepherd stays on a road and openly weeps with the body of his last sheep in his hands. He wept a lot, "his cheeks with tears were wet ... and in his arms a lamb he had" (30). The lamb is not only property; it encompasses the family and humanity which were crucial for Wordsworth. The flock was his landed property, and the love was not only material; the property symbolized for the shepherd the "feelings of inheritance" (739) and independence, both familial and personal. According to Wordsworth, two things are wrong in this poem. Firstly, the community, which was important for Wordsworth, does not work – the father is abandoned by. Secondly, the father gave up all his hopes which consequently lead to devastation. The paradigmatic Wordsworthian father works and supports his family; therefore as the flock diminishes, the self-worth of the father and his ability to fulfil the role of father diminishes too. He pleaded that with each sheep which he gained the love towards his children grew, but with every lost sheep he "loved [his] children less" (32). The last of the flock actually represents the father. When he loses his sheep, he loses himself. He therefore did not love the children less; he loved himself less as he saw his worth and ability to fulfill all the paternal duties diminishing. This father, like many other Wordsworthian fathers, was at the end of the poem suffering alone, without any communal help. Wordsworth suggests that these fathers are often abandoned and no charity

exists for them. Both these poems point to the importance of community. Without a help, the family cannot exist.

Fathers in these poems suffered alone as a result of their strong connection to their children. A similar solitariness is depicted in “Simon Lee”, where we find a child mentioned at the end. We do not encounter any evident emotions of the father; he is a man of absolute peace with intense pain, which he, however, does not feel. The man seems to be in a complete unity with nature. From the narrator’s intervention we learn that the son is dying in a hospital and the father is traveling to see him before his death. This information subsequently connects the reader to the suffering father. Like the father was connected to his son through love, the readers are connected to the father through sympathy for his situation.

4.2 Maternal Bond

The relation of mother and infant was according to Wordsworth important in the development of the child. In *The Prelude* Wordsworth wrote of this relationship thus:

Blest the Babe
Nursed in his Mother’s arms, the Babe who sleeps
Upon his Mother’s breast, who when his soul
Claims manifest kindred with an earthly soul
Doth gather passion from his Mother’s eye. (182)

Wordsworth claimed that the infant communicates with its mother’s heart, and the feelings of its mother are for the infant “Like an awakening breeze” (182).

The portrayal of the maternal love may be seen in “The Thorn”. The infant in this poem is probably murdered by its mother who was betrayed by her lover. Wordsworth never tells us how the child was murdered; he does not concentrate on the guilt of the mother, but rather on her misery. He seems to have an ambivalent attitude towards Martha’s situation: on

the one hand, her madness is a result of her betrayed love and pregnancy, and on the other it seems that the child restored her sanity:

In her womb the infant wrought
About its mother's heart, and brought
Her senses back again. (27)

Even though I present here the situation of maternal love, which obviously is present in the poem, critics have argued that this poem is neither about this subject, nor about abandoned mother nor murdered child. What is important, however, is the storyteller himself (and we should distinguish between Wordsworth and the narrator). The narrator has never seen Martha Ray; he only imagined what might have happened since he had heard in a village some superstition about a mad woman who lived there "some two and twenty" (26) years ago. Therefore, "The Thorn" is actually a portrayal of "superstitious imagination" (Parrish 162).

Of the poems "Idiot Boy" and "Mad Mother" Wordsworth wrote that they were intended to "trace the maternal passion through many of its subtle windings" (60). In "The Mad Mother", the mother is left alone and the child is the only thing which prevents her from being utterly desperate. Coleridge praised this poem for its representation of a mother's love, even though the woman is deranged. The mother was abandoned by her lover. She is a social outcast. The only recourse is her child:

The high crag cannot work me harm,
Nor leaping torrents when they howl;
The babe I carry on my arm,
He saves for me my precious soul. (Poetical works 115)

According to Bidlake, the child is crucial for the mother and without the child the woman would be likely to commit suicide (189). The relation of the mother and infant is interesting in the way that the child cannot directly express its love for its mother as she does. Nonverbal

actions might be ambiguous, and it depends on the interpretation of the mother how she will understand the child. Bidlake claims that the child does not have its own identity since the child “continues to be informed solely by his mother’s viewpoint and utterance” (189), suggesting that this child will become independent only after the death of its mother. The mother expresses her fear that if the child became aware of her condition, it would not care for her. The child’s ignorance is why the mother loves the infant even more; the infant loves her regardless of her appearance:

And what if my poor cheek be brown?

Tis well for me; thou canst not see

How pale and wan it else would be. (Poetical works 115)

Wordsworth not only praises maternal love, but also traces its “subtle windings” (60), thus expressing the fear of the mother that once the child might inherit her madness which would consequently bring her the grief again: “If thou art mad, my pretty lad, / Then I must be forever sad” (Poetical works 115).

Wordsworth also used the figure of idiot boy to express the maternal love. In a letter to John Wilson he claimed that he wrote “The Idiot Boy” with “exceeding delight and pleasure” (729), declaring that he “often looked upon the conduct of fathers and mothers of the lower classes of society towards Idiots as the great triumph of the human heart” (729). For him, idiots were strong; he admired their disinterestedness and the “grandeur of love” (729). This poem, as Wordsworth claimed, is not a sad poem, and reading it gives him pleasure. The idiot boy, who is sent by his mother for the doctor, seems to be rather passive; his only words are in the last stanza. All the feelings which this poem evokes are voiced by his mother and the narrator. The strength of love that the mother feels for her son is emphasized by the situation – the loss of her son is more important for her than her gravely ill friend who might have died

when Betty left her home alone. From Betty's words we see the dreadful feelings which she possessed:

'O woe is me! O woe is me!
Here will I die; here will I die;
I thought to find my Johnny here,
But he is neither far nor near,
Oh! what a wretched mother I! (41)

The thought that her son might be dead or drowned somewhere in the woods scares her so much that she contemplates suicide; "her thoughts are bent on deadly sin" (42). Maternal love is emphasized by the line saying that "such tears she never shed before" (42). Nevertheless, Wordsworth expressed how the power of human mind and the power of maternal love join together to recover the mother. When she imagines that her child is alright, these thoughts calm her down and she no longer thinks of the suicide, "the last of all her thoughts would be, / to drown herself" (42). Wordsworth again depicted the healing power of the child; finding the child in the end of the poem not only serves to restore Betty's mind who is now "happy here, she's happy there, / She is uneasy everywhere; / Her limbs are all alive with joy" (44), but it also restores Susa, who was ill, since "as her mind grew worse and worse, / Her body it grew better" (45).

Mothers in Wordsworth's poems are often depicted as mad or having no property; the only thing which they have are their children. There is a difference between the paternal and maternal bond. The mothers, as those who gave birth to their children, seem to be more connected to them and more dependent on them. This deep love and dependence might cause madness as was depicted in "The Idiot Boy". Nevertheless, the children are also the healing source for the mothers, through the deep maternal bond the children are able to recover their minds and bring them peace and happiness. Wordsworth is sympathetic to the abandoned

mothers in “The Thorn” and “The Mad Mother”. Nevertheless, in “The Thorn” he expresses the anxiety of irrational mothers. He does not blame them; he thinks that the love they feel is beyond their control, and the solution of this problem is given in *The Prelude* where he introduces a substitution for the maternal love in the form of nature.

4.3 Rational Adult and Irrational Child

Wordsworth points to the gap between irrational child and rational adult.

Wordsworth’s poem “Anecdote for Fathers” depicts a father and a child and stresses the difference between their views of life. Edward is unable to tell which place he likes more, he responds impulsively, and his response is emotional and intuitive rather than logical and rational. The father wants to hear the reasons for his choice; therefore, the child chose the first object he saw to support his argument in order to satisfy the rational adult mind: “At Kilve there was no weather-cock; / And that’s the reason why” (21). The question was rather pointless and the answer of the child was ridiculous. Wordsworth expresses the absurdity of the attempt of adults to rationalize the emotions of children: “And three times to the child I said, ‘Why, Edward, tell me why?’” (20). The child’s view of the world is not rational. Therefore it cannot answer this question.

In “We Are Seven” Wordsworth depicts the same difference between the rationality of an adult and irrationality of a child. The child in this poem cannot understand the rational adult and insists on its arguments. The girl does not distinguish her siblings who are dead and those who are still living; they are all still present in her mind. Though she insists on the truth of her arguments, the adult is perplexed: “If two are in the church-yard laid, / Then ye are only five” (22). As I have written in the second chapter, death is not evil for her. Knoepflmacher pointed to the irony in “We Are Seven” where “the speaker who belabors the uncomprehending girl ironically exposes his own, far greater incomprehension” (400).

Even in *The Prelude*, Wordsworth does not explain his reactions to nature. He claimed that thoughts and ideas do not always have a logical origin:

Hard task to analyse a soul in which
Not only general habits and desires,
But each most obvious and particular thought,
Not in a mystical and idle sense,
But in the words of reason deeply weighed,
Hath no beginning. (182)

In this subchapter the child is called irrational, however, it is important to stress that children's behavior appears irrational only in the eyes of rational adults. Wordsworth contrasts children with adults to stress the gap between their different views of life, and to depict the behavior of children, who are unlike the adults, and in touch with deeper truths. The adults are not in contact with these truths; therefore they do not understand the children. As Knoepflmacher claimed, it is not that children misunderstand the reality; rather the adults cannot comprehend the deep truths of the world. Wordsworth claimed that irrationality is one of the greatest advantages of a child's mind. The child enjoys the emotional, intense moments and feels communion with the nature. Nevertheless, due to its irrationality, the child is incapable of understanding the influence and the real value of nature.

4.4 The Educated Child

Wordsworth was interested in the child's changing sense of reality – how a child develops from the irrational human being into the rational adult. Therefore he emphasized the importance of education. He spoke of the overeducated children and compared them to the insouciant children brought up in nature. In Book Five of *The Prelude* he wrote about a “race of real children, not too wise, / Too learned, or too good” (372). He criticized the children who were sent to school too early and stressed the importance of books and nature as the

primal education: “May books and nature be their early joy!” (372). For him it was unimportant whether the child makes mistakes or not – the child may suffer, feel “pain and fear; yet still in happiness / Not yielding to the happiest upon earth” (372). The most important qualities which the children should possess are “Simplicity in habit, truth in speech” (372). These qualities may not be gained in school, but in books and nature.

Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy took care of little Basil Montagu at Alfoxden, and they tried to “bring him up as a child of Nature” (Byatt 175). “The child symbolized innocence and youthful energy as a natural power” (Byatt 175). Wordsworth emphasized the importance of free upbringing. A child has its instincts of how to behave and any influences should not usurp its self. Liberty thus allows the child “to luxuriate in such feelings and images as will feed her mind in silent pleasure” (Byatt 176). Wordsworth was strongly against infant schools since they separate mothers from their children and thus destroy the maternal bond and the family unity. Coleridge supported Wordsworth; he claimed that the knowledge which is offered to a child there destroys its childlike state. He provided a great example which expresses the importance of imaginative literature as a way of educating children – “Touch a door little ajar or half-open and it will yield to the push of your finger. Fire a cannon-ball at it and the door stirs not an inch; you make a hole through it, the door is spoilt forever, but not moved. Apply this moral to education” (qtd. in Byatt 177). It is interesting that although Wordsworth was against the overeducated children, he considered the education of his own son important. When John, the eldest son, was young, he spent the whole days by running out of the house and back. Dorothy described him “the best endure of wet and cold I ever saw – in the frostiest weather he never complains” (Byatt 184). Wordsworth taught John at home; however, John was a slow learner. Since John was one of his last three children still living, this fact made Wordsworth very anxious. “John’s slowness and the fact that he was, as Sara Hutchinson put it ‘diseasedly shy’ drove Wordsworth into fits or irritability and impatience”

(Byatt 184). Wordsworth himself received very little formal education; he was taught by nature and that is why Wordsworth situates children in the midst of nature. In *The Prelude* Wordsworth gave an account of his own childhood and expressed how nature shaped his own poetic imagination.

Family unity was crucial for William Wordsworth, and in his works he concentrated especially on maternal and paternal bond. He compared the relation of mother and infant to the relation of child and nature. The paternal bond was for him one of the most powerful affections; he depicted it in “Michael” and “The Last of the Flock”. These poems express the struggle of fathers between the love of property and the love of their children. These fathers feel their role – to work and feed their family, and if they cannot fulfil this role, they suffer. Society does not care for these struggling fathers as was depicted in “The Last of the Flock”. Wordsworth expressed the maternal love as deep and beautiful. Nevertheless, he also traced all the struggles of the love between mother and her child. In the family the child faces the problem of contradiction between rational adult and irrational child’s mind. Although Wordsworth emphasized the importance of nature in the children upbringing, he also stressed the importance of the role of family in education. All in all, the unity of family relation and natural background seem to be the best surrounding for a child.

5. Conclusion

Romanticism was a crucial period for literature and for forming a new view of children. Wordsworth invented a new style of poetry which marked a return to, as he saw it, the real language used by people, as well as subjects containing the theme of childhood. Coleridge and Blake also revised representations of children. Although these poets had slightly different views of children, one thing linked them together – neither considered a child congenitally sinful. According to them children were innocent, pure, and they did not need preaching adults as guides. They were victims of an uncaring society and these poets tried to show this in order to help them. Literature for children was no longer only preaching and frightening, it contained also entertainment. Children gradually came to be in the center of attention.

Wordsworth's Romantic child became a figure in literature. The second chapter dealt with the child in relation to nature. Children have the closest bond with nature. The younger they are, the more they remember of the divine world that they came from; therefore nature is the best tutor for them. As they grow they lose this connection and become imprisoned in ordinary and common days of adulthood. Wordsworth does not depict the beauties of nature in his poems about children. He concentrates on the insouciant activities of children in nature. That is the difference between child and adult; the child unconsciously enjoys all the beauties of nature but it is the adult who is able to understand and appreciate all the joys and pleasures which may be found there.

The third chapter depicted family relations in Wordsworth's poetry. His treatment of the paternal bond depicts the struggle of fathers between love of children and love of property. Fathers are not dependent on their children; they need the landed property to feel the independence and inheritance which provides them the feelings of family unity. Nevertheless,

if they are not able to maintain their property and to work and feed the family, they suffer.

Unfortunately, just as the society does not care for poor children, it does not look after these fathers too. Mothers are much more dependent on their children, therefore the children might cause them madness; however, they might also recover their minds and be a source of great pleasure and happiness. In a family there will always be a struggle between conscious and rational adults and unconscious, irrational children. The rational adult mind will never wholly understand the child's mind. Nevertheless, it is obvious through the works of Wordsworth that like the child learns from the adult, the adult learns from the child.

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7. Summary in Czech

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá tématem dětství v poezii Williama Wordswortha. Zabývá se díly z období jeho rané tvorby, zejména básněmi z *Lyrical Ballads*, sekce z *The Prelude* a především “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood”. Práce je rozdělena do tří kapitol. První část popisuje jak Romantičtí básníci obecně nahlízejí na téma dětství. Následující dvě kapitoly se věnují konkrétním básním Williama Wordswortha a jeho užití tématu dětství ve svých dílech. Druhá kapitola se zabývá dítětem v přírodě a třetí kapitola zobrazuje dítě v rodině.