Wordsworth and Nineteenth-Century English Educational Reform

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ABSTRACT

This thesis adopts a historical point of view to analyze Wordsworth’s concept of education in relation to nineteenth-century English educational reform. In the nineteenth century, mass education, following the pace of the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, became an indispensable social issue. Among the diverse educational reform movements, Joseph Lancaster and Andrew Bell’s monitorial system was most prominent in that they provided a pedagogy that utilized teaching assistants to achieve efficiency and sufficiency in a large classroom and thus fulfilled the need of large-quantitative education of the age. Featured by efficiency, sufficiency, and materialism, the monitorial system best embodies the spirit of the Industrial Age. On the other hand, Wordsworth insisted on a community-based educational philosophy that urged people of his age to cherish old moral concepts such as harmonious, affectionate, and cooperative communal spirit inherent in traditional rural communities. The poet, representing the eighteenth-century rural tradition, observed with anxiety those children raised in an materialistic atmosphere. He delineates in his major works, especially The Excursion, a social vision that provides the best environment for the development and education of a spiritually mature man in which nature, man, and society are incorporated into a harmonious unity. This insistence on the old rural tradition distanced Wordsworth from his contemporary educational reformers and caused him to withdraw from his original support of the monitorial system.
論文名稱：華滋華斯與十九世紀英國教育改革

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論文摘要：

本論文旨在從歷史的角度來探討華滋華斯的教育觀，以及其和十九世紀英國教育改革之間的關係。在十九世紀，國民教育伴隨著法國大革命與工業革命的腳步，成為了不可避免的社會議題。在百家爭鳴的教育改革運動中，就以約瑟夫·蘭克斯與安德魯·貝爾所提倡的「教學助理制度」(monitorial system)最為突出。他們利用學生為教學助理在教室中達到量多而有效率的教育目的，因此而最能滿足時代大量教育的需求。其大量化、高效率、物質主義的特色成為工業革命的精神象徵。然而另一方面，華滋華斯則堅持著一種以團體為依歸的教育理念，促請人們重視並珍惜舊時代的道德價值觀，像是傳統鄉間團體 (traditional rural communities) 生活所隱含的和諧、真情、互助的特質。華滋華斯代表的是十八世紀的鄉村傳統，他對於在物質主義的懷抱中長大的時下青少年感到憂心忡忡，因此嘗試著在他的詩文中提倡他的教育理念，尤其在《郊遊》(The Excursion) 這首長詩中，他刻劃出一個理想的社會願景，在其中大自然、人、與社會構成一個和諧的整體，為人們的心靈教育提供適當的環境。華滋華斯對於舊式鄉村傳統的擇善固執使得他與當代教育改革家漸行漸遠，以至於轉而反對貝爾的教學助理制度。
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to explore William Wordsworth’s theory of education, especially his concept of a system of natural and environmental education.

Education is directly related to man and society. To talk about educational concept that is related to nature and environment is thus to relate the natural world with the human world. Generally speaking, a person who advocates an educational system based on his concept of the natural environment is more likely than not a person who not only shows concern for the progress and well being of human society, but also pays attention to nature. In Wordsworth’s case, however, this premise is not widely and unquestionably accepted by literary critics. On the contrary, critics tend to ask questions such as: Does Wordsworth really care about society? Or, is he only an egotistical pursuer of personal transcendence? How does Wordsworth treat the relations between nature, the self, man, and society?

Among the first to question Wordsworth’s social and political inclination are the Marxist new-historicists in the 1980s: “The 1980s witnessed something of a return to history, a move away from ahistorical formalisms, among practitioners of literary criticism” (Bate 2). Critics who belong to this literary trend analyze Wordsworth’s works from a social and historical point of view. As the new historicist Jerome McGann describes in his book, The Romantic Ideology: “This work assumes that poems are social and historical products and that the critical study of such products must be grounded in a socio-historical analytic” (3). New historicists try to restore to a literary work those social and historical meanings that work at an ideological level and are beyond the cognition of the writer: “[New historicists], at once materialist and deconstructive,
represent the literary work as that which speaks of one thing because it cannot articulate another—presenting formally a sort of allegory by absence, where the signified is indicated by an identifiably absented signifier” (Levinson 9). In the case of Romanticism, McGann states that: “[t]he Poetry of Romanticism is everywhere marked by extreme forms of displacement and poetic conceptualization whereby the actual human issues with which the poetry is concerned are resituated in a variety of idealized localities” (1). The questions new historicists have posed within this socio-historical context can be summarized with an exemplary problem Marjorie Levinson points out in *Wordsworth’s Great Period Poems: Four Essays*: “[The New historicists] wondered why, for example, in a poem commonly known as “Tintern Abbey” and, by its title, very concretely situated with respect to time and place of composition, there is no mention of an abbey, and only the most generalized treatment of occasion” (2). What concern these critics most is not the unmentioned abbey nor a detailed treatment and description of the occasion, but the fact that Wordsworth ignores the general social and historical backgrounds of his poetry. These new historicists, generally speaking, deal with the contradictions—contradictions that emerge especially from their presupposed socio-historical viewpoint—that exist in many of Wordsworth’s canonical poems, for example, “Tintern Abbey”, “The Ruined Cottage”, and “Intimations of Immortality: An Ode.” These contradictions are those between nature and society, the poet himself and people in suffering as a whole, and the individualistic imagination and socio-political reality. They accuse Wordsworth of failing to delineate and pay attention to the social and political situations taking place when he wrote those poems, and of caring only for his own imaginative transcendence. For example, Tintern Abbey was a dwelling-place
of beggars and vagrants, but Wordsworth did not mention this in the poem\(^1\). And in “The Ruined Cottage,” even though it is a poem about the French Revolution and its impact on poor people, man’s sufferings caused by historical events are eventually replaced by the overgrowing effects of Nature. As McGann argues:

This gradual collapse of the cottage into what Wordsworth calls . . . Nature’s ‘silent overgrowings’, has yet another analogue, however, in the poems’ narrative method itself. To read Wordsworth’s re-telling of this pitiful story is to be led further and further from a clear sense of the historical origins and circumstantial causes of Margaret’s tragedy. The place of such thoughts and such concerns is usurped, overgrown. (83)

These critics explain these discrepancies as effacement, usurpation, and displacement. They accuse Wordsworth of “suppressing history and [of] ‘privileging’ the individual imagination” (Bate 3). As Levinson puts it in her analysis of “Tintern Abbey”: “When I reflected on this discrepancy—a logical contradiction between title and text—it occurred to me that the amassing harmonies of Wordsworth’s poem effectively muffle the social and political resonance of the date inscribed in the title, of the designated five-year interval, and of the scene of writing” (2). Jerome McGann’s accusation of this poem is even more severe: “In the course of the poem not a word is said about the French Revolution, or about the impoverished and dislocated country poor, or—least of all—that this event and these conditions might be structurally related to each other” (85). These new historicists upbraid Wordsworth for ignoring and sacrificing the socio-historical facts

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1 Mary Moorman points out in *Wordsworth’s Early Years* (London: Oxford UP, 1987): “It is a curious fact that nowhere in the poem does Wordsworth mention Tintern Abbey itself, though we know that he must have admired it, for they returned from Chepstow to spend a second night there. Gilpin describes its condition; the grass in the ruins was kept mown, but it was a dwelling-place of beggars and the wretchedly poor. The river was then full of shipping, carrying coal and timber from the Forest of Dean. This also Wordsworth does not mention” (402-3).
of people’s suffering in order to achieve his personal transcendence through nature: “Thus the poem concludes in what appears to be an immense gain, but what is in reality the deepest and most piteous loss. Between 1793 and 1798 Wordsworth lost the world merely to gain his own immortal soul” (McGann 88). Similarly, Alan Liu in “The History in ‘Imagination’” in his *Wordsworth: The Sense of History* makes the same accusation. This article focuses its analysis on Wordsworth’s 1790 tour with Robert Jones to Switzerland, which is described in Book 6 of *The Prelude* with its famous passage of crossing the Alps and the celebration of Imagination. Liu argues that, in this passage, nature works together with the self to deny history:

> The description of the 1790 tour in Book 6, read in its own context, is a sustained effort to deny history by asserting nature as the separating mark constitutive of the egotistical self. It may be helpful to think of nature in its deflective capacity here as a mirror. The aim of Book 6 is to prevent the self from looking through nature to underlying history. Nature must instead reflect the self. (13)

To Liu and other new historicists, poetry that is not placed within a historical context is a deficiency and “the deepest and most piteous loss” (McGann 88): “No jewel without its setting: without history in the background, after all, a landscape is not a landscape; it is wilderness” (Liu 11).

These critics’ analyses are generally Marxist. They assert the importance of society and history, deplore Wordsworth’s emphasis on imaginative consciousness, and accuse him of abandoning the original political idealism by seeking his own transcendence: “[T]he ‘Romantic Ideology’ displaces and idealizes, it privileges imagination at the expense of history, it covers up social conditions as it quests for transcendence” (Bate 6).
From the Marxist point of view, to seek only for personal transcendence, to privilege individual imagination, is a bourgeois fetish.

Generally speaking, new historicists put history and society in the foreground and nature and imagination in the background. To them, history, politics, and society are of prime importance. When Wordsworth goes into nature, new historicists believe, he has left behind society and the human world. The individual poet confronts nature all by himself. It becomes a world only between nature and the self. Everything else is left behind. Consequently, since Wordsworth was a “nature poet” who spent almost all his lifetime being close to nature, his imaginative transcendence becomes a self indulgence and, through the means of nature, he escapes from the socio-political reality and ignores and suppresses facts about people’s suffering.

The new historicists’ criticism, put in the context of the history of literary criticism, has its origin in the Yale School criticism. The new historicists’ statements are derived from the Yale School critics, the predecessors of the new historicists, even though the new historicists set up their theory in reaction against these critics. Critics of the Yale School, including Geoffrey Hartman, Harold Bloom, and Paul de Man, generally speaking, assert that all Romantic poets, in their relationship with the natural world, seek to go beyond nature, to achieve personal transcendence and independent imagination, which is also the new historicists’ understanding toward Wordsworth’s solitary moments with nature.

Geoffrey Hartman explains this in his influential essay, “A Poet’s Progress: Wordsworth and the Via Naturaliter Negativa”. He argues that “Wordsworth thought nature itself led him beyond nature” (33). Take his analysis of “the crossing of the Alps” episode for example. It is an episode that happened in Wordsworth’s walking tour of France and Switzerland in the summer of 1790. Wordsworth and his friend intend to cross the Alps
through the Simplon Pass. However, without knowing it, they cross the Alps, only to be informed later by a peasant. They are very much disappointed. At the moment of writing about this incident in 1804, Wordsworth is suddenly “overpowered by a feeling of glory to which he gives expression in rapturous, almost self-obscuring lines” of a celebration of imagination (Hartman 40). Hartman argues that, at this moment when he writes this passage, Wordsworth, in “the ‘presence’ of imagination and the ‘absence’ of nature,” achieves poetic power without the guidance of nature (43). In fact, nature disappoints the poet. The poet’s imagination is “called forth, at the time of writing, by the barely scrutable, not by the splendid emotion; by the disappointment, not the fulfillment” (44). Hartman asserts that it is:

... the mind’s growth toward independence of immediate external stimuli [i.e., nature]. The measure of that independence is Imagination, and carries with it a precarious self-consciousness. We see that the mind must pass through a stage where it experiences Imagination as a power separate from Nature, that the poet must come to think and feel as if by his own choice, or from the structure of his mind” (44).

Hartman concludes in this analysis of “the crossing of the Alps” episode that “[i]t is not, therefore, till 1804 that Wordsworth discovers the identity of his hidden guide. . . . [N]ow he sees that it was imagination moving him by means of nature” (48). When writing poetry, it is not the external natural world that guides the poet, but the poet’s own internal imaginative power. This is what these Yale School critics mean by “going beyond nature.”

The Marxist new-historicists do not challenge this critical point of view. Instead, they accept this transcendental theory and build their criticism upon this premise:
“Hartman threw out nature to bring us the transcendent imagination; McGann throws out the transcendent imagination to bring us history and society” (Bate 8). The new-historicists assert that, when writing poetry, Wordsworth has only his own imagination and poetic power in mind. He has left behind not only nature but also, most importantly, history. The Yale School critics fail to take notice of this crucial aspect of history. Thus, these new-historicists’ enemy is not only the bourgeois fetish of individual imagination but also the Yale School hegemony: “[The Romantic Ideology] served a purpose, namely to offer a challenge to the hegemony which idealizing, imagination-privileging critics like Geoffrey Hartman and Harold Bloom had held over Romantic studies in the United States for twenty years, in particular through their hugely influential books, *Wordsworth’s Poetry* and *The Visionary Company*” (Bate 6).

Therefore, concerning Wordsworth’s relationship with nature, new historicists and the Yale School critics share a similar point of view. As Karl Kroeber observes in *Ecological Literary Criticism*:

> A link between the Yale School and Marxist new historicists lies in their common presuppositions, first, that romantic poets regarded private consciousness as distinct from and superior to all natural phenomena, and second, that the poets regularly sought to transcend, if only linguistically, the physical circumstances of their experiences in the natural world. (38)

In a word, both the new historicists and the Yale School critics believe that, to Wordsworth, personal spiritual transcendence is of primary importance, and that in his relationship with nature, he is superior to nature or seeks to surpass nature.

The new historicists and the Yale School critics are correct about Wordsworth’s emphasis on personal solitude and spiritual transcendence. It is also true that, in many
of Wordsworth’s canonical poems such as “Tintern Abbey” and “Intimations of Immortality: An Ode,” there is the predominant theme of individual spiritual experience in nature. I also agree with the new historicists that, in evaluating Wordsworth’s works, it is crucial to put them in a historical and social context so that we can better understand the poet’s social vision. In this thesis precisely from a historical point of view that I will examine Wordsworth’s idea of society and education. Yet I do not agree with the new historicists, as well as the Yale School critics’ comments on Wordsworth’s relationship with nature. I find their statements about Wordsworth’s relation between man and nature over-simplified. I believe that Wordsworth, instead of seeking to go beyond nature for individual transcendence, dwells in nature, communes with it, and learns from it without seeking to go beyond it.

Wordsworth’s idea about the relationships among man, nature, and society is related to the concept of oneness. As Gilbert T. Dunklin observes, Wordsworth tends to “see life steadily and to see it whole,” and this notion has its origin in “an outworn mode of regarding man, nature, and society which he had inherited from the eighteenth century that was fascinated by the concept of the great chain of being” (35). Wordsworth regards the relationships among man, nature, and society as highly interrelated. Wordsworth describes this concept of oneness in “Fragments from the Alfoxden Notebook (1)”:

Of unknown modes of being which on earth,  
Or in the heavens, or in the heavens and earth  
Exist by mighty combinations, bound  
Together by a link, and with a soul  
Which makes all one. (17-21)
Therefore, instead of regarding the relationships between man and nature as antagonistic, he emphasizes their close ties with each other. How can one establish a linkage with nature? It is through affections and feelings. In many of his poems Wordsworth frequently expresses his love of nature. Take “Tintern Abbey” for example, the poet describes himself as “[a] worshipper of Nature” with love:

... 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. (151-55)

In his experiences with nature, Wordsworth often expresses his affection for a specific scenery:

Yet once again do I behold the forms

Of these huge mountains, and yet once again,

Standing beneath these elms, I hear thy voice,

Beloved Derwent, that peculiar voice

Heard in the stillness of the evening air,

Half-heard and half-created. (“Fragment: Yet once again” 1-6)

Besides, Wordsworth does not always go into nature alone. There are moments which he shares with other fellow human beings, and he cherishes these experiences very much. In “Tintern Abbey,” the poem closes with the poet’s love for his sister Dorothy. His experience in nature thus becomes even more precious because of the participation of Dorothy and her sharing of feelings and thoughts with him:

... 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! (155-59).

All these elements: personal growth, feelings and thoughts stimulated, and sharing with other people are important aspects in the poem about nature. As Jonathan Bate puts it: “In Romantic poetics, poetry is to be found not only in language but in nature; it is not only a means of verbal expression, it is also a means of emotional communication between man and the natural world” (17).

Therefore, seen in the example of “Tintern Abbey,” the new historicists’ argument that for Wordsworth, the relations between man and nature are antagonistic and oppositional, seems to be a misunderstanding. As Karl Kroeber observes: “Cold War critics [i.e., new historicists] under the spell of antagonistic oppositionalism, and conceiving relationships exclusively in terms of power struggles, tend to treat all poems as lyricized representations of ‘primal scenes,’ that is, as schematic dramatizations of universal psychic conflicts” (3-4). It seems that their purpose of “[reading] poetry as a part of a society and its culture” (McGann 91) is to persuade us that poetry, and the parts in Romantic poetics about spirituality and nature, is not part of society and culture. What they call “society”, “culture”, or “history” includes only the materialistic and artificial parts of human civilization but excludes the part of the natural cosmos. They forget that, after all, human civilization derives from and is dependent upon the natural world. Without nature, man achieves nothing. They also forget that in The Prelude, it is his love of nature that leads Wordsworth to love of mankind. As Bate puts it:

[T]here is not an opposition but a continuity between his “love of nature” and
his revolutionary politics, for it is precisely the Lakeland environment explored in book eight of *The Prelude* (“Retrospect: Love of Nature leading to Love of Mankind”) that prepares the ground for the radical ardour of book nine (“Residence in France and French Revolution”). (10)

Therefore, the new historicists’ conception of nature is somewhat limited. Alan Liu says in *Wordsworth: The Sense of History*: “[T]here is no nature except as it is constituted by acts of political definition made possible by particular forms of government” (104). Jonathan Bate comments on this statement:

But here one sees the limitation of Liu’s argument: not even the most ardent advocate of entrepreneurship and the free market can privatize the air we breathe. Governments may legislate about what we emit into the air, and in that sense the constitution of nature is determined by government and industry, but we cannot parcel out the air as we parcel out the land. And water can only be privatized in a limited sense. The particles of water which form clouds—and we need no reminding of how important clouds were to Wordsworth . . .—cannot be possessed or sold. (19)

Fresh air, white clouds, and blue sky are things that “cannot be possessed and sold.” And these elements in nature matter very much to a person’s mental well-being. To Wordsworth, the golden daffodils along the margin of a bay are not simply daffodils. The pleasant atmosphere conveyed by the dancing daffodils makes Wordsworth happy. Whenever he thinks of these daffodils, “[his] heart with pleasure fills,/ And dances with the daffodils” (“I Wondered Lonely as a Cloud” 23-4). The historicist/ Marxist analytical viewpoint ignores the emotional and spiritual communication between man and nature. It is annihilated, displaced, erased, and usurped by a materialistic and
socio-political discourse. Because of the new historicists’ insistence on history and society, they fail to understand Wordsworth's insistence on the importance of nature.

Wordsworth’s insistence on the natural environment, his commitment to the people and the lives around nature, and his devotion to his poetic career dedicated to portray these subjects are shown in his decision to retire to Grasmere in December 1799. This decision was made partly to carry out the great task of completing *The Recluse*, a philosophical poem that Wordsworth never finished. As Stephen Gill says, “Deliberately distancing himself from the political center, from publishers, and the whole professional world of literature, he had chosen his home, not as a negative retreat from ‘the real world’ but as a positive commitment to an austere and dedicated life amidst the elemental forms of Nature” (174). This act of retirement is an assertion of his determination to be a poet, and he “entered 1800 with everything at stake, needing to demonstrate to his family, to Coleridge, . . . above all to himself, that he was a chosen son and that he had mistaken neither his gifts nor the importance of his calling” (Gill 174).

Wordsworth values highly his poetic career. In the 1802 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth defines the poet:

[The poet] is the rock of defence for human nature; an upholder and preserver, carrying everywhere with him relationship and love. In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs: in spite of things silently gone out of mind, and things violently destroyed; the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time. The object of the Poet’s thoughts are every where; though the eyes and sense of man are, it is true, his favorite guides, yet he will follow wheresoever he can find an atmosphere of
sensation in which to move his wings. Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge—it is as immortal as the heart of man. (141)

This is a very glorious definition. Wordsworth by no means regards his poetic career as a retreat or a means of pursuing only individual transcendence. The subjects of his poetry cover almost all aspects of human life. And, according to him, the Poet’s ideal is to “[bind] together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society.” As we can see in the passage from the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* quoted above, the poet is “an upholder and preserver, carrying everywhere with him relationship and love.” When writing this definition and dedicating all his life to being a poet, Wordsworth definitely had people and society in his mind. In the 1800 edition of *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth also states specifically what he chooses to delineate in his poetry:

Low and rustic life was generally chosen because in that situation the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that situation our elementary feelings exist in a state of greater simplicity and consequently may be more accurately contemplated and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings; and from the necessary character of rural occupations are more easily comprehended; and are more endurable; and lastly, because in that situation the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature. (*Prose Works* 124)

Man, especially lower class people and their “low and rustic life”, is the emphasis. Besides, the poet chooses to portray these people because “in that situation the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature.” Again,
Wordsworth stresses the harmonious relationship between man and nature. This is what he values most and what he, as a “preserver and upholder” of “relationship and love”, tries his best to advocate.

Furthermore, when writing poems about “low and rustic life”, Wordsworth was undertaking a kind of social work that the new historicists, when they criticize him of ignoring socio-political reality, fail to take into account. In effect, his poetry carries a political ends. He tries to let the reading public, mostly the middle class, be aware of the existence of these poor and suffering people. As Gill puts it:

Addressing himself to the poetry-reading public—that is, to the legislating, voting, rate-paying, opinion-forming middle class—Wordsworth wanted to defamiliarize poetry and the subject-matter of poetry, to remove “the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude” which dulls the eye and hardens the heart. And what the reader’s awakened sensibility was asked to comprehend was the pathos, tragedy, or dignity inherent in the burbling of an idiot boy, in the gratitude of an enfeebled old man, or even in the shuffling gait of an Old Cumberland beggar. (141)

Wordsworth cared very much whether his poetry was accepted by the reading public. He would like his opinion and the voices of the people he represented be heard and taken seriously.

From the above discussion, we come to know that the new historicists’ way of looking at Wordsworth’s idea of the relations among man, nature, and society is problematic in the sense that they regard Wordsworth’s solitary moments in nature as the poet’s attempt to go beyond nature and view the relationships between man and nature as antagonistic and oppositional. They fail to take into account Wordsworth’s concept of
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Oneness, his idea of love of nature that leads to love of mankind, and his social intention in his dedication to the career of a poet. In this respect, I agree more with the ecological critics’ point of view. Ecological critics like Jonathan Bate and Karl Kroeber set up their criticism to challenge “the grand illusion” that “every Romantic poet” believes “poetry, or even consciousness, can set one free of the ruins of history and culture” (McGann 91). They argue that Romantic poets, including Wordsworth, neither sought to transcend the physical world nor denied society and history. Instead, their lives and poetry are deeply rooted in the materialistic natural world and, through their commitment to Nature, they show their profound concern for other people in the society. Kroeber argues:

Both [the Yale School critics and new-historicists] undervalue romantic counterconceptions of the individual self as fully existent only in relation to other selves, and of human nature as significantly determined by natural environment. Both sets of critics avert their eyes from the poets’ insistence that imaginative consciousness is best understood in terms of its adaptations to—and therefore its power to transform rather than transcend—the actualities of humankind’s physical environment—of which continuing relations with other human beings are a primary feature. (38)

Ecological criticism reasserts the importance of nature. What they call “the natural world” or “the natural environment” is not only the physical and geographical sense of nature, but also human communities and activities that are deeply associated with and connected to the natural surroundings. They regard nature not only as an integral part of human world, but also as an abundant resource that is directly connected to mankind’s history, society, and culture. Only through a harmonious interrelationship with nature can mankind achieve well being. And they believe that it is precisely with this
conception that Romantic poets like Wordsworth wrote their poetry: “[Cold War critics] assume that all societies alienate mankind from nature. The romantics, in contrast, made pleasure fundamental to human accomplishments because they believed that humankind belonged in, could and should be at home within, the world of natural processes” (Kroeber 5). The Romantic poets wrote about nature precisely to express their “deepest political commitments, the profundity of which, ironically, has been obscured by ‘new historicists’ dismissing romantic descriptions of nature as mere ‘displacements’ of unconscious political motives” (Kroeber 2). Ecological critics adopt this critical viewpoint not only to challenge the hegemony that Marxist new-historicists have established, but also to “make claims for the historical continuity of a tradition of environmental consciousness” (Bate 9):

A green reading [i.e. a natural environmental reading] of Wordsworth is a prime example: it has strong historical force, for if one historicizes the idea of an ecological viewpoint—a respect for the earth and a scepticism as to the orthodoxy that economic growth and material production are the be-all and end-all of human society—one finds oneself squarely in the Romantic tradition; and it has strong contemporary force in that it brings Romanticism to bear on what are likely to be some of the most pressing political issues of the coming decade: the greenhouse effect and the depletion of the ozone layer, the destruction of the tropical rainforest, acid rain, the pollution of the sea, and, more locally, the concreting of England’s green and pleasant land. (Bate 9)

Ecological critics believe that nature, man, and society are interrelated, and Wordsworth, as a leading Romantic poet, has already asserted the importance and necessity of maintaining a harmonious relationship with nature. They try to restore nature’s place in
In this thesis, I would like to argue that Wordsworth’s emphasis on Nature is related not only to his own personal transcendence, but also to the well-being of the whole society. And such an emphasis is most convincingly expressed in his concept of education. The kind of life Wordsworth chooses to live and the kind of poetry Wordsworth chooses to write strongly convey the idea of a natural education which regards Nature as an integral part of human society. In Wordsworth’s ideal, to educate people through the simple but profound influence of Nature is the best way to bring welfare to the whole country. In the first chapter I will give a brief history of the educational reform in the late eighteenth century and the nineteenth century in England, which provides a historical context for Wordsworth’s concept of education. In the second chapter, I will discuss in detail Wordsworth’s concept of education. I will argue in this chapter that Wordsworth, in going into nature, always intends to go to the society as well. In his educational ideal, man is best educated under the three-fold influence of nature, home life, and human community, and the ultimate goal of such an education is life in a harmonious community. In the third chapter I will examine Wordsworth’s reaction to nineteenth-century English educational reform and his criticism of the society of the Industrial Age. I will show in this chapter how Wordsworth’s idea of society is different from that of his contemporaries and how this disagreement results in his opposition to the educational reform in general. Through my discussions in this thesis I intend to show that Wordsworth indeed has a great concern for the society and fellow human beings. It is just that his disagreement with nineteenth-century educational reformers distances him from the mainstream of the reform.
In this chapter I will discuss the educational reform from late eighteenth century to early nineteenth century in England, with emphasis on elementary formal schooling, especially the education of the poor. There are two factors that made this period a decisive turning point in education: one is social changes brought about by what has come to be known as the Industrial Revolution, and the other is new social ideas generated by the French Revolution. These two main factors made the English social conditions no longer the same as those in the traditional, agricultural, rural-based England and forced reformers and scholars to think of new methods to educate the mass of people. Thus, education became an important issue, and different groups reacted to this new trend with different stands. The more conservative groups of people would like to establish a system of education that was solely under the control of the established Church, and thus made the educational problem a religious issue. The more radical-minded reformers looked forward to a progressive, industrialized new society, and thus pushed for educational systems that could meet the actual needs of the present society, i.e., to provide an efficient, economic, and large-scaled mass education. The conservative kind of educational systems were established by religious philanthropists like The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK 1699-1730) and the Evangelicals, and examples of the radicalism are Jeremy Bentham’s utilitarianism and Andrew Bell and Joseph Lancaster’s monitorial system.

The educational problem that arose in this period of time, however, actually had its origin in seventeenth century and even earlier; therefore, I will first talk about the
educational conditions and ideas of this period. In fact, the educational reform we are now mentioning began at this period.

Before the nineteenth century, there was no such thing as mass education. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries especially, the so-called education was related to that received by aristocrats and gentlemen, who ruled the nation and were therefore influential and important: “The education of noblemen and gentlemen was a subject that attracted much attention at this time. Because of the great influence they exercised in society their proper training was regarded as a matter of national importance” (Lawson and Silver 172). Poor people, inferior in social status, not only were deprived of many privileges and power, but had no right for education. This idea was widely accepted by all of the people in the society. Even John Locke, who was influential in his ideas about education, talked about aristocratic education only:

Locke is here concerned with the education only of gentlemen—the 3 or 4 per cent of the population who constituted the ruling class—for as he wrote elsewhere, mental culture was not for men of low condition, only for those with means and leisure. . . . In the conditions of the time it could hardly have occurred to him that all children should be educated, and certainly not educated along the same lines, as we now accept. Men were educated according to their social rank and even “a prince, a nobleman and an ordinary gentleman’s son should have different ways of breeding”. (Lawson and Silver 174-75)

This kind of notion is derived from the idea of a society ranked in traditional orders based on birth and occupation. People led a certain style of life according to their position in the social hierarchy. And they believed their positions were divinely ordained by God. This notion of social order kept everybody in his/her proper place
rigidly, and it was a way for the higher orders with privilege and authority to obtain control over people in the lower orders. On the other hand, it was also a means for the poor to be content with their position and be tolerant to social injustice and the harsh reality of life. Even though social changes did happen and altered people’s positions in the social hierarchy, it usually happened to people with property. For those landless poor, they could only try to tolerate poverty from generation to generation.

The ruling classes regarded people from the lower orders as inferior. They were supposed to be obedient, hard working in a harsh environment, and timid. There was no need to provide these people any sort of education. If there was any, it was to maintain social order and to teach moral and religious disciplines of duty and obedience. There were fears from the ruling classes that, if they let these lower-class people receive too much education, they would become disobedient and threaten the “established social order”:

Among the ruling elite a view strongly held throughout the eighteenth century, and well into the nineteenth, was that too much literacy among the population at large was a danger to the established order. The social system, divinely ordained, depended on a plentiful supply of labourers and servants; to educate them above their station would make them dissatisfied with their lot and invite social disruption. (Lawson and Silver 179)

As a result, the governing class generally asserted that liberal education should be a privilege confined to their own kind (Lawson and Silver 180).

Nevertheless, there was still education, basically elementary, provided by private enterprise of benevolent philanthropies and religious foundations such as churches: “Such elementary education as was available for the mass of the population in the eighteenth
century was provided as in the past by private enterprise, supplemented by philanthropy” (Lawson and Silver 181). To educate the poor people, especially to give them at least a sense of morality and obedience to social orders would be necessary to maintain social stability. It was better for them to work diligently in their ordained occupation than wandering around as vagrants and criminals. Religion at this point played an important and successful role. In a society in which most people believed in and feared God, it was easy to admonish the socially inferior to stay obediently in their position. In England’s case, the Anglican Church also represented the upper class. As a result, their purpose of educating the poor was mainly to maintain the ruling class as well as their own power and superior position.

These philanthropists were of course people from the upper classes. Their purpose of building schools for the poor was based on a pitying benevolence with which they could rescue the poor from ignorance and vice. This humanitarianism and spirit of benevolence were the main body of ideas that pushed forward the establishment of education for the poor in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Because of this spirit of benevolence, men and women from the upper classes supported the establishment of schools to educate the poor:

The stronghold of the benevolent spirit was within the upper middle class which, in its sober righteousness, saw that the lower middle classes, and especially the poor, were in dire need of a religious and moral re-education. A young man and woman, who were reared in the atmosphere of an upright, middle-class family, could scarcely escape infection by this spirit of benevolence and by the desire for reforms of England’s social and intellectual life which accompanied and grew out of it. (Dunklin 3)
Nevertheless, these philanthropists did not wish all these actions to cause social mobility. As mentioned above, their purpose was not social progress: “These educational program instituted by private, philanthropic individuals were endued with the spirit of benevolence rather than with the zeal for social revolution” (Dunklin 11).

The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) was the first foundation established to educate the poor on a large scale. However, its aim, not surprisingly, was not to spread benevolence and light, nor to provide knowledge and intelligence for the poor, but to “propagate the belief, and to promote the aims of the Protestant Episcopal Church” (Dunklin 4). It intended to increase the number of communicants of the Anglican Church, and “[n]ew communicants were most easily found among the young and the uneducated, and it was clear that their loyalty, like the loyalty of the Catholic young who were trained in the Jesuit schools, was insured if their first education was received at the hands of the Church” (Dunklin 4). Their purpose, therefore, was to absorb new communicants, and to spread practical Christianity among the godless poor, and hence the curriculum they offered was nothing new—mainly reading, writing, and some basic arithmetic for the boys and sewing for the girls. Yet these were not of primary importance. The most essential thing for them to learn was moral and religious discipline and social subordination:

In the hymns they sang, the prayers they recited and the sermons they had to listen to, the charity children were constantly reminded of their low estate and the duty and respect they owed their betters. Supporting schools of this kind suddenly became fashionable among the more benevolent well-to-do. Educationally, the poor were very much what the rich made them. (Lawson and Silver 184)
The curriculum was “designed to teach them their duties and reveal to them their rights in a moral rather than political or economic aspect” (Dunklin 10). This design and purpose formed a large part of the reformation and movements of education until the nineteenth century. Among the reformers were the SPCK, representing the Established Church, and Robert Raikes, Hannah More, Sarah Trimmer, representing the Sunday School Movement of the Evangelicals. Power of religion and the traditional idea of social order never disappeared. The spirit of benevolence and the idea of religious control prevailed throughout the educational reform with the predominant fear of an educated populace. This conservatism hindered the establishment of an educational system. That was the reason why mass education was established as late as late nineteenth century. More radical and liberal movements had to wait until the 1790s and later to enter into the battlefields of educational reform.

Despite their conservatism and intention of keeping the poor in their proper places, the SPCK contributed greatly to the education of the poor, especially when it was done on a large scale. Even though their mission ended in 1730 due to controversies and fears from the governing class of giving too much education to the poor, their efforts, helped increase the literacy rates considerably “from one in four males in 1600 to one in two by 1800” (Lerner, Meacham, and Burns 594). Furthermore, they set up a tradition and provided examples for future mass education; they also put down cornerstones for future educational movements: “Perhaps the SPCK’s chief importance was in establishing the tradition of a central body encouraging local effort in school provision—a tradition which was taken up a century later by the National Society and so largely determined the form that state intervention was eventually to take” (Lawson and Silver 185).

Due to the efforts of individual philanthropists and SPCK, the amount of schools for
the poor raised considerably. However, compare with this quantity, the quality was still poor. First of all there was problems of teachers’ qualifications and earnings. Even though more and more men devoted themselves to teaching, most of them regarded it as a casual, part-time occupation. In towns, the educational conditions were better and schooling was more regular; some men could take teaching as a career and made a modest living out of it, but there was almost no formal qualification or training prepared for them. They usually taught according to their own schooling and private reading, and perhaps some previous experience of other occupations. When it comes to the case of countryside, the majority of teachers were countrymen, living in villages and teaching the children of ploughmen, shepherds and small farmers who had poor income themselves and most of the time required the labors of their children (Lawson and Silver 189). Schoolkeeping as an occupation was scanty and uncertain: “Teaching the children of the labouring poor was a humble occupation that might earn local respect but conferred no status: the financial rewards were meagre and the work was considered suitable only for the poor themselves to undertake. It is a tradition that has died hard” (Lawson and Silver 190). This problem of teachers’ qualification became a prevalent problem throughout the process of educational reform till the late nineteenth century.

Another reason that made education for the poor difficult was the problem of necessity. Most of the people in the lower orders regarded education as unnecessary, because education could do nothing to promote their positions or improve their living standards. Literacy means nothing to them. In a society that judged a person’s prospects by rank and family, literacy could not bring the poor any material benefits. Education could not at all promote social mobility (Lawson and Silver 194). The idea of raising the poor from ignorance and darkness through education was only a one-sided
fantasy of the upper classes. To educate them while at the same time keep them firmly in their places was equally a paradoxical ideal. In their daily lives, the rural poor simply had no time and chance for them to read and write:

Even if the labourer could read, incessant physical labour left him with no leisure for reading such books as he possessed or could borrow. If he could write, there was nobody to write to: everybody he knew lived in the village, or in the next one, and if he had anything to say he walked there and said it. On the few occasions when he needed to sign his name the law allowed him to make his mark instead, which was just as good. And if he sent his children to school he had not only to pay the schoolmaster but also manage without their earnings, which might mean hunger for all the family. Schooling was a risky investment for the poor, anyway, when perhaps only one child in two might survive to adulthood. (Lawson and Silver 194)

Besides, there was this deeply-rooted ideology that their inferior status was divinely ordained:

In a society of strong traditions and relatively unchanging status and standards of life, schooling for the poor had in general appeared irrelevant. A young man in that situation who attempted to “improve his condition” was seen as “a dissaffected person, who was not satisfied with the station in which God had placed him, but, forgetting the humility that belonged to his condition, was contriving how to raise himself out of his proper place.” (Lawson and Silver 227-28)

Since the educational program was designed and established by the upper classes, it was a system produced solely according to their point of view. People from the lower
orders neither had time, nor had the ability, not to mention the intention, to receive formal education. They had their own ways of self-instruction. This informal education took place even before individual philanthropists and the SPCK began to build schools for them and kept on affecting most of the rural children. In the parishes, the improvement of literacy rate “from 51 per cent in the 1750s to 57 per cent in the 1790s” was not always explained by the presence or absence of a school (Lawson and Silver 193). Therefore, “[a]t all times informal instruction by parents or friends or even by unaided self-help must have been almost as important as systematic instruction in schools” (Lawson and Silver 193). Wordsworth’s concept of education, which we will discuss in the later chapters, refers mainly to this kind of informal education. He regards this education as even more important than formal schooling. This kind of self-education also shows that the rural people did have their own ways to educate the young, to which popular literature provided by “the traveling bagman” contributed greatly:

Since Tudor times popular literature in the form of ballads, broadsides and pamphlets had formed part of the stock-in-trade of the traveling bagman and furnished means of self-instruction. In the eighteenth century there was a great increase in the output of popular reading and didactic material intended primarily for juveniles, though also for their elders: spelling books, writing sheets, fairy stories, moral tales, fables, histories. Hack-written, crudely printed and illustrated, chapbooks of this kind were produced in great variety in numerous towns, and peddled round the fairs, villages and farms of the countryside by the “travelling stationers”. (Lawson and Silver 193)

The “traveling stationers” thus played an important role in informal self-instruction. Life in the countryside was isolated and restricted. Villagers relied heavily upon these
travelers to provide goods, information, and even knowledge of the outside world. It is worth noticing here that the figure of the Wanderer in *The Excursion* holds exactly this occupation. I will discuss his education and the educational meanings of his being a pedlar in detail in the next chapter.

Now let us go back to formal schooling and the educational reform. Social changes in the late eighteenth century became the main factor that caused and intensified educational controversies and reform: “In the half-century beginning in the 1780s education became one of the main areas of conflict in a profoundly changing society. The provision of mass education, and to a much lesser extent the reform of the endowed schools and ancient universities, became persistent public issues” (Lawson and Silver 226). Generally speaking, at this time the English society was still quite conservative and traditional, in the sense that problem of the poor and the governing class’ s desire to keep them firmly in their places were still the same. It was just that all these traditional ways of thinking and living were put in a different social context. Urbanization, the rapid growth of factory towns and mining industries, and the decline of the rural areas caused by the Industrial Revolution introduced new patterns of life to people. New ideas such as utilitarianism, *laissez-faire* economy, and the emphasis on human progression changed people’ s view about society as well as the relationship between men and society. Although these changes in society and ideas were taking place in a gradual and slow process, they were influencing people’ s lives and gradually spread throughout England:

Sustained social change sharpens questions about the adequacy of existing social institutions, and from the late eighteenth century, in fact, sustained change became, to an extent unparalleled in previous centuries, the major
characteristic of English society. . . . From the late eighteenth century, however, social change was continuous and pervasive. Although Britain was still predominantly rural, social relationships and assumptions about the organization of society were no longer what they had been. (Lawson and Silver 226)

These changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution directly benefited the upper and middle classes. Inventions of machines and productions in factories promoted economic prosperity and made the people in the higher orders even wealthier. However, their well-beings were gained through the sacrifices of people from the lower orders. These poor people’s lifestyles were dramatically altered and their quality of life deteriorated. Poverty and the living conditions of the poor eventually formed serious social problems and aroused concern regarding the issue of primary education. These changes in the lives of the poor were generated from three main factors: the rise of population, the decline of rural agriculture and industry, and the Industrial Revolution.

The rise of population caused social as well as educational problems. During the years 1750 to 1800 the total number of inhabitants of England and Wales grew from six million in estimation to around nine million with the sharp upward growth continuing thereafter, at least until the 1820s. By 1851 the total population was about eighteen million, of whom, for the first time, just over half lived in urban areas (Horn 8). The population rise was mainly caused by the fall in mortality rates, the growth in the birth rate, and the drop in the age of marriage (Horn 8). This rise of population made the poor even poorer. It also caused unemployment and the increase of crimes: “[E]ven in less dynamic districts, this population upsurge was apparent and, in the long run, it was to create serious problems of poverty and underemployment” (Horn 9). Together with the development of slum towns and factories with large amount of workers massed together,
which we would discuss later, it is not surprising that to civilize these people through education would become an urgent issue.

The decline of the rural area was an important factor that altered the economic outlook and people’s ways of life. Its direct cause was nearby factories and mines. The growth of towns, followed with industrial manufacturing, made family industry and traditional handicrafts difficult to survive. Agriculture, together with many other traditional rural occupations, was undergoing an unprecedented threat (Horn 2):

The years from 1760 to 1850 were to prove among the most momentous in the history of the English countryside, for it was during this period that agriculture and its associated trades ceased to dominate the national economy in the way they had done from time immemorial. Instead they were overtaken by the products of urban manufacturing and the mining industry. (Horn 1)

One of the outcomes of the threat was the outflow of population from rural areas to nearby towns, because agriculture and the disappearing traditional industry and rural occupations could no longer fulfill the needs of the younger generations: “The continual rise in the population made it indeed impossible to provide work for everyone in the English village. Agriculture had absorbed all the hands required. And many traditional kinds of rural occupation were disappearing” (Trevelyan 416). Thus, “[t]he village was becoming more purely agricultural; it was ceasing to manufacture goods for the general market, and moreover, was manufacturing fewer goods for itself” (Trevelyan 416). With the improvement of roads and communications, ladies and wives in the village gradually learnt to buy in the town daily necessities that used to be made in the village. Village shops were set up to sell goods from the cities:

The self-sufficing, self-clothing village became more and more a thing of the
past. . . . The reduction in the number of small industries and handicrafts made rural life duller and less-sufficient in its mentality and native interests, a backwater of the national life instead of its main stream. The vitality of the village slowly declined, as the city in a hundred ways sucked away its blood and brains. (Trevelyan 417)

Thus, cities and towns not only sucked away the village’s blood and brains, it also drew away thousands of young men and women from all parts of rural England, and “this situation was most marked in the north, the region of mines and factories and cotton mills” (Travelyan 416).)

As a result, the concentration of population shifted from the rural area to the urban area, and thus the focus of attention to the problem of poverty and education also shifted from the countryside to cities and towns. Even though “[p]overty and illiteracy were no less acute in rural areas during this period than they were in towns,” the educational problem in the countryside was no longer the focus of concern (Lawson and Silver 227). Large proportion of the poor now lived in slum towns and workhouses. The problem of poverty and the education of the poor, seen from this perspective, became even severer.

The problem of education and poverty emerged primarily because of the comparison between past and present. Not until the rural tradition was being threatened did people begin to sense its importance. Village life, despite its poverty, had its pleasant part and, especially, its sense of humanity accompanied by the natural surroundings. As George Trevelyan describes it:

The beauty of field and wood and hedge, the immemorial customs of rural life—the village green and its games, the harvest-home, the tithe feast, the May Day rites, the field sports—had supplied a humane background and an age-long
In traditional village life, people’s relationship with each other was close, pleasant, and humane: “[U]nder the old rural system [the workers] had been scattered about—one, two or at most half a dozen hands to each farm—in close and therefore often in kindly personal relation with their employer the farmer, at whose board the unmarried hands took their meals, cooked by the farmer’s wife,” but now they “were brought together as a mass of employees face to face with an employer, who lived apart from them in a house of his own in a separate social atmosphere” (Trevelyan 418).

Thus, the most crucial problem that worsened the living conditions of the poor, threatened moral standards and thus caused educational problem, was the lack of humanity in the working environment of factories and mines. It was a new order of life. Iron foundries, railways, mining industry, and cotton mills “brought into being communities working to new forms of industrial discipline, dislocating old patterns of life and the traditional culture and pursuits of the countryside” (Lawson and Silver 227). Therefore, this destruction of old rural patterns of life and the introduction of new industrial discipline were actually a cultural problem—many traditional moral standards and close interrelationship between people were being threatened:

Child labour and child crime became major social phenomena. Familiar landmarks of behavior and relationships were destroyed. The new urban communities were cut off from the familiar attentions of squire, vicar, poor-law overseer and schoolmaster. The new towns spread without planning, without local government, franchise, churches or schools. (Lawson and Silver 227)
New social orders and new patterns of life needed new ways of organization and governing, but the ruling class and middle class were enjoying the excitement of individualism, forgetting conveniently the wretched poor in factories and mines:

    The modern English slum town grew up to meet the momentary needs of the new type of employer and jerry builder, unchecked and unguided by public control of any sort. A rampant individualism, inspired by no idea beyond quick money returns, set up the cheap and nasty model of modern industrial life and its surroundings. Town-planning, sanitation and amenity were things undreamt of by the vulgarian makers of the new world, while the aristocratic ruling class enjoyed its own pleasant life apart, and thought that town building, sanitation and factory conditions were no concern of government. (Trevelyan 408)

The government did nothing to compensate for these workers the loss of traditions of country life. There was no social services or amusements of any kind. And fearfully, this new type of urban community was very easy to imitate on an ever-increasing scale, until in the late nineteenth century the majority of Englishmen dwelt in mean streets (Trevelyan 408-10). As a result, “[t]he poor, perhaps, had in reality always been as poor and as ill-used; but their evil plight became more obvious to themselves and to others, now that they were segregated and massed together. In the past, poverty had been an individual misfortune; now it was a group grievance” (Trevelyan 410). This group grievance not only destroyed traditional moral standards and reinforced the increase of crimes; it also caused social unrest and riots, like the Peterloo Massacre.

Despite all these destruction of old ways of life and social unrest caused by industrialization, the breakdown of settled ways of life, however, opened new horizons.
New political and social ideals, new ideas about justice, rights and education, helped to form new aspirations. As old patterns of life were destroyed, so was old ways of thinking. People were forced to made efforts in improving their living conditions, and thus resulted in social mobility. In the past, any man who attempted to improve his condition was seen as a disaffected person, who tried to raise himself out of his divinely ordained proper place. Now, more and more young men attempted to improve their condition through working and education (Lawson and Silver 227-8).

In this situation new educational ideas and efforts to establish schools emerged from a variety of sources—traditions of philanthropy, Jeremy Bentham’s utilitarianism and the laissez-faire economists, and the evangelical movement in the Church of England, to name just a few. Among these sources, utilitarianism and the laissez-faire economists’ ideas were the most influential to the forming of new educational programs, while the evangelical movement represented the religious force that desired to restrain social mobility and restore traditional social values. These two will be the focus of the following discussion.

Before we discuss utilitarianism, we should first examine the idea of human educability and progression, which provided the main body of ideas for nineteenth-century English educational reform (Lawson and Silver 228). In the eighteenth century, a new sense of confidence gradually emerged. Radical social and political ideas stressed individualism and human perfectibility, which had a far-reaching influence in England. Philosophers like Helvétius believed that education could do a great deal and ascribed to education total influence over human conduct: “For Helvétius, as for Locke, man was at birth nothing, and became what education (by which he meant circumstances in general) made him” (Lawson and Silver 229). This concept influenced
the English radicals greatly, and they “saw education as one of the objectives in their
search for a just and sensible social order” (Lawson and Silver 229). Tom Paine’s The
Rights of Man, Mary Wollstonecraft’s A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and William
Godwin’s Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence of Modern Morals and
Happiness were embedded with assumptions about education in the context of the pursuit
of human rights. Godwin “built a social philosophy on the twin pillars of justice and a
rational approach to education” (Lawson and Silver 229). Therefore, it was in this kind
of philosophical context that social and educational reforms took place. The radical
philosophers and reformers just mentioned believed that human beings as well as society
could progress and achieve perfection through education. In the seventeenth and early
eighteenth century, the upper classes promoted education for the poor solely because of
humanitarianism and the spirit of benevolence. Now in the late eighteenth and
nineteenth century, scholars and educators promoted educational reform, not to raise the
poor from ignorance and vice, but to achieve their ideals of social progress.

As a result, education became a means for human and social perfection. It directly
influenced the ideas of laissez-faire economists and utilitarians. This new confidence of
human perfectability was reinforced by the economic prosperity that brought about by the
Industrial Revolution. The coming of the new industrial age opened new prospects to
many middle-class businessmen, who tried to get rid of any obstacles that would
intervene in their individual as well as economic progresses. Therefore, laissez-faire
economists asserted that the government “should shrink itself into the role of a modest
policeman, preserving order and protecting property, but never interfering with the
operation of economic processes” (Lerner, Meacham, and Burns 773). This is a theory
that magnifies personal desires and intentions, disregard of social responsibility and the
groaning victims of the lower orders.

The doctrine of laissez-faire, however, has its own apparent inconsistency:

“[b]usinessmen and entrepreneurs vehemently opposed to government intervention, which might deny them the chance to make as much money as they could, were nevertheless prepared to see the government step in and prevent profiteering landlords from making what they could from their property” (Lerner, Meacham, and Burns 774). If every individual in the society considered only his own intention and benefits, who is to sacrifice his own rights and desires? At this moment, Jeremy Bentham offered his middle-way solution:

Society, if it was to function properly, needed an organizing principle that would both acknowledge humanity’s basic selfishness and at the same time compel people to sacrifice at least a portion of their own interests for the good of the majority. That principle, called utilitarianism, stated that every institution, every law, must be measured according to its social usefulness. And a socially useful law was one that produced the greatest happiness of the greatest number. (Lerner, Meacham, and Burns 775)

This doctrine, used in the field of education, regards education as a means and schools as institutions that can achieve social progress and “[produce] the greatest happiness of the greatest number” (Lerner, Meacham, and Burns 775). The success of educational systems was judged according to its utility, i.e., social usefulness: “The utilitarians were anxious to educate the different social classes for their different social roles—the poor to work intelligently and the middle classes to govern intelligently. In spite of its limitations, the utilitarian view accepted that the people were educable, and that they should be educated” (Lawson and Silver 231). Together with the supporters’ confidence
in the power of education, and the apparently urgent need of primary education of the poor, utilitarianism provided the most influential body of ideas for radical educational reform and thus led to widespread actions in the field of education, monitorial schools for the poor being one of the most crucial movements.

We will leave the monitorial system, which was the most important, for later discussion. Now let us return to the issue of religious control over education, which was the pioneer of educational reform and remained predominant throughout the whole process. The educational reform began with religious control and still ended with religious control; not even the radical monitorial system could not escape from its predominant power. Previously the SPCK was the representative institution for promoting education for the poor, now we have the Evangelicals. The Evangelicals was very much similar to the SPCK in its aim of preserving traditional social order and promoting Christian belief. It was just that the Evangelicals made all these efforts in the context of a changing society when traditional Christian belief and social order were crumbling gradually. It was a reactionary force that tried to withhold the radical changes in society:

The evangelical movement which grew up in the Church of England in the late eighteenth century was in some respects the religious counterpart to utilitarianism in its awareness of the changes taking place in society. Its objective, however, was different—to reserve the population for traditional, Christian roles. It aimed, not to adapt people to new conditions, but consciously to warn against social and moral dangers, in order to reinforce traditional religious codes of behavior. It was a movement at once to redeem an apathetic church, to educate an illiterate populace and to protect the social
The Evangelical movement had its origin in Wesleyan Methodism. The leaders of the movements were William Wilberforce, Robert Raikes, Hannah More, and Sarah Trimmer, among whom Hannah More was the most influential educator. They were anxious to raise the moral and religious status of the lower classes and preach to the poor that they should accept their subordinate status, and they used the media (the printing press) and education (the Sunday School) as their powerful weapons and tried their best to win the support of the great and the influential. They believed that the industrialization and its impact on the lives of the poor threatened traditional Christian morality and basic virtues. They were combatants against moral corruption and revolutionary danger:

By combatting [sic.] immorality, idolatry, and atheism, these sects also hoped to reduce the evils of poverty, that blighting, disrupting, threatening poverty which the new age of the industrial revolution had brought unavoidably to the attention of every enlightened friend of mankind. At the close of the eighteenth century, with their eyes still looking backward on the independently agricultural England that had been, the disciples of Wesley ardently hoped to purge the new industrial society of its incipient ills by administering strong doses of morality and religion to each individual who made up the social state. (Dunklin 5)

The evangelical tracts, of which Hannah More was the most famous author, was an important publication for the Evangelicals to promote their ideas, which two million copies were reputed to have been sold in 1795. Most of the contents of the tracts were simple moral tales about Christian virtues and advocacy for the rightness of social order. Together with the establishment of the Sunday Schools, their actions exerted a great influence on the society as well as the character of Victorian life (Lawson and Silver 231).
Like the SPCK, the Evangelicals were criticized by later scholars of preserving the status quo and having been interested in an orderly society that was run for the benefits of the upper classes. They were accused of indoctrinating the poor with religious morality and complacency to miserable living conditions. (Dunklin 6) Despite all these accuses, however, we cannot overlook their positive influences and contributions to the educational reform. For one thing, they instructed thousands of children to read, children who might otherwise have remained illiterate for all of their lives. Besides, their aims of Christian morality and spirit of benevolence created a stable element in the dramatically changing society:

For purposes of education the Sunday schools of the Evangelicals held a place of importance equal to the charity schools of the S.P.C.K. They spread throughout every county and parish of England as the spirit of benevolence and the desire for reform infected more and more persons of the intellectual and economic upper classes. (Dunklin 6)

Even though the Evangelicals’ aim was to restore the traditional social order and promote basic Christian virtues, they still met with persistent opposition, especially from farmers and dignitaries in the rural area. Many people still thought that the poor should remain ignorant. To educate them was to undermine their divinely ordained social status, manner, and behavior:

Hannah More was as little anxious as her opponents to upset the social order, but she believed that the ability to read was essential for a Christian society. Her opponents saw her work as undermining the natural and necessary ignorance of the poor, and therefore the social order. *The Anti-Jacobin* was in
the late nineties waging a violent campaign against the Sunday schools, describing them as “nurseries of fanaticism”. Attempts to found schools in rural areas met with apathy or opposition from farmers afraid that their labourers would become disaffected. (Lawson and Silver 235)

This opposition came from the persistent fear of an educated populace and suspicion of the motives of the educators. Not only were the Evangelicals subjected to criticism and resistance; all of the educational programs that intended to educate the poor met with persistent resistance.

This is the Sunday school movement promoted by the Evangelicals that represents the religious and more conservative force in the educational reform. There were other programs that did not emphasize religion but tried to fulfill the needs of an industrialized society, like workhouse schools, the schools of industry and the monitorial system established by Andrew Bell and Joseph Lancaster.

Workhouse schools and schools of industry, as the terms imply, were products of industrialization. The reasons for the emergence of workhouse schools were a combination of poverty and industrialization. As England was shifting from an agricultural society to a more and more industrialized one, more and more poor people chose to work in factories. The problem was that industrialization and working in factories did not better their lives. Instead, they lived in an even poorer condition. Especially, their children, deprived of the natural environment of the countryside and forced to live in the factories, were in urgent need of education. As early as early eighteenth century, this problem emerged:

About 1700 half the population lived in poverty, a third of them on the subsistence level, and one family in five was receiving poor relief. Pauperism
and the burden it imposed on the poor rate was a constant problem for parish authorities, and one of the eighteenth century’s attempted solutions was the workhouse school. (Lawson and Silver 188)

This was a good method to let children work while at the same time receive education. Besides, there was the problem of the decline of apprenticeship, which could also be solved by establishing workhouse schools:

With the progressive decline of apprenticeship in humbler trades, the 1690s also saw new workhouses established in London and some of the larger towns, with industrial schools attached to give pauper children vocational training. In a report to the Board of Trades in 1697 Locke recommended the institution of workhouse schools of this kind in every parish for all poor children over three and under fourteen. (Lawson and Silver 171)

Nevertheless, as industrialization gradually prevailed, curriculum in workhouse schools emphasized more and more vocational training. Many charity schools also took the form of workhouse schools, “where reading and perhaps writing might be taught, but always subordinated to vocational training” (Lawson and Silver 188). As a result, children became tools for trustees and ratepayers to save or even earn money:

Here the product of the children’s labour was intended to supplement the trustee’s income from endowments or subscriptions, just as in the workhouse schools it was intended to save the ratepayers’ money. Some working charity schools for girls provided training in housecraft as well as the inevitable moral and religious discipline, and the scarcely concealed purpose of these was to supply the local tradesmen—often the subscribers—with obedient cheap domestic servants. (Lawson and Silver 188-89)
Thus, exploitation was at times inevitable. Many children in the workhouse schools were apprenticed (had to work as laborers) as soon as they were old enough, so that they would not become permanently chargeable. The exploitation became even more and more severe in the late eighteenth century and the nineteenth century as these children were “‘apprenticed’ in batches to northern factory masters where their notorious exploitation as cheap labour was an important factor in the textile revolution and England’s early industrialization” (Lawson and Silver 188).

Besides workhouse schools, these were also schools of industry, which were very similar to workhouse schools. But, they have a different purpose. According to An Account of Several Workhouses . . . as also of several charity schools for promoting work and labour published in 1732, the purpose of these Schools of Industry was that “the children of the poor instead of being bred up in ignorance and vice to an idle, beggarly and vagabond life, [would] have the fear of God before their eyes, get habits of virtue, be inured to labour and thus become useful to their country” (qtd. in Lawson and Silver 188). Such schools of industry intended to provide poor and pauper children opportunities to learn useful skills for future vocations, so that they could find jobs in the future and would not become criminals, thieves, and vagrants, even though at times this good intention would be distorted.

Therefore, both workhouse schools and schools of industry intended to train children as factory workers. These forms of education in some sense efficiently solved the problem of poverty. What’s more, these children’s labors contributed greatly to the economic boost and industrialization of the Industrial Age. Workhouse schools and schools of industry were thus tools to fulfill the needs of the industrial age. This idea of utility was in accord with the concept of utilitarianism. At this time, however, one
crucial problem emerged: How to do it efficiently? Educators and school administrators needed a teaching method to manage classrooms and to teach children. At this point the monitorial system, the most important tool of the educational reform, emerged.

The monitorial system established by Dr. Andrew Bell and Joseph Lancaster intended to fulfill the needs of education with efficiency and sufficiency. One thing that distinguishes this system from other educational movements is that it is the only movement that emphasizes pedagogy. Bell and Lancaster were successful because the method they used was such a useful tool for the age: “They were hailed, indeed, as inventors of a piece of social machinery that was both simple and economical, an instrument suited to the needs and outlook of the times” (Lawson and Silver 241). No one took up the system more enthusiastically than Bentham and the utilitarians. To the system’s utilitarian supporters “it appeared faultless, and teachers who were trained for National Society schools for forbidden to depart from ‘the beautiful and efficient simplicity of the system’” (Lawson and Silver 241).

The monitorial system began when Joseph Lancaster, a Quaker, opened a school for poor children in 1798, which expanded to become the Royal Lancastrian Society in 1808 and the British and Foreign School Society in 1814; in 1797, almost at the same time, Dr. Andrew Bell also conducted a monitorial experiment in schools of Madras. His Madras System was accepted by the Church of England in 1811 and the Church set up the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church (Lawson and Silver 242). These two opposing foundations, opposing because of oppositional religious stands, in fact only slightly differed from each other. The slight difference was that Lancaster emphasized punishment more than Bell. Both of their characteristics were the use of monitors, or teaching assistants. The
method was to divide a large class in one single schoolroom into small groups with ten to twenty pupils and one monitor. The teacher’s job was to control and supervise the whole classroom. Usually the teacher would teach the monitors for several hours, and the monitors would in turn teach their group members instructions learned from the teacher. The monitors themselves were usually in the same age group as the students in his class. Besides, “the whole class was regulated by a system of rewards and punishments seen as moral training” (Lawson and Silver 242).

This system was economic and efficient. It could teach large amount of students at one time. Regardless of the problem of quality, the system was the best educational machinery in the nineteenth century. Concerning its curriculum, both of the systems aimed to provide a minimum of knowledge necessary for the lower classes, and insisted that only what was useful mattered.

Another thing worth mentioning was the monitorial system’s relation to religion. Bell and Lancaster, in spite of the similarity between their systems, opposed and disputed against each other, and their dispute originated precisely in their opposing religious stands. Andrew Bell was a clergyman of the Church of England, while Joseph Lancaster was a Quaker. Bell would eventually obtain the support of the Anglican Church, while Lancaster obtained support from the non-conformists. The reason why religious groups, like those administrators of workhouse schools and schools of industry, showed interest in the monitorial system was that the monitorial system, as a useful educational method, also reinforced the religious groups’ ambition of gaining control over the education of the poor (Dunklin 20). The Established Church, with Andrew Bell as its professional educator, proceeded to establish a program of educational reform and established the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in 1811, while similarly the
Royal Lancastrian Association was established for the non-conformists:

The superiority of Bell to Lancaster as a reformer of educational methods consisted primarily of his orthodox religious views. As a cleric of the Established Church he had not only solved the problem of the scarcity of teachers, but he also had kept education in the hands of the Church, and he had retained the traditional religious instruction in creed and catechism which the parish schools of England’s Church had always taught. (Dunklin 19-20)

The problem of this system was of course its quality of schooling. Many young pupils did not actually learn anything, since they were not directly taught by the teacher, nor did they receive any special instruction and qualifying test. All of the students were massed together in one single classroom without division according to levels or ages. There was also, not surprisingly, the problem of the teachers’ qualification: “One of the outstanding problems was the lack of or the inadequate training for teachers, a high proportion of whom became teachers only after having tried other occupations” (Lawson and Silver 246). Nevertheless, this problem of quality was a prevalent situation since the beginning of the educational reform, when there was not yet state control: “[P]rogress in the quality of schooling was not to be made until the monitorial system declined and a new approach to the training of teachers was inaugurated at the end of the 1830s” (Lawson and Silver 246).

Despite all these shortcomings, we still have to give credits to the monitorial system. One was that they did provide at least “a modicum of education, in a way that no other system could have done at the time, and where otherwise none might have existed” (Lawson and Silver 246). Furthermore, regardless of the intense battle between the supporters of Lancaster and those of Bell, they helped to make education a heated issue
and affected eventually the development of national education in Britain:

In the end, both systems were given government support in the 1830s, on the grounds of their economy and efficiency, and a secular pattern of state education evolved, which all the same required morning prayer and religious instruction as a feature of the curriculum. Both systems offered a way of teaching large classes on the cheap, and this in the end became the dominating consideration, when, finally, compulsory elementary education for all was introduced in 1870. (Foakes 196)

The result of the competition between Anglicans and non-conformists was that “145,000 pupils were being instructed in monitorial schools; by 1828 the number of those pupils who attended newly established unendowed day schools had reached 1,000,000” (Dunklin 21). In 1870, a significant Education Act was passed by the Parliament. This was the cumulative efforts of the Anglican Church, the Evangelicals, the utilitarians, educators of the monitorial systems, and some other benevolent philanthropists. The result was a complete but somewhat uncoordinated and aimless system of education in England.

Of course, this process of educational reform continued until the twentieth century. Some more spiritual and humane elements were still to be introduced into the pedagogy and curriculum. The monitorial system’s large single classroom with its diligent pupils was in fact very similar to factories and mines with industrious workers massed together. Gilbert T. Dunklin made an excellent comment on this mass education:

But in proportion to the quantity of education that was offered, the quality was dismally meager. The more astute critics of England’s social, political, and economic problems became aware that the golden era of modern society, the
goal of social progress which the eighteenth century had encouraged the generation of the French Revolution to seek, was not to be achieved by teaching reading, writing, arithmetic, linear drawing, French lessons, dancing, and deportment to persons whose lives were determined economically and intellectually by the cultural standards of middle-class industrialists or reactionary, Tory landowners. Bacon to read was fine indeed, but what about Bacon to eat, Cobbett reminded Lord Brougham, and Carlyle commenced his public office of critic of English society by reminding men that the poor must be raised in spirit as well as in body, that the clothes symbol is meaningful only if the spirit within is a vital spirit of love and joy. (Dunklin 23)

Something was missing in the spirit of the industrial age. The old rural tradition, despite its poverty and ignorance, at least provided the poor with spiritual food, which was totally in want in factories, mines, and cotton mills. It was precisely at this point that Wordsworth’s philosophy of education emerged.
CHAPTER II

Wordsworth’s Concept of Education

Before we discuss the main issue of this chapter—Wordsworth’s concept of education—it is necessary to give a brief account of the poet’s own education in childhood and his attitude toward, and treatment of, it in poetry, so that Wordsworth’s educational philosophy can be seen in a clearer light. When we mention the topic of education, it is natural to think of institutional education, including schooling, pedagogy, curriculum, class management, etc. However, Wordsworth is an exception. None of his writings concerning education touches upon anything about schools except his short-lived support of Andrew Bell’s monitorial system. This inclination of ignoring the issues of institutional education is shown in his attitude toward, and treatment of, his own education in poetry. Wordsworth himself received quite formal education at Hawskhead and Cambridge. Before he entered the Hawskhead Grammar School in 1779, Wordsworth had attended Ann Birkett’s school in Penrith and the Reverend Mr. Gilbank’s grammar school in Cockermouth (Gill 16). Even though “[i]n neither of the academy can the quality of education have been high,” according to his nephew Christopher Wordsworth in Memoirs of William Wordsworth, the poet’s father “set him very early to learn portions of the works of the best English poets by heart, so that at an early age he could repeat large portions of Shakespeare, Milton and Spenser” (Gill 16; qtd. in Gill 17). Therefore, Wordsworth grew up in an environment that emphasized education. He was instructed with his father’s deliberate efforts. At Hawskhead Grammar School, Wordsworth received very good education. As Gill describes it:

Hawskhead Grammar School was not just situated in a place that offered
everything for the energies of a growing boy, it was a very good school. . . . As a ‘grammar’ school Hawkshead gave a good grounding in Classics. Here, however, unlike in many other schools, a good grounding did not mean wearisome rote learning and exercises in verse composition in Latin and Greek. Wordsworth was taught in a humane way[.] (Gill 27)

Teachings in Hawkshead not only were the fundamental of Wordsworth’s knowledge in Classics, they also contributed to his mastering in mathematics and science, which were crucial qualifications for entering Cambridge University (Gill 27-8). And most importantly, learning at Hawkshead engendered Wordsworth’s love for literature and poetry: “Wordsworth continued to educate himself in the Classics after school, but that he was able to delight in the poetry as something more than an academic chore, to feel in the 1790s the contemporaneity of Juvenal, and to profit from the ideas of Cicero and Seneca must be attributed to early teaching of rare quality” (Gill 27).

However, in Wordsworth’s works, he seldom mentions his formal education at both Hawkshead and Cambridge. Take The Prelude for example, Books I and II are entitled “Childhood and School-time,” and Book III is devoted to life at Cambridge, but none of them deals with teachings and academic instructions the poet received in the classroom. The contents of these books are mostly wanderings and adventures in the countryside, as if Wordsworth was indeed raised totally in nature. Gill comments on this:

But although a superficial reading of The Prelude could suggest that Wordsworth thought Nature alone had made him a poet, he knew it was not so. The poet of the 1799 Prelude might linger on the image of himself as a naked savage, but he wrote as he did then because of study, instruction, example, and in finding these at the right time and in the right place Wordsworth was as
fortunate as possibly any other English poet has been. (27)

However, Wordsworth eliminates these in his works. What is more, he even shows a dislike toward education at Cambridge in *The Prelude*: “There Cambridge figures as a place of Error, significant in the poet’s development only by its failure to fulfill the proper function of a place of learning” (Gill 38). Wordsworth seemed to have difficulty in adapting to the serious academic competition of Cambridge and graduated with only a pass degree. In Book III of *The Prelude*, he mentions his dislike toward the spirit of competition:

\[
\ldots \text{of important days,}
\]

Examinations, when the man was weighed

As in the balance; of excessive hopes,

Tremblings withal and commendable fears,

Small jealousies and triumphs good or bad—

I make short mention. Things they were which then

I did not love, nor do I love them now:

Such glory was but little sought by me,

And little won. (64-72)

Such resistance to competitive examination is a consistent inclination of Wordsworth on the issue of education. This makes him oppositional to most of his contemporary educational systems, especially the monitorial system that he originally approved of.

As a result, Wordsworth emphasizes more roaming in nature than receiving instructions in the classroom. Almost none of his works about education, such as *The Prelude, The Excursion*, “Reply to Mathetes,” “Speech at the Laying of the Foundation Stone of the New School in the Village of Bowness,” and some of his letters and
correspondences, deals with the more practical aspect of education that his contemporary educational reformers discussed, such as curriculum, pedagogy, and class management.

Wordsworth talks about education as a concept, and his definition of education is primarily related to moral and spiritual education.¹

Therefore, the focus of this chapter is Wordsworth’s idea of moral and spiritual education in relation to his idea of community. His reaction to and criticism of the nineteenth-century educational reform we will leave to the next chapter. Now I will first give a brief review of two important books on the poet's educational philosophy, one is Gilbert T. Dunklin’s *Wordsworth's Theory of Education* (1948), and the other is Barry Pointon’s *Wordsworth and Education* (1998). After the brief literature review, I will discuss Wordsworth’s concept of “the education of circumstances” with his emphasis on sensory perceptions, affections, and virtues, because it is the central idea of his educational philosophy and will be our focus throughout our discussion. Furthermore, in order to explain how “the education of circumstances” influences man and society, I would like to discuss Wordsworth’s educational philosophy in relation to the idea of community, which I will begin first with the poet's emphasis on the natural environment. The Wanderer’s education in *The Excursion* will be discussed in detail. Secondly, I will discuss the motif of walking and traveling in *The Excursion* and its educational meanings.² I will argue that, in *The Excursion*, the act of walking on foot, i.e, the excursion around the countryside, leads eventually to human community. The walking

¹ Despite his inclination of ignoring institutional education in his writings, paradoxically, Wordsworth did care very much about his children’s academic performances in classroom. For example, to make sure that his children, John, Willy, and Dora receive the best instruction, the Wordsworths made great efforts to make them receive the best education and never gave up the expectation that John and Willy might enter the university. Nevertheless, none of them were academically successful. For detailed analysis on this part, see Barry Pointon’s *Wordsworth and Education*. (Lewes: Hornbook, 1998.)

² For detailed analysis of the motif of walking and traveling on foot in Wordsworth poetry, please see Yu-suan Yu’s “‘Walking’ and the Representation of the ‘Traveller’ in Wordsworth’s Poetry—From Private Space to Public Space,” *Sun Yat-Sen Journal of Humanities* 7 (1998): 113-34.
in *The Excursion* does not intend to lead men toward personal transcendence, but to step into the human world. Therefore, the sense of community in relation to humanistic education is the third idea I will discuss. The education of the Solitary at this point plays a crucial role. Through their “excursion”, the Wanderer intends to lead the Solitary out of individual solitude and go toward community. Fourthly, to elaborate further the idea of community, I would like to discuss the educational roles parents and strangers like vagrants play in “the education of circumstances.”

There are two books that focus on Wordsworth’s educational theory and are closely related to our discussion in this chapter. One is Gilbert T. Dunklin’s *Wordsworth’s Theory of Education* (1948). The other is Barry Pointon’s *Wordsworth and Education* (1998). Both of them deal with Wordsworth’s idea about education from a historical point of view. Dunklin, in his book, discusses the social and historical background of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century educational reform movement and the possible philosophical background of Wordsworth’s idea about education. He then analyzes Wordsworth’s political and religious thought, his criticism of the society and educational conditions of his own time. Finally he examines Wordsworth’s poetic works such as *Lyrical Ballads, The Prelude*, and *The Excursion*. Overall, in this book, Dunklin intends to argue that, first, from Wordsworth’s educational ideal we come to know that “his political thought always rested upon fundamentally conservative principles of morality, while at the same time, with his recurrent emphasis upon the importance of the individual, it was always liberal in the only valid sense of the word” (ii). Besides, the author stresses “how important to Wordsworth was the preservation of the spiritual virtues of faith, hope, and joy in an age which was becoming increasingly mechanical in its functions and materialistic in its values” (ii). This stress is also my argument in this and
the following chapter. However, I will discuss it from the aspect of the idea of community, which Dunklin does not mention in his book.

Pointon’s *Wordsworth and Education*, on the other hand, discusses Wordsworth’s idea about education from a biographical point of view. He reviews and analyzes in detail Wordsworth’s family life, education of his children such as Dora, Willy, and John, and how events happened in Wordsworth’s lifetime influenced his political and educational philosophy. There are detailed analyses of Wordsworth’s relationship with Dr. Andrew Bell and Wordsworth’s children’s personalities, schooling, life, and career in adulthood. Furthermore, Pointon also scrutinizes Wordsworth’s educational concept according to several of his important prose writings, such as the “Speech at the Laying of the Foundation Stone of the New School in the Village of Bowness,” “Reply to Mathetes,” *The Convention of Citra*, and many of his correspondences and letters.

I agree with most of the two critics’ analyses, and I rely quite heavily upon their texts in my discussion. However, none of them focus their discussion of Wordsworth’s educational philosophy on the importance of rural community and “the educational of circumstances” (Pointon mentions it in his discussion of the Bowness Speech, while Dunklin totally ignores it). And yet these two ideas are the core of Wordsworth’s concept of education and will be the focus of my discussion, especially in this chapter. It is precisely upon this basis that Wordsworth forms his criticism of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century society and his political and educational thought. Wordsworth emphasizes especially the importance of developing a harmonious community and closely related human relationships in it. Therefore, Wordsworth’s educational philosophy is also a social vision, in which the development of a good social community is of great importance.
To Wordsworth, education is a life-long quest for spiritual and moral maturity. And he believes that every individual’s spiritual and moral maturity would lead toward a harmonious human community, and vice versa. This idea is directly related to Wordsworth’s concept of the relationship between man, nature, and society, which we have already discussed in the Introduction, but which we will briefly summarize here. The poet regards the relationship between man, nature, and society a unified and highly interrelated one. The sanctity and integrity of individual human mind directly influence the sanctity and integrity of the society and the nation. This is the basic philosophy that lies behind Wordsworth’s educational concept. Therefore, Wordsworth stresses the close connection and harmonious interrelationship between man, nature, and society. What is a good education? In Wordsworth’s idea, a good education is achieved through one’s interactions with nature, harmonious interrelationship among men in a rural community, and home life with virtues and affections. Daily circumstances such as a person’s interaction with his parents, sisters and brothers, villagers, and even beggars and vagrants, are the best educational materials, which Wordsworth calls “the education of circumstances.” Through the education of circumstances, moral concepts such as love, duty, and benevolence would come naturally without any formal instructions.

Wordsworth mentions this “education of circumstances” in his “Speech at the Laying of the Foundation Stone of the New School in the Village of Bowness” (Prose Works Vol. III 295). The moral education that Wordsworth advocates is not obtained through school instruction and catechisms, but through the good behavior and affectionate feelings of people around a man. In the Bowness Speech Wordsworth makes a clear distinction between the so-called education of school instruction and his definition of true education:

And here I must direct your attention to a fundamental mistake, by which this
age, so distinguished for its marvelous progress in arts and sciences, is
unhappily characterized—a mistake, manifested in the use of the word
*education*, which is habitually confounded with *tuition* or school instruction;
this is indeed a very important part of education, but when it is taken for the
whole, we are deceived and betrayed. Education, according to the derivation
of the word, and in the only use of which it is strictly justifiable, comprehends
all those processes and influences, come from whence they may, that conduce to
the best development of the bodily powers, and of the moral, intellectual, and
spiritual faculties which the position of the individual admits of. In this just
and high sense of the word, the education of a sincere christian, and a good
member of society upon christian principles, does not terminate with his youth,
but goes on to the last moment of his conscious earthly existence—an education
not for time but for eternity. To education like this, is indispensably necessary,
as co-operating with schoolmasters and ministers of the gospel, the
never-ceasing vigilance of parents; not so much exercised in superadding their
pains to that of the schoolmaster or minister in teaching lessons or catechisms,
or by enforcing maxims or precepts . . . , but by care over their own conduct. It
is through the silent operation of example in their own well-regulated behaviour,
and by accustoming their children early to the discipline of daily and hourly life,
in such offices and employment as the situation of the family requires, and as
are suitable to tender years, that parents become infinitely the most important
tutors of their children, without appearing, or positively meaning to do so.
This *education of circumstances* has happily, in this district, not yet been much
infringed upon by experimental novelties. (295, emphases mine)
The reason why I quote this lengthy passage is that it is the basic statement of Wordsworth’s educational concept. Wordsworth’s sense of education is not limited to school instruction, the so-called institutional education. His sense of education is the education of life. He regards institutional education as only part of his idea of the education of circumstances. As Barry Pointon explains: “The vital educational influence upon children in [a] stable society was not school but parents; the vital learning for children was gained not through formal precept or instruction but subtly, accidentally, through all the various impressions of daily life” (53). Wordsworth believes that true education always comes naturally through sensory perception and affections. This kind of education creates a profundity, subtlety and comprehensiveness that no textbook, catechism, or school instruction can achieve.

The difference between school instruction and the education of circumstances lies in affection, which is what Wordsworth value most. In the Bowness Speech, Wordsworth emphasizes gratitude and contentment aroused by the inscriptions of the foundation stone, in which thanks for the founder of the school is especially given. To Wordsworth, true teaching should be loaded with meanings and affections; otherwise it is only instructions. He criticizes the religious teachings of his time: “[R]eligious instruction . . . is too often given with reference, less to the affections, to the imagination, and to the practical duties, than to subtile [sic.] distinctions in points of doctrine, and to facts in scripture history, of which a knowledge may be brought out by a catechetical process” (Prose Works Vol. III 295). Instructions can only give children facts, but affections and imagination can provide strength and wisdom for their future lives: “Education for Wordsworth, was a process not of intellectual instruction but of learning love through people (starting with family) and through nature” (Pointon 50). The importance of love and affections lies in
Wordsworth’s belief that love and affections provide reference and offer linkage for a person to connect with the outside world through heart. This linkage that is established through heart provides future resources for personal growth.

Affections, love, and imagination should be learned not only through contact with fellow men, but also through intimations with the natural world. Nature is one of the most crucial elements in Wordsworth’s concept of moral and spiritual education. One of the reasons is that Wordsworth himself was raised in a natural environment. Nature formed an important substance in his life and poetry, and he chose to live in the rural area all his life. Wordsworth stresses especially solitude in nature. In many of his poems about education, he depicts the acts of being in nature alone, such as the passage about the Boy of Winander in Book V of *The Prelude* and the Wanderer’s natural upbringing in Book I of *The Excursion*. Take the Wanderer for example; his education was received totally in the natural environment. In summer, the boy “tended cattle on the hills,” while in winter he went to a school that was built “on a mountain’s dreary edge,/ Remote from view of city squire, or sound/ Of minster clock!” (119-25). He was a child who grew up in nature alone. Wordsworth stresses especially the boy’s solitary moment in nature:

> . . . From that bleak tenement

> He, many an evening, to his distant home

> In solitude returning, saw the hills

> Grow larger in the darkness; all alone

> Beheld the stars come out above his head,

> And traveled through the wood, with no one near

> To whom he might confess the things he saw. (125-31)

In this way, the boy communed with the phenomenal world and learned from it all by
himself. Things and images in nature were impressed upon his mind through his senses—the sound he heard, the image he saw, the touches he felt with his fingers. Here Wordsworth stresses the importance of communion through senses. Because nature does not speak man’s language, when going into nature, the only way to commune with nature is to use sensory abilities. Besides, with no one around to talk to and thus divert him from sensory communion, the boy received everything nature impressed upon him. This is perhaps one of the reasons why Wordsworth emphasizes solitude. The capability to sense and feel is an important preparation for interactions with other fellow human beings. Wordsworth asserts that communication among men cannot be achieved solely through language expressions. Communicative elements such as senses and feelings are perhaps more important. He mentioned this idea in “Fragments from the Alfoxden Note-Book (I)”:  

And never for each other shall we feel  
As we may feel, till we have sympathy  
With nature in her forms inanimate,  
With objects such as have no power to hold  
Articulate language. (11-15)  

Various and dynamic forms and images in nature stimulates man’s sensory feelings. This is something Wordsworth’s contemporary educational reformers did not think of. For them, education meant science and art. However, the poet tells us in “The Tables Turned”: “Enough of Science and of Art;/ Close up those barren leaves;/ Come forth, and bring with you a heart/ That watches and receives” (9-12).  

In communion with nature, man is a recipient of images, sounds, and feelings. The poet calls this reception of natural images “wise passiveness” in “Expostulation and
Reply”: “Nor less I deem that there are Powers/ Which of themselves our minds impress:/ That we can feed this mind of ours/ In a wise passiveness” (21-24).

With a natural education the Wanderer’s “foundations of his mind were laid” *(Excursion I 132)*. The Boy of Winander receives his natural education in the same way:

Then sometimes in that silence, while he hung

Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprize

Has carried far into his heart the voice

Of mountain torrents; or the visible scene

Would enter unawares into his mind

With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,

Its woods, and that uncertain heaven, received

Into the bosom of the steady lake. *(Prelude V 381-8)*

All these natural substances in “the bosom of the steady lake” will one day, when chances come, influence the boy’s mind through stimulation. This is nature’s teaching we receive through our sensory communion with it. Wordsworth gives us an example in Book I of *The Prelude*, i.e., the stealing boat passage. In this passage, the poet describes a moral lesson he learned through nature in childhood. One night when the child Wordsworth was alone in nature, he decided to steal a boat beside the lake. When he rowed the boat further and further away from the shore, an image of a dark, huge mountain suddenly came into his sight, which scared him. After the incident, the image of the mountain lingered in his mind for many days:

. . . and after I had seen

That spectacle, for many days my brain

Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being. In my thoughts
There was a darkness—call it solitude
Or blank desertion—no familiar shapes
Of hourly objects, images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields,
But huge and mighty forms that do not live
Like living men moved slowly through my mind

By day, and were the trouble of my dreams. (Prelude I 390-400)

The dark, huge mountain evokes the boy’s sense of guilt in the boy’s mind and troubles him for many days. It is like an admonishment and a punishment coming from nature. Of course nature is neutral, but the child-Wordsworth’s psychological responses to the sudden appearance of the mountain creates a circumstance that brings out the boy’s sense of guilt. This is the way nature teaches man—through workings of circumstances.

However, solitude in nature is only the first part of the poet’s concept of education. A person must step into the human world to receive his humanistic education. Spiritual maturity is achieved through the process of going out of nature and returning to the human world. Education in nature, which nourishes senses and feelings, is a preparation for future life in the human world, because, eventually, a man needs to reach out toward other human beings. This is a necessary process of socialization as well as humanization. For instance, after the Wanderer grows up, he has to choose a career: “He now was summoned to select the course/ Of humble industry that promised best/ To yield him no unworthy maintenance” (Excursion I 309-11). And he chooses to teach in a village school. However, there are conflicts in his mind that drive him to resign his teaching job: “[B]ut wandering thoughts were then/ A misery to him; and the Youth
resigned/ A task he was unable to perform” (*Excursion* I 313-5). The Wanderer at this moment is a man who lives in his own inner world. In nature he has had abundant opportunities to face himself, but now it is time for him to face other fellow human beings and receive his humanistic education, i.e., to go into contact with men and interact and communicate with them. A teaching job is the best opportunity. However, the Wanderer is unable to perform it well. Those wandering inner thoughts prevent him from getting close to his students and doing well in his teaching. Therefore he chooses to resign from the job and becomes a vagrant merchant: “[That stern yet kindly Spirit . . . did now impel/ His restless mind to look abroad with hope” (*Excursion* I 316-21). This job provides even more abundant opportunities for him to encounter various kinds of people through traveling. In his note to this part of the poem, Wordsworth defends his choice of a pedlar as the main character and gives us the following comment: “As, in their peregrinations, they have opportunity of contemplating the manners of various men and various cities, they become eminently skilled in the knowledge of the world. *As they wander, each alone, through thinly inhabited districts, they form habits of reflection, and of sublime contemplation*” (*Poems* 954). Through the experiences of encountering different people, the Wanderer obtained a full knowledge of the world of man:

. . . From his native hills

He wandered far; much did he see of men,

Their manners, their enjoyments, and pursuits,

Their passions and their feelings; chiefly those

Essential and eternal in the heart,

That, ‘mid the simpler forms of rural life,

Exist more simple in their elements,
And speak a plainer language. (*Excursion* I 340-7)

If solitude in nature helps to nourish one’s sensitivity and feelings, to go traveling in both nature and the human world provides even more chances. In the past, the Wanderer opened up his heart to receive impressions from nature with “wise passiveness,” now he uses the same manner to receive impressions from the human world. Notice that the Wanderer is still alone. The wandering characteristic of being a pedlar makes him shift from place to place and from man to man without attachment and commitment. The Wanderer is now a free man both physically and mentally:

... and there

Spontaneously had his affections thriven
Amid the bounties of the year, the peace
And liberty of nature; there he kept
In solitude and solitary thought
His mind in a just equipoise of love.
Serene it was, unclouded by the cares
Of ordinary life; unvexed, unwarped
By partial bondage. (*Excursion*, I 350-8)

He is free from any mental and physical bondage, and thus is free from sorrow: “... In his steady course/ No piteous revolutions had he felt./ No wild varieties of joy and grief” (*Excursion* I 358-60). And thus he was free to love and help other people he encountered:

Unoccupied by sorrow of its own,
His heart lay open; and, by nature tuned
And constant disposition of his thoughts
To sympathy with man, he was alive
To all that was enjoyed where’er he went,
And all that was endured; for, in himself
Happy, and quiet in his cheerfulness,
He had no painful pressure from within
That made him turn aside from wretchedness
With coward fears. He could afford to suffer
With those whom he saw suffer. Hence it came
That in our best experience he was rich,
And in the wisdom of our daily life. (Excursion I 361-73)

The Wanderer’s natural and humanistic educations help him develop a sensitive and open heart, which is free from sorrow of its own. Without these sorrows, he is capable of giving out his affections and aids to other fellow human beings. In the process of reaching out, he has completed his humanistic education.

This process of reaching out, from home to nature, from nature to the human world, and from one community to another community, touches upon an important motif in The Excursion, i.e., the motif of traveling on foot. For Wordsworth, traveling has its educational purpose. In Book XII of The Prelude, Wordsworth delineates things we can learn when walking on a public road:

I love a public road: few sights there are
That please me more—such object hath had power
O’er my imagination since the dawn
Of childhood, when its disappearing line
Seen daily afar off, on one bare steep
Beyond the limits which my feet had trod,

Was like a guide into eternity,

At least to things unknown and without bound. (142-51)

The public road offers the poet abundant opportunities to get in contact with ‘things unknown and without bound.’ This is something very similar to the Wanderer’s traveling experiences. Especially, Wordsworth likes to meet strangers, wanderers, and vagrants on the road:

Even something of the grandeur which invests
The mariner who sails the roaring sea
Through storm and darkness, early in my mind
Surrounded too the wanderers of the earth—
Grandeur as much, and loveliness far more.

Awed have I been by strolling bedlamites;
From many other uncouth vagrants, passed
In fear, have walked with quicker step—but why
Take note of this? When I began to inquire,
To watch and question those I met, and held
Familiar talk with them, the lonely roads
Were schools to me in which I daily read
With most delight the passions of mankind,
There saw into the depth of human souls—
Souls that appear to have no depth at all
To vulgar eyes. (Prelude XII 152-69)

As Yu-san Yu observes:
For Wordsworth the road is like a school, hence the re-emergence of wandering, travelling, and walking motifs is closely related to the educational function of these peripatetic activities. In these lines we also find that behind the poet’s diatribe against books is a paradoxical link between the road as the unknown and the unbounded and its being a kind of “text” (book) which one can read, and from which one learns. (119)

When Wordsworth with an open heart “began to inquire,/ To watch and question those [he] met, and held/ Familiar talk with [those vagrants and wanderers]”, the public road was like a public school, and those people he encountered were like books that he could read and learn from. Those vagrants and wanderers would be “[s]ouls that appear to have no depth at all/ To vulgar eyes” because usually people avoid communicating with them. However, as long as one opens one’s heart and interact with those vagrant people freely, one is able to learn something from these people. Wordsworth again and again emphasizes the importance of opening one’s heart and communicating with other people freely, so that we can learn from every encounter on the public road. Once again, Wordsworth touches upon the core of his conception of a true education:

\[
\begin{align*}
& \text{. . . And now, convinced at heart} \\
& \text{How little that to which alone we give} \\
& \text{The name of education hath to do} \\
& \text{With real feeling and just sense, how vain} \\
& \text{A correspondence with the talking world} \\
& \text{Proves to the most—and called to make good search} \\
& \text{In man’s estate, by doom of Nature yoked} \\
& \text{With toil, is therefore yoked with ignorance,}
\end{align*}
\]
If virtue be indeed so hard to rear,
And intellectual strength so rare a boon—
I prized such walks still more; for there I found
Hope to my hope, and to my pleasure peace
And steadiness, and healing and repose
To every angry passion. There I heard,
From mouths of lowly men and of obscure,
A tale of honour—sounds in unison
With loftiest promises of good and fair. (*Prelude* XII 169-85)

The poet states that the problem of education is that it does not provide opportunities for people to learn “real feeling and just sense.” As a result, even though human beings make a great effort to gain knowledge and intelligence, it is a futile effort if he does not open his heart and learn through senses and feelings. As Russell Noyes observes in his analysis of “Expostulation and Reply”:

Wordsworth felt that the book learning . . . would lead men into an arid desert of mechanical rationalism. He felt that true knowledge must be founded upon experience received freshly through sense. . . . What Wordsworth is saying is that the senses furnish men with the primary data out of which they build this moral and spiritual life; hence, they must keep the senses open. (62)

The mechanical rationalism is the “meddling intellect” that “[m]is-shapes the beauteous forms of things” and thus makes us “murder to dissect” (“The Tables Turned” 25-28).

Noyes again comments: “No one should seriously suppose that Wordsworth was here or elsewhere declaring himself an enemy of book learning. He obviously did not mean that a person was to give up reading now and forever. . . . He was protesting against the
overbearing encroachment of the ‘meddling intellect’” (63). This “meddling intellect’ and one’s act of “[murdering] to dissect” happen if one relies too much upon books. True knowledge is largely obtained through life experience. We must gain experiences by ourselves with an open heart. This is Wordsworth’s concept of a true education.

Let us return now to The Excursion and see how this concept of education through life experience is represented in the education of the Solitary and how it is related to the motif of traveling on foot in this poem. As Wordsworth says to his friend in “The Tables Turned”: “Up! up! my Friend, and quit your books;/ Or surely you’ll grow double:/ Up! up! my Friend, and clear your looks;/ Why all this toil and trouble?” (1-4), the message is the same as that given to the Solitary when the Poet and the Wanderer try to lead him out of personal solitude. The Solitary is the opposite of the Wanderer. In contrast to the Wanderer, he shut himself up in his own personal sorrows. If the Wanderer’s open heart is “[u]noccupied by sorrow of its own” (361), the Solitary’s is full of sorrows that confine him to an unhappy seclusion. He dwelt alone in deep mountain area and seldom went out and be in contact with the outside world. One of the main purposes of The Excursion is to correct the Solitary’s despondency. From the Poet and the Wanderer’s point of view, he needs to go out of his personal solitude and be in contact with other fellow human beings through traveling around the countryside, so that he can walk out of his sorrows and be a happier man. Through the process of the excursion, similar to the Wanderer’s educational process in childhood, the Solitary is led out of his home, went into nature, and eventually walked toward human community in order to find support, to be free from the constraint and obstacle of his own mind. At the end of the poem, although the Solitary was not corrected, and remained cynical and pessimistic, in Wordsworth’s point of view, the education through walking during the excursion offered
by the Wanderer and the Poet is the best remedy to the Solitary’s sorrows.

From the above discussion we come to know that the Wordsworthian education, no matter happening in nature or taking place in a human community, intends to lead man toward the external world, to go beyond oneself to commune and create sympathy with others. Thus, the traveling and the wandering in *The Excursion* serve an educational purpose. The education of the Solitary, as well as the thematic development of the poem, is a process that starts from the natural world of mountain solitary, and goes into the village, i.e., a return to the human community. And finally in this human community, the Poet, the Wanderer, the Pastor, and the Solitary make a comment on the educational problem of the English society in the Industrial Age, which we will discuss fully in Chapter 3.

Generally speaking, the Industrial Age Wordsworth delineates in Book Eighth of *The Excursion* is a degenerate age, in which the traditional harmonious ways of life in the rural community was replaced by ceaseless toils in the inhumanistic environment of factories and mines. The Industrial Age was a chaotic world that undermined old ways of life and altered people’s lives dramatically. These changes had direct influences on people’s mental well-beings. The Solitary is a typical example of the kind of person who is disillusioned in this chaotic and changing world. Through the excursion, the Poet and the Wanderer lead the Solitary toward a harmonious human community in the hope that he might understand the importance of such a kind of community to a person’s well-being and thus walk out of his personal despondency. Why a harmonious community is important to such a person like the Solitary? It is again related to the Solitary’s attitude toward miseries and sorrows in his life. The Poet and the Wanderer intend to teach the Solitary the appropriate attitude to face miseries and sorrows in life.
This attitude is related to the ability to walk out of personal sorrows and cynicisms. It is the kind of ability that enables the Wanderer, after telling the Margaret’s sad story in Book First of *The Excursion*, to observe the beauties of nature and realize that:

... what we feel of sorrow and despair

From ruin and from change, and all the grief

That passing shows of Being leave behind,

Appeared an idle dream, that could maintain,

Nowhere, dominion o’er the enlightened spirit

Whose meditative sympathies repose

Upon the breast of Faith. (949-55)

After realizing that sorrows and grief are only idle dreams, the Wanderer thus “[turns] away,/ And [walks] along [his] road in happiness” (955-6). However, this attitude cannot be achieved all by oneself. We need other people to share with us our joys and sorrows. This is one of the reasons why human community, especially simple, harmonious community like home, school, church, and village, is so important:

It is clear that, as Wordsworth uses the term, there is a radical ambivalence in the word “solitude.” Someone who becomes a solitary in order to pursue a “favorite pleasure” “alone/Along the public way” is seeking in some way and for some reason to be free of social constraints. But society is itself double. Just as it can be a constraint, so it can also be a support. A social constraint may be, and indeed often is, simultaneously a social support. (Friedman 32)

Human communities offer physical as well as mental support when we need it. When we are facing misfortunes, support from our relatives and friends provide aids and solace that help us to walk out of our sorrows.
Besides this personal mental benefit from human communities, individuals’ attitude toward human communities also determines how well functioned is a community’s spiritual support. If every person in a community is able to open one’s heart and give out spiritual support when needed, it is more likely that a harmonious community is achieved. In this case, the Wanderer and the Solitary are the opposite. Their mental conditions and attitude toward the human world distinguish them from each other. The Solitary is cynical, while the Wanderer is compassionate. The Wanderer is able to open his heart and love other fellow human beings freely. Because he has “no painful pressure from within/ That [makes] him turn aside from wretchedness/ With coward fears,” therefore, “he [can] afford to suffer/ With those whom he saw suffer” (Excursion I 368-71). On the contrary, the Solitary is totally confined in personal solitude, imprisoned in individual sorrows. If every person in this society is like the Solitary and confines oneself in personal solitude, this society is without hope. The well-being of the whole society lies in the well-being of individuals, and vice versa. Therefore, here lies the importance of the ability to interact with other people and the ability to create a harmonious community that minimize communicative obstacles among men:

Implicitly, one should seek and/or create a society in which the unbridgeable gulf of ignorance and identity that separates people from one another is reduced to a bearable limit or minimum. Identity can survive if we create a truly human community, bound together by mutually strengthening ties, a community in which everyone attempts to know, love and support his fellow man. One must struggle against the divisive society of competing integers that was being established by the developing capitalist and industrial social relations. This capitalist world was based not on affectivity but on utility and abstract
Capitalist and industrial social relations isolate men and undermine the harmonious relationship among men. Competition and conflicts increase the hostility among people. In this kind of environment, man’s sense of morality and spiritual integrity is threatened. This is what Wordsworth worried about and what he opposed to. For him, affections, love and joy, duty and beneficence are crucial qualities that men should learn to possess. For him, only these can lead men toward a happy life and make a community a harmonious one.

The community in *The Excursion* is represented by Pastor and his family and the village people whose stories are told by the Pastor. The purpose of the storytelling, like the act of walking and traveling, is to lead the Solitary toward the human world. The Pastor is a representation of the country clergyman. In the Fenwick note, Wordsworth comments on the creation of the figure the Pastor: “I had no one individual in mind, wishing rather to embody this idea [of ‘a country clergyman’] than to break in upon the simplicity of it, by traits of individual character or any peculiarity of opinion” (*Poems* 953). The Pastor is a representation of the country clergyman. A clergyman is a leading figure in a village community. Because of the nature of his occupation, he knows almost everyone in his village, and is in frequent contact with them. He can therefore best tell the stories of village people. Besides, in *The Excursion*, the Pastor’s family life is also a Wordsworthian model of an idealized harmonious family of love and joy. The stories the Pastor tells are “offered as ‘solid facts’ from real life, [and they] support the wisdom of reasonable optimism” that the Wanderer, the Poet, and the Pastor intend to teach the Solitary (Noyes 159). Through storytelling and the sharing of life experiences, the Pastor delineates a human world of joy and sorrow. These stories
enable the Solitary to be connected with the real human world, which has a similar effect of walking and traveling around.

Moreover, hearing other people’s stories of joys and sorrows, like encountering people in the real world, helps the Solitary to walk out of his personal sorrows. The purpose of the storytelling, in a sense, is to let the Solitary understand that many other people, like himself, have also undergone various kinds of suffering and sorrows. This can help the Solitary to forget his own sorrows and create sympathy for other people and thus be freed from individual sorrows.

Going into the human world through traveling as well as storytelling is a kind of education for the Solitary. Through the stories told, people encountered, and things observed in daily life, a man learns his moral education in a natural way. This is precisely “the education of circumstances” that I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

It is worth noticing here that family life, especially the kind of family with harmony and love exemplified by the Pastor’s family in Book VIII of *The Excursion* (459-587), is most important in a man’s education, because home is the first community a man lives in. As I mentioned at the beginning, parents play crucial roles in children’s education of circumstances. Parents’ love toward children and their conduct done in front of them show great influence over them:

It is through the silent operation of example in their own well-regulated behaviour, and by accustoming their children early to the discipline of daily and hourly life, in such offices and employment as the situation of the family requires, and as are suitable to tender years, that parents become infinitely the most important tutors of their children, without appearing, or positively
meaning to do so. (*Prose Works* Vol. III 295)

Thus, the parents’ role as an educationist is indispensable, because they are the first people that children encounter and learn from in this world. They are the first people to show unconditional love to their children. They create opportunities for children to commune with the external world with senses and affections. A child that is nourished through the double influence of the natural environment and parental love can develop genuine affections, morality, and benevolence that are of crucial importance for his future well being and happiness. The aim of Wordsworth’s true education is a cultivated heart instead of an intelligent mind. And he especially values the influence of maternal love on children’s education in Book II of *The Prelude*:

Blest the infant 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. (237-43)

The babe and his mother hold a communion in which the babe’s soul “[c]laims manifest kindred with an earthly soul.” Notice that these two souls commune with each other through senses and the infant babe “gather passion from his mother’s eye.” Like the communion with nature, the communion between a babe and his mother is not through language or speech. Instead, feelings and love are conveyed through the mother’s eyes. Eye contact creates connection, linkage, and combination, which vitalize the babe’s mind:

Such feelings pass into his torpid life

Like an awakening breeze, and hence his mind,
Even in the first trial of its powers,
Is prompt and watchful, eager to combine
In one appearance all the elements
And parts of the same object, else detached
And loth to coalesce. Thus day by day
Subjected to the discipline of love,
His organs and recipient faculties
Are quickened, are more vigorous; his mind spreads,
Tenacious of the forms which it receives
In one beloved presence—nay and more,
In that most apprehensive habitude
And those sensations which have been derived
From this beloved presence—there exists
A virtue which irradiates and exalts
All objects through all intercourse of sense.
No outcast he, bewildered and depressed;
Along his infant veins are interfused
The gravitation and the filial bond
Of Nature that connect him with the world. (*Prelude II* 244-64)

The babe is no longer alone. It opens his heart and enables him to receive from, connect, and commune freely, with his mother. As Friedman observes:

But the maternal glance animates the torpor; it creates relationship. Crucially, it creates between mother and child a unitive field of pleasure in which subject and object unit in identification, and a unitive field of force, the force of
imagination. From this experience the imagination develops. This loving relationship is the model for all other relationships the infant mind establishes, and will ever establish, between itself and the outer phenomenal world.

(Friedman 8)

The communion of love is a force that stimulates the self to reach beyond itself to the outside world. It creates a linkage between one being and another and thus helps the child to open its heart for free communion. Love and affections expressed through senses offer pleasures and joy in the babe-mother relationship. This benevolent communion and interaction create an example for the babe’s future relationship with others. If the mother gives her love freely to the babe, who receives freely, then, in the future, with abundant love, the babe can also give his love freely to others:

Emphatically such a being lives,

An inmate of this *active* universe.

From Nature largely he receives, nor so
Is satisfied, but largely gives again;

For feeling has to him imparted strength,

And—powerful in all sentiments of grief,

Of exultation, fear and joy—his mind,

Even as an agent of the one great mind,

Creates, creator and receiver both,

Working but in alliance with the works

Which it beholds. (Prelude II 265-75)

Thus, his identity as a moral being is established: “Not only is the mother capable of helping to establish in the blessed babe the beginnings of a significant moral world, but
by penetrating his torpor with her love, she creates security and community for the child and establishes the prototype for all subsequent experience of affective community” (Friedman 10). The parents, especially the mother, set up models for their babes, thus helping them to form their future psychology as well as their sense of morality. This is the education of circumstances. For Wordsworth, a true education is to create affectionate circumstances for children to learn.

To create this environment and circumstances, we need not only a loving home, but an affectionate community in which every person is connected with others through genuine feelings. As Pointon states:

For Wordsworth Christian teaching came from the loving home—not from notions written up in text-books; the process of becoming a Christian was in this way a natural revelation. . . . Similarly, the love of books was acquired through the storytelling that was such a natural feature of parent-child relationship. (23)

As long as a child is raised in a loving environment and becomes “creator and receiver both” of benevolent feelings, he is able to reach beyond himself toward others and thus is capable of receiving and absorbing wisdom and teachings from other people around him. The education of circumstances opens up children’s mind and create educational circumstances at every moment in every daily encounters.

In Wordsworth’s vision of a harmonious community, all men, including low and rustic men, should be respected. In fact, the poet shows a special respect for these people. He states in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* that “[l]ow and rustic life was generally chosen” for the subject of his poetry (*Prose Works* 124). The choice is based on his lifelong humanistic concern, his environmental philosophy, and his sense of community. When we read Wordsworth’s poetry, we quite frequently observe his
particular respect for people of the lower class, especially vagrants and the derelict. Wordsworth believes that, just as we learn from nature and daily circumstances, we can learn much from these people. Every event and every person in our lives can have profound educational meanings. Typical examples is “The Old Cumberland Beggar.”

In “The Old Cumberland Beggar”, Wordsworth gives us his basic statement about humanitarianism. He asserts that in a human community, every man, even a beggar, would not be totally useless:

\[ \ldots \text{‘Tis Nature’s law} \]

\[ \text{That none, the meanest of created things,} \]

\[ \ldots \text{should exist} \]

\[ \text{Divorced from good—a spirit and pulse of good,} \]

\[ \text{A life and soul, to every mode of being} \]

\[ \text{Inseparably linked. (73-9)} \]

This “spirit and pulse of good” is the element that links “every mode of being.” So are human charity, compassion, and love. These elements draw human beings together and form a circle of life in which every one is closely interrelated and incorporated. Therefore, even an old Cumberland beggar works as a stimulation for human charity and virtue, and thus provides an opportunity for good deeds:

\[ \text{Among the farms and solitary huts,} \]

\[ \text{Hamlets and thinly-scattered villages,} \]

\[ \text{Where'er the aged Beggar takes his rounds,} \]

\[ \text{The mild necessity of use compels} \]

\[ \text{To acts of love; and habit does the work} \]

\[ \text{Of reason; yet prepares that after-joy} \]
Which reason cherishes. And thus the soul,
By that sweet taste of pleasure unpursued,
Doth find herself insensibly disposed
To virtue and true goodness. (96-105)

The old beggar is like—
A silent monitor, which on their minds
Must needs impress a transitory thought
Of self-congratulation, to the heart
Of each recalling his peculiar boons. (123-6)

Gratitude, sympathy, virtue and charity are all elements that Wordsworth values in education. In a sense, he does regard the beggar as a teacher who teaches the villagers love and virtue. There is moral meaning in the beggars’ being a monitor of good deeds, and what the villagers learn from him cannot be obtained elsewhere:

. . . Some there are,
By their good works exalted, lofty minds
And meditative, authors of delight
And happiness, which to the end of time
Will live, and spread, and kindle: even such minds
In childhood, from this solitary Being,
Or from like wanderer, haply have received
(A thing more precious far than all that books
Or the solicitudes of love can do!) (105-13)

Nothing is more important than Wordsworth’s humanistic statement at the end of this poem:
No—man is dear to man; the poorest poor
Long for some moments in a weary life
When they can know and feel that they have been,
Themselves, the fathers and the dealers-out
Of some small blessings; have been kind to such
As needed kindness, for this single cause,
That we have all of us one human heart. (147-53)

The old beggar is a monitor and reminder of the truth that “we have all of us one human heart.” It is this truth that combines us. Precisely because of this truth, the teaching of the Old Cumberland Beggar is a most valuable education of circumstances.

Take Wordsworth himself as an example, he always learns from and commune with things and people he encounters. In “Resolution and Independence,” when he is troubled by the thoughts of life’s uncertainty and human sufferings, he learns from the leech gatherer the wisdom of fortitude:

And soon with this he other matter blended,
Cheerfully uttered, with demeanour kind,
But stately in the main; and when he ended,
I could have laughed myself to scorn to find
In that decrepit Man so firm a mind.
“God,” said I, “be my help and stay secure;
I’ll think of the Leech-gatherer on the lonely moor!” (134-40)

As long as one has an open heart that is prepared to receive, commune, and interact, every day and everywhere there are opportunities to learn.

In his concept of education, Wordsworth intends to portray a harmonious rural
community, in which people’s lives are closely connected with the beautiful natural environment, and communication and interrelationship among men at home and in the village establish close ties and support for every single man. Wordsworth’s sense of a true education is an environmental education as well as an education achieved through real life experiences gained with an open heart.
CHAPTER III

Wordsworth and Nineteenth-Century English Educational Reform

From the previous chapter we know that Wordsworth’s educational concept has a specific rural context, which is directly related to Wordsworth’s own childhood and the eighteenth-century rural tradition. In constructing his educational ideal, he pictured an utopia of beautiful landscape, simple home life, and harmonious village community. However, as the poet gradually stepped into the Industrial Age, changes in landscape and people’s lives directly undermined the very basis of his educational vision.

Wordsworth’s notice of these changes is seriously discussed in Book Eighth of The Excursion, and his reaction to these changes is shown in his support of and later opposition to Dr. Andrew Bell’s Madras System. In this chapter, I will first examine the Industrial Age and its impacts on environment and education discussed in Book Eighth of The Excursion, and through the discussion re-examine Wordsworth’s educational concept according to the social reality. Secondly, I will analyze Wordsworth’s support of the Madras System and its relation to his concept of self moral education mentioned in “Reply to Mathetes.” Lastly I will examine how Wordsworth turned against the Madras System due to his opposition to the spirit of competition. Through the whole discussion I will argue that, although Wordsworth addressed the issue of industrial changes in The Excursion and showed his concern for the establishment of a national education, his attitude toward education remained the same. His turning against the Madras System and his growing conservatism resulted precisely from this consistency.

Book Eighth of The Excursion is primarily a discussion of the impact of the Industrial Revolution on the natural environment and people’s lives. Wordsworth
regards the Industrial Revolution a destructive force that has reconstructed nature, man, and society with astonishing efficiency:

\[
\ldots I \text{ have lived to mark}
\]

A new and unforeseen creation rise

From out the labours of a peaceful Land

Wielding her potent enginery to frame

And to produce, with appetite as keen

As that of war, which rests not night or day,

Industrious to destroy! (89-95)

The destruction was first shown in the natural environment. It rapidly altered the outlook of the landscape. Green fields vanished and were replaced by roads, factories, and towns. Roads were the symbols of the penetrating force and rapid growth of the industrialization. Not a single area of England could be exempt from its destructive influence: “Many beautiful sceneries and landscapes/ Have vanished—swallowed up by stately roads/ Easy and bold, that penetrate the gloom/ Of Britain’s farthest glens” (*Excursion* VIII 109-12). The original simplicity and serenity of the countryside were disturbed by the busy and ceaseless transportation: “[T]he sale/ Of traffic glides with ceaseless intercourse,/ Glistening along the low and woody dale” (*Excursion* VIII 113-5).

Together with the development of roads and transportation network, industrial towns and factories replaced natural sceneries and landscape rapidly and systematically: “From the germ of some poor hamlet, rapidly produced/ Here a huge town, continuous and compact./ Hiding the face of earth for leagues” (*Excursion* VIII 118-21). All these destructions of the natural environment were aimed at economic prosperity and the development of the imperialist power of the nation:
Hence is the wide sea peopled, —hence the shores
Of Britain are resorted to by ships
Freighted from every climate of the world
With the world’s choicest produce. Hence . . .

.........................
That animating spectacle of sails
That, through her inland regions, to and fro
Pass with the respirations of the tide
Perpetual, multitudinous! Finally,
Hence a dread arm of floating power, a voice
Of thunder daunting those who would approach

With hostile purposes the blessed Isle. (Excursion VIII 133-45)

Nevertheless, it was not only nature that was destroyed. Wordsworth did not observe the
destruction of the natural environment from an ecological aspect, which was waiting to
show its effect long after Wordsworth’s time. Instead, he observed the immediate
impact of industrialization on man and society, especially on people’s live styles and the
ethical foundations of the society. “These new-born arts” (Excursion VIII 132), with
their spirit of competition and material gains altered people’s live styles dramatically,
especially those of the poor, to whom factories and workhouses offered new prospect and
hope. They abandoned their rural homes and traditional agricultural living style and
migrated into towns and industrial districts to earn their daily breads. These people were
ignorant. They did not know that they had become the sacrifices of the Industrial Age
and its aims of economic boost and material gains—not the boost and gains of these poor
people, but those of the upper and middle classes. These poor people worked in
factories “irregularly massed/ Like Trees in forests” (*Excursion* VIII 113-4). Their lives were filled up with rapid productions and ceaseless toils of which war-like spirit of competition, nervous request of efficiency, dull machinery were the substances:

... [A]n unnatural light

Prepared for never-resting Labour’s eyes

Breaks from a many-windowed fabric huge;

And at the appointed hour a bell is heard,

Of harsher import than the curfew-knoll

That spake the Norman Conqueror’s stern behest—

A local summons to unceasing toil! (*Excursion* VIII 167-73)

Wordsworth compares this industrial spirit with religious zeal. To him, those factories and workhouses were like religious temples. Factories were the holy temples of the Industrial Spirit. Material gains were the idol that they worshiped. People’s peaceful lives were its sacrifices:

... Men, maidens, youths,

Mother and little children, boys and girls,

Enter, and each the wonted task resumes

Within this temple, where is offered up

To Gain, the master idol of the realm,

Perpetual sacrifice. (*Excursion* VIII 180-5)

How great was the difference between life in workhouses and the rural life? According to Horn’s research, despite the harsh reality, such as harvest failure and ceaseless toils on lands, life in the rural countryside had its simple and regular rules and routines, which every person obeys, each according to his position and duties. Besides, there were
entertainments and celebration in the harvest seasons provided by the village community and landlords. In general, life in the countryside had its fundamentals of regularity, duties, and communal-based activities. However, in factories and workhouses, all of these substances of life were reduced to mere ceaseless toils and harsh labors. Workers faced productive machines instead of other fellow men everyday. They were deprived of the very basic humanistic interrelationship and its originally taken-for-granted morality and duties. There were no more mental support and spiritual life provided. All of these were replaced by material gains.

This was what Wordsworth worried about. How could this kind of life lead man toward happiness? Wordsworth believed that “all true glory rests,/ All praise, all safety, and all happiness/ Upon the moral law” (Excursion VIII 206-8). To him, morality, duties, and virtues were the basic elements of a happy life. The old way of life provided abundant opportunities for men to obtain these, but the industrialized society with a materialistic spirit was not able to provide people with spiritual food that brought them true love and joy in daily life. This sacrifice was immense:

Call Archimedes from his buried tomb

Upon the grave of vanished Syracuse,

And feelingly the Sage shall make report

How insecure, how baseless in itself,

Is the Philosophy whose sway depends

On mere material instruments; —how weak

Those arts, and high inventions, if unpropped

By virtue. — He, sighing with pensive grief.

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1 For a detailed analysis of life in the rural community, see “The Rural Community” in Pamela Horn’s Life and Labour in Rural England, 1760-1850. (London: Macmillan, 1987.)
Amid his calm abstractions, would admit
That not the slender privilege is theirs
To save themselves from blank forgetfulness! (*Excursion* VIII 220-30)

What was lost was not merely a simple life with moralities and duties in the village community. With ceaseless toils, there were no more home life with close ties among parents and children established through daily domestic activities:

Lo! in such neighbourhood, from morn to eve,
The habitations empty! or perchance
The Mother left alone, —no helping hand
To rock the cradle of her peevish babe;
No daughters round her, busy at the wheel,
Or in dispatch of each day’s little growth
Of household occupation; no nice arts
Of needle-work; no bustle at the fire,
Where once the dinner was prepared with pride;
Nothing to speed the day, or cheer the mind;
Nothing to praise, to teach, or to command! (*Excursion* VIII 265-75)

Especially, childhood was also sacrificed. The children spent all of their days in factories, facing cold machines and ceaseless labors. There was no more freedom to roam in nature:

The Father, if perchance he still retain
His old employments, goes to field or wood,
No longer led or followed by the Sons;
Idlers perchance they were, —but in *his* sight;
Breathing fresh air, and treading the green earth;

Till their short holiday of childhood ceased,

Ne’er to return! That birthright now is lost. (Excursion VIII 276-82)

Furthermore, the greatest loss was true feelings and affections inherent in people’s interaction and communication with one another. We know from the previous chapter that these are crucial elements in Wordsworth’s concept of education. Without love, duty, good-will, and joy conveyed in everyday intercourses with fellow men, there was no chance for a person to learn these true feelings and affections:

Oh! where is now the character of peace,

Sobriety, and order, and chaste love,

And honest dealing, and untainted speech,

And pure good-will, and hospitable cheer;

That made the very thought of country-life

A thought of refuge, for a mind detained

Reluctantly amid the bustling crowd?

Where now the beauty of the Sabbath kept

With conscientious reverence, as a day

By the almighty Lawgiver pronounced

Holy and blest? and where the winning grace

Of all the lighter ornaments attached

To time and season, as the year rolled round? (Excursion VIII 239-51)

All of the changes delineated above are serious threats to Wordsworth’s educational ideal, because he greatly emphasizes the influences of environment and human community on a person’s education. The Industrial Revolution separated father, mother,
brothers, and sisters and put all of them in front of the productive machine. They were massed together with various other strange people without organization. The original morality and virtues were destroyed together with harmonies and home life. According to Wordsworth’s concept of a true education, nothing can be a more serious threat than this to every fellow countryman of this industrialized nation. What Wordsworth cares is neither national economic growth nor expansion of imperialist power: “Economists will tell you that the State/ Thrives by the forfeiture—unfeeling thought,/ And false as monstrous!” (283-5) He sees economic prosperity from a different angle. He observes that the very substance that makes a man sound and happy was ruined. There is a portrait of a boy in the Industrial England, and it is a hopeless image:

\[\ldots\] The boy, where’er he turns,

Is still a prisoner; when the wind is up

Among the clouds, and roars through the ancient woods;

Or when the sun is shining in the east,

Quiet and calm. Behold him—in the school

Of his attainments? no; but with the air

Fanning his temples under heaven’s blue arch.

His raiment, whitened o’er with cotton-flakes

Or locks of wool, announces whence he comes.

Creeping his gait and cowering, his lip pale,

His respiration quick and audible;

And scarcely could you fancy that a gleam

Could break from out those languid eyes, or a blush

Mantle upon his cheek. (Excursion VIII 302-15)
In the past, natural environment and harmonious rural communities provided abundant opportunities for personal spiritual growth. Now all of these were being threatened, but the government did not provide any substitute for this loss. Boys and girls grew up in this circumstance lost their original vigor and inner strength: “The limbs increase; but liberty of mind/ Is gone for ever; and this organic frame,/ So joyful in its motions, is become/ Dull, to the joy of her own motions dead” (321-4). To Wordsworth, who valued most a person’s spiritual condition, this was a lamentable picture. The Industrial Age sacrificed people’s mental maturity and happiness for its economic, political, and materialistic gains. Just look at the portrait delineated above: “Can hope look forward to a manhood raised/ On such foundations?” (334-5)

Despite all these criticisms on the Industrial Age, one may ask: Was the past so good, and the present so bad? Could Wordsworth be only nostalgic to the old days? It is true that industrialization undermined people’s original simple, peaceful rural lives, and in this sense Wordsworth’s criticism on the Industrial Age was correct. However, it is now time to examine Wordsworth’s rural image as an educational environment. In many ways Wordsworth was delineating an idealistic vision based on the eighteenth-century rural community he grew up and lived in. However, this utopian image and Wordsworth’s criticism on the Industrial Age based upon it conveniently ignored many negative aspects and harsh realities existed in the rustic life. When considering Wordsworth’s portrait of the rural community, we have to further think about his position as a middle-class gentleman who can roam in nature freely at leisure. When he describes the rustic poor, he sees them from a distance; and when he deplores the destructive changes brought by industrialization to the countryside, in a sense he sees it only through his own eyes, not through the eyes of those rustic poor. As Horn observes: “[T]o some observers the
inexorable advance of industrialisation and commercialism posed a serious threat to what they felt were the simpler verities of country life and to the social cohesiveness which the older village communities had seemed to offer” (11). This is exactly Wordsworth’s attitude. However, many others held a totally different point of view to the old rural countryside:

As Roger Sales pointed out, such a vision of pastoral serenity conveniently ignored the harsher realities of day-to-day life on the land. It gave no indication of the long hours of drudging labour expected from most peasant cultivators or the feudal dues exacted from them by many landowners in Wordsworth’s native Cumbria. This is rather a “countryside of the mind”—a place of intellectual refuge—than one rooted in the reality of Georgian England. (Horn 13)

Wordsworth, in some sense, when portraying his idealistic idyllic rural image, especially when he talks about education in nature, fails to take into consideration the “harsher realities” of rustic people’s lives. It is true that, regarding Wordsworth’s educational concept, nature, simple home life and harmonious village community are essential and even indispensable elements in man’s moral education. However, the eighteenth-century rural community did not necessarily in reality provide such an idealistic environment for such an education. There are some realistic problems needed to be considered. Many negative factors must be included in the educational outlook of eighteenth-century rural community. The lack of appropriate schooling system is one of the factors. Poverty, ceaseless toils, restricted village life were even more serious factors.

In reality, with threatening poverty and harsh labors, common farmers and their
children had to tolerate dull and rigid routines of their works: “Many of the tasks [rural children] undertook were lonely and uninteresting, providing little stimulus to their mind and thereby encouraging the slowness of speech and intellect which critics claimed were characteristic of young villagers” (Horn 126-7). Besides, they would have no leisure time to enjoy the natural surroundings and learn from nature, not to mention the kind of education through traveling provided in The Excursion. People’s lives in rural communities were very much limited and isolated: “[W]ell into the nineteenth century, attachment to the local community remained a major feature of the day-to-day life of most country people” (Horn 107). Under this circumstance, village people’s minds were far from open. Most of the time they were ignorant and narrow-minded:

[T]here were strong kinship ties with much intermarrying within a relatively limited geographical area, while outsiders, especially in the more remote communities, were regarded with suspicion. . . . [T]here was widespread intermarrying among the inhabitants because they dreaded the “alliance of foreigners”. Elsewhere it was not uncommon for villagers to turn out and stone a wayfarer for no other reason than that he was a stranger. In George Eliot’s Silas Marner much of the suspicion which the linen weaver aroused was due to the fact that he was an “outsider”. (Horn 107)

There were dark sides of village life that was primarily caused by village people’s ignorance and lack of proper education due to their harsh lives. Superstition is a typical example:

Belief in magic and in the influence of omens was one way of emphasising people’s helplessness in the face of an unpredictable and possibly malevolent fate. At a time when medical treatment was rudimentary and death rates high,
it seemed only prudent to many that they should take all possible steps to placate evil spirits and to ostracise, or even ill-treat, those suspected of exercising harmful powers. Only the spread of education and an end to what John Claire called “wild rusticity” could eradicate such practices. Religious influences alone were insufficient. (Horn 121)

If the Industrial Age brought unfavorable changes to people’s lives, we should, however, give at least one credit to it, i.e., it stimulated the governments’ concern for the educational problems of the poor and promoted the establishment of a system of mass education. Besides, improvement of transportation and building of roads in the countryside, despite its destruction on natural landscapes, at least helped village people to step out of their isolated situations and would better their lives gradually:

The construction of improved turnpike roads also had its effect in opening up the countryside. And as early as 1768 the agricultural writer and improver, Arthur Young, commented upon the significance of this transport “revolution” in increasing farmers’ marketing opportunities, and hence the price they secured for their products. This applied especially to holdings located at a distance from the major markets, and there were some agriculturalists in the home counties who feared that such extra competition would undermine their own profits. But the sharp increase in the number of urban consumers showed that their fears were groundless. (Horn 6)

All of these, if not directly contributing to their virtues and inner wisdom, at least provided new dimensions to their lives. In some sense, economic conditions influenced people’s education greatly. To receive education we need financial sufficiency as well as abundant leisure time without toiling ceaselessly for daily breads.
Now let us return to Wordsworth. Earlier we questioned the poet's naïve attitude toward the negative aspects of the rural life. Yet, perhaps he did see the dark side of rural serenity, so he has the Solitary utter these words to do justice to the Industrial Age:

Yet be it asked, in justice to our age,
If there were not, before those arts appeared,
These structures rose, commingling old and young,
And unripe sex with sex, for mutual taint;
If there were not, then, in our far-famed Isle,
Multitudes, who from infancy had breathed
Air unimprisoned, and had lived at large;
Yet walked beneath the sun, in human shape,
As abject, as degraded? (Excursion VIII 337-45)

What follows is a portrait of a rustic boy to compare with the boy in a factory delineated previously:

    . . . Stiff are his joints;
    Beneath a cumbrous frock, that to the knees
    Invests the thriving churl, his legs appear,
    Fellows to those that lustily upheld
    The wooden stools for everlasting use,
    Whereon our fathers sate. And mark his brow!
    Under whose shaggy canopy are set
    Two eyes—not dim, but of a healthy stare—
    Wide, sluggish, blank, and ignorant, and strange—
    Proclaiming boldly that they never drew
A look or motion of intelligence
From infant-conning of the Christ-cross-row,
Or puzzling through a primer, line by line,
Till perfect mastery crown the pains at last.
—What kindly warmth from touch of fostering hand,
What penetrating power of sun or breeze,
Shall e’er dissolve the crust wherein his soul
Sleeps, like a caterpillar sheathed in ice? (Excursion VIII 402-19)

This boy is wild, ignorant, and uneducated. He is not the kind of child that
Wordsworth’s idealistic community would produce. He is the production of poverty and
harsh labor:

. . . This Boy the fields produce:

His spade and hoe, mattock and glittering scythe,
The carter’s whip that on his shoulder rests
In air high-towering with a boorish pomp,
The scepter of his sway; his country’s name,
Her equal rights, her churches and her schools—
What have they done for him? And, let me ask,
For tens of thousands uninformed as he?
In brief, what liberty of mind is here? (Excursion VIII 425-33)

The problem was that both of the two boys delineated above—one was the sacrifice of the
Industrial Age, and the other was raised in ignorance and poverty in the
countryside—both boys lack any form of education. If Wordsworth’s education of
circumstances is aimed at providing a good educational environment for children, neither
of them was raised in a good environment to cultivate their mind and to teach them virtues and morals.

With such kind of environmental deficiency, the only way to promote education is through the means of national education. Deprived of an appropriate educational environment, both boys delineated in *The Excursion* need the support of a well-organized school system. This is the reason why Wordsworth, in Book Ninth of *The Excursion*, urges the government to establish a systematic educational system for all of the people:

‘O for the coming of that glorious time
When, prizing knowledge as her noblest wealth
And best protection, this imperial Realm,
While she exacts allegiance, shall admit
An obligation, on her part, to *teach*
Them who are born to serve her and obey;
Binding herself by statute to secure
For all the children whom her soil maintains
The rudiments of letters, and inform
The mind with moral and religious truth,
Both understood and practised,—so that none,
However destitute, be left to droop
By timely culture unsustained; or run
Into a wild disorder; or be forced
To drudge through a weary life without the help
Of intellectual implements and tools;
A savage horde among the civilized,
A servile band among the lordly free!’ (Excursion IX 293-310)

Wordsworth asserts that “the whole people should be taught and trained” (Excursion IX 358). It is at this point that Wordsworth eventually agreed with his contemporary educational reformers. When he wrote the above passage, Wordsworth had Andrew Bell’s Madras System in mind. In the footnote to Book Nine of The Excursion, Wordsworth directly praises the invention of the Madras system: “The discovery of Dr. Bell affords marvellous facilities for carrying [the establishment of national education] into effect; and it is impossible to over-rate the benefit which might accrue to humanity from the universal application of this simple engine under an enlightened and conscientious government” (Poems Vol. II 967). At the time when Wordsworth was writing The Excursion, he was zealous about the Madras system and enthusiastically supported the adoption of the System by the Grasmere village school. In a letter to Thomas Poole, Wordsworth wrote:

If you have read my Poem, the “Excursion”, you will there see what importance I attach to the Madras System. Next to the art of Printing it is the noblest invention for the improvement of the human species. Our population in this neigbourhood is not sufficient to apply it on a large scale; but great benefit has been derived from it even upon a small one. (Letters New Selection 177-8)

Why did Wordsworth show such zeal for the Madras System? One of the reasons was that, at the time when Wordsworth came to know Andrew Bell and read his An Experiment in Education made at the Asylum of Madras, he was worrying about the education of his two sons, John and Willy. John especially was a very slow learner. Wordsworth was urgently seeking a suitable school for him to attend. Bell came in September 1811 to Grasmere and went with Wordsworth to visit the Grasmere school.
Its previous headmaster Johnson had already introduced the Madras system, and now this plan was undertaken by the new headmaster, Bamford. Wordsworth at that time was fascinated by the monitorial idea, so he and Dorothy came to teach at this tiny village school several hours a day and sent John to attend it (Gill 290-1; Pointon 177-8). Wordsworth regarded this new discovery of teaching method, “with the exception of the abolition of the Slave trade, the most happy event of [his] times” (Letters William Dorothy Vol.II 432). Afterwards, he was anxious to send John and Willy to the Charterhouse school solely because it was run with the system (Moorman 178-9). Eventually, however, Wordsworth became disillusioned with Bell’s Madras system also primarily because of his two sons’ failure in gaining academic success.

Another reason for Wordsworth’s support of the Madras System concerns his concept of self-education. No matter how much emphasis he puts on the educational functions of community, home life, parents and teachers in his concept of education of circumstances, the poet always asserts that moral and spiritual education cannot be obtained through other people’s instruction. One’s inner wisdom and virtues are gained through one’s real life experiences. The education of circumstances is only to provide an appropriate environment, not to take the responsibility of teaching and learning. In “Reply to Mathetes”, Wordsworth rejects John Wilson’s (the Mathetes) request of his being a moral teacher for the age, because he believes that no one can be anybody else’s moral teacher. The youths have to solve their own moral problems and acquire spiritual and moral maturity by learning through their own errors:

In such a mixed assemblage as our age presents, with its genuine merit and its large overbalance of alloy, I may boldly ask into what errors, either with respect to Person or Thing, could a young Man fall, who has sincerely entered upon the
course of moral discipline which has been recommended, and to which the condition of youth, it has been proved, is favourable? His opinions could nowhere deceive him beyond the point to which, after a season, he would find that it was salutary for him to have been deceived. For, as that Man cannot set a right value upon health who has never known sickness, nor feel the blessing of ease who has been through his life a stranger to pain, so can there be no confirmed and passionate love of truth for him who has not experienced the hollowness of error. (21)

The sorrows and joys, success and failure, ups and downs a man experiences are all the best teaching materials with moral lessons, provided the man learns with true feelings and a sincere heart. As Pointon points out: “The only lasting ‘moral discipline’, insists Wordsworth, that has the authentic power to invest a life is that which the individual discovers for himself” (146). There is no shortcut to spiritual maturity, and for Wordsworth, the only path is through one’s heart: “Nature has irrevocably decreed that our prime dependence in all stages of life after Infancy and Childhood have been passed through (nor do I know that this latter ought to be expected) must be upon our own minds; and that the way to knowledge shall be long, difficult, winding, and often times returning upon itself” (*Prose Works* Vol. II 23).

The Madras System in some aspects coincided with Wordsworth’s concept of self-education. First of all, in a monitorial classroom the teacher no longer plays the leading role. Instead, the students themselves should be responsible for their own learning. Andrew Bell’s classroom was a student-centered place. The schoolteacher was only a supervisor. His job was to scrutinize situations happened in the classroom. Most of the teachings, instructions, and managements of student behavior were
undertaken by students themselves. The students, especially the monitors, would thus become self-motivated, because they were not just receivers of knowledge and orders. They could make their own judgments on how to instruct other pupils, and how to reward and punish through general agreements. Andrew Bell individualized learning and transferred the responsibility of learning, instruction, and management of the whole classroom to the hands of pupils themselves: “Bell’s genius lay in his perceptive ability to exploit a child’s desire for activity and variety. Class-control under the Madras system was achieved because half the children were occupied as tutors” (Pointon 175). This is definitely a system Wordsworth would welcome, since he emphasizes individualism and the importance of individual as activator instead of passive receiver of knowledge in his ideal of education: “Bell’s faith in human nature led him to an insight that encapsulates the essence of Wordsworth’s philosophy of education: ‘Another rule of the school is, that no boy ever knows anything you tell him, or is improved by anything you do for him: it is what he tells you, and what he does for himself that is alone useful’ ” (Pointon 176). This statement fulfills Wordsworth ideal and belief in the importance of self-education. If Wordsworth disapproved of any educational scheme, it was because he thought it was only instruction, not true education. Wordsworth cared about this distinction very much. It was not that Wordsworth totally opposed to school instruction. It was that he hadn’t found any school instruction that could fulfill his ideal of true education. Andrew Bell’s Madras system was an exception that rekindled Wordsworth’s hope in formal education. When Bell said: “[N]o boy ever knows anything you tell him, or is improved by anything you do for him: it is what he tells you, and what he does for himself that is alone useful,” nothing could appeal to Wordsworth more. Bell’s words are a statement of Wordsworth’s fundamental view of the vital difference between tutorial instruction and
For Wordsworth knowledge that was imposed upon children might be necessary in certain instances but was all too often superfluous to a child’s true, natural development. It promoted vanity in middle-class children and social discontent and the seeds of rebellion among the working-class. Knowledge imposed on children might make them feel clever, might make them able to display their cleverness. It was not part of a process of natural, organic growth from within the human being. (Pointon 176)

This process of “natural, organic growth from within the human being” is the core of Wordsworth’s educational philosophy. To him, education is not to impose knowledge upon a person’s mind. In the educational process, the person should not remain passive. Instead, education is to “educe,” to stimulate and draw out the potential wisdom and power in the person. It is totally impossible to “instruct” children. Children cannot be instructed at all. Therefore, “[t]his view of Bell’s that knowledge imposed on a child is not authentic knowledge, would have recommended him to Wordsworth more than any principle” (Pointon 176). When Bell first took over the Madras Asylum in 1790, he became accustomed to hearing his staff blaming the pupils for their slowness. Again, his grasp of what a school is about might still be usefully put to trainee teachers: “It is you, who do not know how to teach, how to arrest and fix the attention of your pupils: it is not that he cannot learn but that he does not give the degree of attention requisite for his share of capacity” (Bell 6). The motto of the Madras system was “‘Qui docet indoctos, docet se’—who teaches, teaches himself. And “Nothing could have appealed to Wordsworth more,” says the critic Pointon (Pointon 176).

Another important characteristic that distinguished the Madras system from other
schemes was Bell’s concept of reward and punishment. The system of reward and punishment, like many other pedagogues used in the classroom, was centered upon students themselves. There were not only rules about punishment; there were also standards for rewards that pupils would desire to achieve. Besides, Bell abandoned severe physical punishments by using only appropriate and reasonable ones like extra work, solitary confinement, and detention, etc. And most importantly, he put the decision and judgment into the pupils’ hands. Under the scrutiny of the teacher, student each week would undergo a routine of open judgment of both rewards and punishments. Under the control of principle judges formed by several leading pupils, the students themselves decided the ways to deal with each individual case. Students were not only self-motivated. They were also self-ruled:

Bell repudiated corporal punishment. He determined to appeal to the better natures of his pupils by introducing a systematic scheme of merits and praises for them to aim at—and a set of punishments rationally worked out as appropriate to offences. He went further. Instead of bad behavior being arbitrarily punished by adults he created a system of self-rule whereby the boys themselves supervised their own discipline. Each week a jury of twelve boys—composed of the best pupils—would read charges against offenders recorded in a “Black Book”; under the watchful eye of the schoolmaster they would select a suitable punishment—extra work, solitary confinement, detention—but not the severe whippings of the past. For good behaviour Bell established a system of cumulative merits leading to Rewards or Prizes the boys would value. (Pointon 175)

Wordsworth shared Bell’s trust in the innate goodness of children and their instincts, as
well as Bell’s dislike of punishment particularly corporal punishment.

Despite all these merits of Bell’s Madras System, Wordsworth grew disillusioned at the system eventually. The main cause was the issue of competition. Wordsworth repudiates the idea of competition in any educational scheme. He values spiritual and moral education, which cannot be obtained through competition, and which can only be achieved through harmonious human relationships. Competition destroys this basic circumstance. That is the reason why Wordsworth was opposed to the spirit of competition and any educational system that promotes it. To Wordsworth, teaching students reading, writing, music, and arithmetic at school is not education. It is only part of education. Competition based on success in reading, writing, and arithmetic is not education either. Wordsworth’s ideal education is a life-long pursuit of real knowledge, wisdom, morality, duty, love, joy, and spiritual maturity. All of these cannot be achieved through mere training on reading, writing, arithmetic, and dancing, which are only skills. Something more profound and influential to a person’s life should be emphasized. Therefore, Wordsworth believes that any knowledge should be learned in the context of real life. Education is in real life, not in the book. If anyone intends to obtain happiness in life, superficial competition for benefits and merits will never do:

Throughout his life Wordsworth opposed the notion that success in learning should ever be motivated by anything but the purest desire to learn for its own sake. To acquire knowledge or to acquire a skill in order to display superior talent was, to Wordsworth (as it had been to Rousseau), a failure of education not a proof of accomplishment. Competitive examinations went against the grain for him as he had showed when an undergraduate. (Pointon 180)

In his long letter to a father regarding the private education of his daughter, Wordsworth
summarizes his views about the kind of attainments a young person can gain from school. These consist of acquired skills, such as arts, drawing, music, languages and science. As the child is exposed to the praise of proud teachers or parents, his tendency to vainglory is encouraged. Wordsworth’s hope is that this praise-seeking aspect of learning will be a phase only and that the other more profound and comprehensive aspects of education will provide the context in which a child will grow in self-forgetfulness, deepening wonder and curiosity about the world (Letters William Dorothy Vol. II 284-5):

    Education, Wordsworth later told Rose, is that which “draws out the human being” into conscious relation. It ought to be a natural process chiefly enabled by parents and family, a process of integration, which cannot be a matter of social competition. It is quite clear from the letter to the unidentified father of the girl that competition, prize-winning and praise are incompatible with the aim of enabling a person to absorb herself in a self-forgetful joy of discovery. (Pointon 181)

    Besides, competition is the product of a materialized and industrialized society. The materialized social value would drive people toward alienation and isolation because of the conflict of interest. In the long run, it would cause the loss of some basic but crucial elements in human relationships like tolerance, love, compassion, and harmony. The past world in which human communities functioned harmoniously based on people’s cherishing of mutual feelings would be totally destroyed by capitalism, competition, and conflict of interest and would eventually cause social turmoil and unrest, because people were taught to be discontented with their lives. As Pointon puts it:

    Essentially, [Wordsworth’s] distrust was not of stories about real-life but of the scientific outlook that reduced all to what could be analysed and labelled and,
ultimately, given a material value. . . . It was the stunting of the sense of wonder and of imaginative delight that he objected to and its opposite—a preoccupation with material usefulness and putting things in order of merit. (180)

In a word, Wordsworth asserts that competition, “the Idol of the Political economists, in fact ruins everything” (Letters William Dorothy Vol.VI 56).

Nevertheless, all these were not Andrew Bell’s consideration in establishing the Madras system. To Bell, the society needs an efficient system of mass education to educate as many children as fast as possible. That was all. And monitorial system did provide a very good method, or we should say, a good machinery, for the age. It was the product of an industrialized, materialized, and utilitarian age. The goal of the education was to make children learn as fast as possible. As a result: “To Bell, a commonsense, extrovert understanding of human nature gave ample proof that boys and girls worked at their hardest in the face of healthy and, in his view, natural competition” (Pointon 181).

Therefore, Wordsworth and Bell basically had incompatible ideals about education. Wordsworth was a poet living in seclusion, and Bell was an educator who had run a large boys’ school in Madras single-handedly. To Bell, Wordsworth’s concept in learning was too high-minded for a practical educator. Wordsworth regarded the educational issue from his idealistic point of view based on his own childhood education, and his main concern was the education of his two slow-to-learn sons, while Bell was concerned about the efficiency and success of the school system. It was unlikely for Bell to consider individual children like John and Willy.

Of course Wordsworth’s educational ideal was very difficult to practice, especially in the atmosphere and circumstances of the nineteenth century, when the educational reform was still at the very beginning, without any appropriate teacher training, governmental
intervention, or systematic construction. Andrew Bell’s Madras system was only one of the many schemes that was undergoing experiment at the time, not to mention the fact that there were complicated political and religious disputes entangled with the educational issue. To Wordsworth, there were some indispensable elements that had to be considered. But, his contemporaries were not so far-sighted as he was. The only thing they thought of was to solve present social problem as soon as possible. There was no consideration of the quality. At this point Wordsworth was the pioneer whose thoughts were far ahead of his time. His voice, however, would not be heard until the twentieth century.

Besides the factor of competition, the other reason that turned Wordsworth against the Bell system was the education of his two sons, John and Willy. Wordsworth tried to get John accepted into the Charterhouse boarding-school in London where the Madras system had been fully adopted, but the Charterhouse rejected him. He began to “suspect that though the Bell system was used there the interest of the school was in its clever pupils and that the real reason for headmaster Russell refusing John was that he was not likely to bring academic glory to the school” (Pointon 182). Later, he successfully got Willy into the Charterhouse in 1820, but Willy did not do well with the Bell system. Wordsworth was even more disappointed with the school, which failed to provide a sympathetic learning environment for his two sons: “Some years later, in a letter to the civil servant John Thornton, whose help he was seeking in getting a job for Willy, Wordsworth said that sending him to Charterhouse had been a mistake on his part. He had intended Willy, he said, to go to university but wasted years and illness at Charterhouse had prevented it” (Pointon 182).

Wordsworth’s objection to the competitive spirit and the Madras System eventually
extended to education’s relation to the whole society. There was a predominant fear of turmoil and unrest related to the educational issue. In the first chapter we came to know that the slow process of the establishment of the mass education system was due to the government’s fear of an over-educated populace. They fear that the poor, once educated, would be discontented with their position and thus become a source of social unrest. Wordsworth also had the same fear, but due to different reasons. The problem was with the content of the education. Wordsworth deemed that the kind of education provided by his contemporary educators, including Andrew Bell, failed to offer meaningful substance to people’s lives. The knowledge offered by the school only led the children into vain cleverness that did not give their inner wisdom and teach them sense of morality. As for those less successful children, failure in the school due to competition would accompany them into their adult life and undermine their personal integrity. An education system that emphasized mere matter-of-facts would eventually cause social unstability:

In addition to Bible Knowledge and reading children were being taught smatterings of science, geography, history, botany and possibly also handwriting. But, in Wordsworth’s view, this kind of knowledge bore no organic relation to their lives. Successful pupils in factory schools would become conceited in their superficial “cleverness”—unsuccessful ones would become envious. Worse, the successful child would have no use for the knowledge he/she had acquired. The only obvious result of such schooling was discontent for both successful and unsuccessful. (Pointon 182)

From the social aspect, according to Wordsworth, this kind of education could be dangerous, because useless knowledge made the lower classes discontented: “. . . it fed
them a diet of knowledge that they were incapable of digesting; it would make them sick, to some extent with confusion but chiefly with discontent. They would be made even more unhappy by it. Society at large would be threatened by their discontent” (Pointon 184).

Moreover, the competitive spirit of the Madras system was nothing different from the industrial spirit at work in factories: “A school run on Madras lines worked ‘like clockwork,’ ” Wordsworth’s sister-in-law, Sara Hutchinson, said when Wordsworth introduced it to Grasmere in 1811 (Pointon 185). But by 1829 Wordsworth had come to regard the Madras schools in the industrial towns as extensions of the factories. They had everything in common with the efficient production systems of the factories surrounding them. However, men are not like material products. Material products can be produced through the production line, but man cannot. Man has thoughts, feelings, love and hatred. An educational system that produced educated populace like machine ignored the organic characteristic of human nature, not to mention the fact that many of the children in the workhouse schools were isolated from their families and home lives. Deprived of natural circumstances and healthy interrelationships with other human beings, these children were learning knowledge that was remote from their working and home lives. Wordsworth worried about these children’s future personalities. As Pointon points out: “Wordsworth, in his day, believed he was confronting a double evil: in the first place the factory system was tearing people away from their natural roots and environment; in the second, the drive to school the labourer was an effort to remould his or her individuality in the fashion of a factory worker” (184)

As a result, Wordsworth eventually turned against the whole educational reform in the nineteenth century. There was no more agreement between Wordsworth’s
educational vision of simple home life with close ties of parental love and harmonious village community and nineteenth-century educational reformers’ utilitarianist, materialistic, competitive-spirited educational system. Wordsworth insisted on his moral and humanistic education and grew more and more conservative. His insight into the educational fundamentals would not be considered until the twentieth century.
CONCLUSION

The Industrial Age was an age of self-confidence and independence. The Industrial Revolution with new patterns of life in factories and workhouses, the utilitarianist emphasis on utility and human progression, and the economic boost and political expansion that followed, all contributed to a self-confident and progressive, but competitive and individualized social idea. Educational reformers, like Andrew Bell, who looked forward to an industrialized, progressive England, based their educational theories and methods upon these industrial spirits. However, something was lost and forgotten in all these rapid machinery productions. The things lost were not only beautiful natural landscapes, but also the spiritual and moral life that was inherent in the old ways of rural life. Wordsworth’s criticism of his age pinpoints this loss, and his concept of education dwells precisely upon this moral and spiritual part of the old way of life. In this sense, Wordsworth’s criticism and concept of education have an insight no educational reformer of his time was able to achieve.

Perhaps precisely because of this insight that makes him an avant-garde, it was difficult for Wordsworth to reach an agreement with his contemporaries on the issue of education. Another reason is that Wordsworth’s concept of education, in some sense, was too idealistic to be put into practice in the social reality of nineteenth-century England. His social vision is based upon an idealized image of rural community, which was greatly undermined in the process of industrialization and urbanization. The problem was that Wordsworth was reluctant to compromise his utopian, rural-based educational vision. In a sense Wordsworth was just like a retired poet in the remote Lake District, far away from the arenas of social, political, and educational disputes.
Wordsworth lived almost all his life in a rural community, which formed the context of his criticisms on contemporary issues such as education. In *The Excursion*, no matter how far the Poet, the Wanderer, and the Solitary travel, they do not in any way leave the natural world and the rural area. In the Wordsworthian ideal world, there was no big cities. Wordsworth’s criticism of the society and the issue of education, uttered through the mouth of the Wanderer, was made in a remote utopian rural village. When the Poet laments the diminish of “the old domestic morals,” “[h]er simple manners, and the stable worth/ That dignified and cheered a low estate” (*Excursion* VIII 236-8), the Wanderer passionately responds:

   “Fled utterly! or only to be traced
   In a few fortunate retreats like this;
   Which I behold with trembling, when I think
   What lamentable change, a year—a month—
   May bring[].” (*Excursion* VIII 253-7)

They are lamenting the disappearance of the old ways of life. They are nostalgic for an old Utopia. Even though he admitted that there was the need for the establishment of a national educational system, Wordsworth by no means suggests any concrete and practical way of doing that.

The importance of a rural community in Wordsworth’s educational vision has thus became a departing point which distanced him from the urban and industrial discourse of his contemporaries. To him, to dwell in nature was the best way of education. However, the fact is that the English countryside had long passed its golden era. It became “a backwater of the national life instead of its main stream” (Trevelyan 417). Urbanization was a slow but continuous process. In 1831 “only about a quarter of the
people lived in towns with over 20,000 inhabitants,” but “[b]y the end of the century that position had been transformed; then a mere quarter of the inhabitants of England and Wales still lived in rural districts” (Horn 10). This was a big change to people’s lifestyle during Wordsworth’s lifetime. We can see from Wordsworth’s descriptions of the establishment of towns and cities in Book Eighth of The Excursion that he did observe this process (82-116). However, he frequently showed his dislike of urban life. In one of his letters to his wife, Mary, he describes his dislike of life in London: “The life which is led by the fashionable world in this great city is miserable; there is neither dignity nor contact nor love nor quiet to be found in it” (Letters New Selection 154). Urban life was something Wordsworth could not get used to and was reluctant to take into consideration. Unfortunately it was the model for most Englishmen’s future lives. When Wordsworth was praising and emphasizing the serenity, harmony, and love that could be found in rural communities, people were drifting out of them toward cities and towns. In this situation, if one were practical enough, probably he would ask such a question: How is one to deal with the educational problem of these urban dwellers, and to raise the spiritual and moral states of these men, who do not have the natural world as their spiritual teacher? However, Wordsworth was unable to address this problem in his educational vision.

Consequently, Wordsworth, in spite of his insight into, and his great concern for, the educational issue, was unable to reach an agreement with his contemporaries. He was perhaps too idealistic to be a practical reformer and dwelled too far away from the center of political and social arenas to participate in the reform. However, In spite of this deficiency concerning the problem of practice, Wordsworth’s educational concept pinpoints the fundamentals of education, i.e., the importance of individual spiritual and moral growth, the indispensability of humanistic education, and the crucial role the
natural environment plays in education.
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