1982

Man's Search for Freedom: A Continuing Theme in the Poetry of William Wordsworth and Robert Frost

Anne C. Maier

The College at Brockport

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/eng_theses

Part of the Poetry Commons

Repository Citation
http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/eng_theses/55

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the English at Digital Commons @Brockport. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Master’s Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @Brockport. For more information, please contact kmyers@brockport.edu.
MAN'S SEARCH FOR FREEDOM:
A CONTINUING THEME IN THE POETRY
OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH AND ROBERT FROST

by

Anne C. Maier

A Thesis
Submitted to the Department of English of the State University
of New York, College at Brockport, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

1982
MAN'S SEARCH FOR FREEDOM:
A CONTINUING THEME IN THE POETRY
OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH AND ROBERT FROST

by Anne C. Maier

APPROVED:  
Thesis Advisor  
Rodman Marshall  
9/17/52  

Thesis Reader  
Calvin Rich  
9/21/52  

Chairman, Graduate Committee  
Frederick W. McDowell  
9-26-52  

Chairman, Department of English  
VExeNoMallon  
9/27/52
MAN'S SEARCH FOR FREEDOM:
A CONTINUING THEME IN THE POETRY
OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH AND ROBERT FROST

As man searches for personal freedom he is confronted with limitations which not only complicate his quest, but remind him of his fragile human condition. The more he struggles with these limitations the more he questions the reality of ultimate freedom. In the following thesis selected poems of William Wordsworth and Robert Frost are used to define man's limitations and illustrate the various ways man attempts to overcome them.

The first chapter explores some of the ways man limits his own personal growth. An individual's fear, indecision, and lack of creativity, for example, often prevent him from moving forward in the direction of freedom. This discussion leads to the matter of how man is limited by other men, both in the problems created by personal relationships and society as a whole.

The third and fourth chapters present those limitations which are imposed on man by the greater forces of Nature, Time, and Space. Man's inability to overcome the power of Nature, to control the passing of time, and to fully understand the complexities of the universe, force him to submit to his limited state of existence.

Robert Frost suggests a philosophy of simple acceptance. Once man realizes his limitations and learns to live with them, he will find happiness, peace, and a satisfying sense of freedom.
Delving too deeply into the mysteries of life is a futile exercise, resulting in frustration and confusion.

William Wordsworth, on the other hand, puts faith in the power of the imagination as the key to freedom. Once the imagination is discovered and developed by the guiding hand of Nature, man is no longer a limited being. His imagination provides him the freedom to view the world creatively and attain joy and peace in his earthly life.

Placing the works of two poets of two completely different literary periods side by side, supports the idea that man continually contemplates his limited existence. Furthermore, each poet offers the hope that man can indeed live happily despite his limitations.
# Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Chapter One:
   Man Limits His Personal Growth 8

Chapter Two:
   Man Limits Man 20

Chapter Three:
   The Power of Nature 43

Chapter Four:
   Limited By Time and Space 58

Conclusion 86

Notes 88

Bibliography 90
Introduction

William Wordsworth and Robert Frost represent two distinct periods of literature: Wordsworth the English Romantic Age, Frost the Modern American period. A total of 193 years passes from the birth of Wordsworth in 1770 to the death of Frost in 1963. Monumental historical events parallel events in their lives, from the birth of the French Revolution to the tragic death of America's youngest president. Within these 193 years there is also a continuing development and change in the style, form, content, and themes of poetry; Wordsworth fights against the established conventions of Neo-Classicism while Frost attempts to break away from the long tradition of American Romanticism. Both men are pioneers in the literary world, and both create traditions of their own.

Regardless of the amount of time, history and poetic change which occurs during the lives of these two men, one can place them side by side and discover marked similarities in their lives and their works. We associate both men, for instance, with the rural sections of their countries: Wordsworth in the mountainous Lake District of England, Frost in the farmlands of New Hampshire. Both develop a profound love for Nature and, throughout their lives, seek the natural world for comfort, solitude, and inspiration. This attachment to Nature was instilled in them at early ages by their mothers.
Ann Wordsworth allowed her children to live without maternal restraint and domination. "She had no nervous dread of calamity to her children; she did not expect too much of them. . . . Their life was free and unoppressed--full of little festivals."¹ Because of his mother's attitude toward raising her children, William was allowed to discover Nature on his own at a very young age. His childhood experiences of exploring fields and mountains were the beginnings of a lifelong bond with Nature which was revealed continually in his poetry. It is said that after his mother's untimely death, he soon was able "to transfer to Nature the affection, the faith, the religious love"² which he had felt for her.

Mrs. Frost, a great lover of poetry and a poetess herself, quoted lines from her favorite romantic writers, Wordsworth included, to her children. She followed the philosophy of Swedenborg and agreed with his idea that what was present in the physical world of Nature symbolized all that was spiritual. Therefore, it is no surprise to learn that Robert Frost was introduced to Wordsworth at an early age: "Wordsworth had also helped Mrs. Frost convey to her children the ability to feel in nature a presence which could and should inspire with the joy of elevated thoughts. He further helped her explain to them her belief that whatsoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child does, shall in no wise enter therein. It may have been easy and natural for her to quote to Robbie and Jeanie, while still in San Francisco, the lines beginning, 'My heart leaps up
when I behold a rainbow in the sky."

With the loving influences of their mothers rooted in them, Wordsworth and Frost grew to be sensitive, intelligent young men. The college experiences of the two poets reveal another similarity. Wordsworth attended Cambridge University, and although he managed to receive a degree, we know from The Prelude that his experiences at college produced disillusionment and restlessness:

"...Yet from the first crude days
Of settling time in this untried abode,
I was disturbed at times with prudent thoughts,
Wishing to hope without a hope, some fears
About my future worldly maintenance,
And, more than all, a strangeness in the mind,
A feeling that I was not for that hour,
Nor for that place."

Wordsworth's time at Cambridge was his first real encounter outside the natural world. At first he was filled with the excitement of college life, but soon discovered a feeling of isolation from the world he loved. He sensed a difference in him, an attitude which did not conform with those around him. College life ultimately became a burden for him.

Robert Frost found it even more difficult to pursue a college career. Although he briefly attended both Dartmouth and Harvard, he never finished his studies. The restlessness experienced by Wordsworth is likewise apparent in the American poet.
In *The Prelude* Wordsworth describes his nightly walks at Cambridge, in which he momentarily escapes the studious life:

> All winter long, whenever free to choose,
> Did I by night frequent the college groves
> And tributary walks; the last, and oft
> The only one, who had been lingering there
> Through hours of silence, till the porter's bell,
> A punctual follower on the stroke of nine,
> Rang with its blunt unceremonious voice,
> Inexorable summons! Lofty elms,
> Inviting shades of opportune recess,
> Bestowed composure on a neighborhood
> Unpeaceful in itself.

*(The Prelude, VI, ll. 66-76)*

As Wordsworth seeks comfort in the "unpeaceful neighborhood," so also with Robert Frost. It is during Frost's short encounter with college life that poetic ideas and purposes begin to take root within him:

Rob fell more and more into long walks, night and day walks in the fine woods and hills that surrounded Hanover. Night walks were never scary to him--it was in a house that he felt afraid sometimes . . . he was finally visited by a delegation of wags who asked what he did in the woods - all alone.
"I gnaw wood," was his reply.  

Both poets spent their lives reflecting on the state of man in a fast changing world, writing their poetry until their deaths, Wordsworth at age 80, Frost at 89.

In attempts to explain their views of poetry, Wordsworth claims that poetry is "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility. . . ." Frost says "that poems, like love, begin in surprise, delight and end in wisdom." These two statements complement one another in that they both emphasize the importance of spontaneity and feeling in poetry. Both poets also believe in the importance of having their poetry understood by the common man. Wordsworth says in his Preface to the Lyrical Ballads: "The principal object, then, proposed in these Poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect; . . ."  

From a discussion Frost had with one of his students, it can be assumed that he agreed with Wordsworth's poetic purpose. He expressed his dislike for poets like Milton because of their formality of language. He enjoyed Wordsworth because in his poetry one could detect the inflection of the human voice. Throughout his poetic career Frost "turned back to the beliefs of Wordsworth
and Emerson, who had stressed the inherent poetic quality of conversational rhythms. . . .”9 He was led “again and again to listen to the language of Wordsworth’s ‘common man’. . . .”10

Finally, both poets seem to agree that poetry is basic to understanding man’s position in the world, his relationship with his fellow man, and his relationship with God and eternity. Through poetry man discovers who he is and what he is about. Wordsworth says, “Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge—it is as immortal as the heart of man.”11 And again, a complementary statement made by Frost can be cited: “The figure a poem makes. It begins in delight and ends in wisdom. The figure is the same as for love. . . . It begins in delight, it inclines to the impulse, it assumes direction with the first line laid down, it runs a course of lucky events, and ends in a clarification of life.”12

These general similarities between the two poets lead one to investigate the possible existence of common themes in their poetic works, and very soon one notes a commonality in the human quest for freedom and the problems man encounters in such a quest. Both Frost and Wordsworth sympathize with man’s limited state in the world. They discuss the various directions of his limitations, and they offer suggestions as to how he must cope with his limited existence.

Therefore the purpose of this thesis: not to compare style and form; not to decide which poet has been more successful; not to argue each poet’s place in the study of literature; and not
to prove Frost a Romantic or to suggest that he replicates Wordsworth. Rather, its purpose is to expose a theme which represents a basic concern for all mankind, and to show how two poets, of two very different ages, express this theme. In so doing, the thesis will demonstrate that poetic themes, such as man's limitations in his search for freedom, are relevant to all readers in any given period of history.

Because we so often try - unsuccessfully - to find words to express our innermost hopes and fears about all that is, it is comforting to discover in the poetry of Wordsworth and Frost how nicely they have done the job for us. They observe what we observe and question what we question. The conclusions they draw help us to clarify our own thoughts about our place in the world.

These two poets help us to identify the human limitations we all encounter and simultaneously to celebrate the gift we all share. While assuring us that we are not alone in our trials, they urge us to view the world creatively and to utilize inner strengths as we seek ultimate freedom.
Writers throughout history have dealt with the idea of Freedom, or man's search for Freedom. Both William Wordsworth and Robert Frost participate in this struggle through their poetry. Both discover that in the search for freedom, man must come face to face with his own limitations, ranging from those we place on ourselves to those which are forced upon us by the overwhelming powers of nature and the universe. Our limitations exemplify the fragility of the human condition and the fact of our own mortality. We begin with the individual man, and with some of the ways in which man complicates his search for freedom by placing limitations on himself.

One self-limitation, according to Frost, is our own indecision. The indecision may be based on a fear of failure, a lack of self-confidence, or an unwillingness to accept challenge or change, but the result is the same: a reluctance in carrying out our plans. For example, the speaker in Frost's "The Mountain," so intrigued with the idea of climbing the mountain and finding the spring at its summit, somehow finds an excuse for not attempting the feat:

Not for this morning, but some other time;
I must be getting back to breakfast now.
In "The Sound of Trees" the speaker listens to the invitation of the forest, a chance to discover new worlds, to experience change, to discover knowledge and beauty in life. But again the speaker is reluctant. Maybe some day he will go, but not at the present:

I shall make the reckless choice
Some day when they are in voice
And tossing so as to scare
The white clouds over them on.

("The Sound of Trees" p. 94)

The use of the word "reckless" implies the speaker's lack of confidence, his reluctance to put faith in his own desire to move onward, his inability to see that desire as something truly positive. He thus resorts to waiting until the sound of the trees "are in voice," until the time is propitious. An age-old rationalization. The reader suspects that such a postponement will exist indefinitely. At the same time the speaker complains that the noise of the tossing trees is similar to the chatter of those humans who always speak of acting yet never act:

They are that that talks of going
But never gets away.

("The Sound of Trees" p. 94)

In the end, it certainly appears that the speaker in the poem is guilty of that very same fault. He represents all of us who limit our own growth by postponing our actions.
The speaker in "Into My Own" expresses the same sort of reluctant attitude. Attracted to the idea of change and the possibility of new adventures, he also possesses a disabling fear of going forward:

One of my wishes is that those dark trees,
So old and firm they scarcely show the breeze,
Were not, as 'twere, the merest mask of gloom,
But stretched away unto the edge of doom.

("Into My Own" p. 5)

The image of "dark trees" is simply the fear which keeps him from pursuing his dreams. He seems to be very much aware of this fear, and although he does not offer solutions here, he does hope that some day he will find the courage to step out on his own:

I should not be withheld that some day
Into their vastness I should steal away,
Fearless of ever finding open land,
Or highway where the slow wheel pours the sand.

("Into My Own" p. 6)

The tragic element of the poem lies in the fact that, beneath his fear, the speaker realizes that the pursuit of his dreams would be beneficial to him. He would discover truth and a better understanding of his place in the world. He knows that moving on to something new would not necessarily involve drastic change or sacrifice. It is even possible that his decision would set an
I do not see why I should e'er turn back,  
Or those should not set forth upon my track  
To overtake me, who should miss me here  
And long to know if still I held them dear.  

("Into My Own", p. 6)

He knows that his friends would not be disappointed by finding him altered. They would only discover a person more certain of his life's purpose:

They would not find me changed from him they knew--  
Only more sure of all I thought was true.  

("Into My Own" p. 6)

Yet, fear limits him from partaking in what would most probably be an enlightening experience. Pursuing his wishes, therefore, becomes secondary to battling the human fear which he has allowed to bar his way.

In all three of the above-mentioned poems, the question that faces the speakers is the same: Do I remain where I am and stay safe with my dreams, or do I try to make my dreams become real? In "The Road Not Taken" Frost goes one step further. The speaker has decided to move onward, but while on the journey he is faced with more complicated decisions. The two roads presented in the poem represent two choices for the speaker. They are two unexplored aspects of life. Now the speaker no longer can decide be-
tween something familiar and something unknown; instead, he is faced with two unknowns:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler. . .

("The Road Not Taken" p. 71)

The fact that he is only human prevents him from traveling both roads. Once again, he must struggle with his limitations.

The image of the two roads brings to mind other works of literature which concern the matter of human destiny. For instance, in Book I of Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* the Red Cross Knight and Una become separated and the Red Cross Knight travels a path which leads to the House of Pride where the knight is confronted with hypocrisy and sin. Temptation surrounds the knight because he is separated from Truth, symbolized by Una. When the knight and Una are reunited, the way becomes clear once again. While the knight is off on the wrong path, his human limitations are shown, and the reader realizes that only with Truth to accompany him can the knight complete his quest successfully.

Likewise, in the New Testament of the Bible, Jesus Christ warns his disciples:

Enter by the narrow gate, since the road that leads to perdition is wide and spacious, and
many take it; but it is a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life, and only a few find it.\(^\text{14}\)

The purpose of citing these two examples is not to imply that Frost intended either to create allusions to Christianity or to point out didactically the paths to righteousness. Nor is the purpose necessarily to show a variety of interpretations one can draw from the poem. Instead, it is to illustrate the many choices in a man's life, the many decisions that must be made, the many roads that are available. The roads presented in the *Faerie Queene* and the New Testament emphasize moral choices. Perhaps it is our own sense of morality which causes reluctance and indecision. Our tendency to categorize our choices into right and wrong, good and bad, often keeps us from committing ourselves at all. It is quite clear that the road traveled by the Red Cross Knight was the wrong one because it lacked the presence of truth. Likewise, Christ's road to perdition is obviously the incorrect choice for man.

What makes Frost's poem interesting is that the reader is never certain if one road is good, and the other bad; whether one lacks truth and life, and the other does not. The roads can represent any number of decisions relating to the speaker's style of living, career, relationships, or attitudes. What is clear is that the speaker must select one of the roads and face the consequences. Once he begins his journey there is no turning back.
We also know that whatever road he decides to take will have a lasting effect on his life. Yet, from reading the final lines, we are left uncertain as to whether the decision is a positive one, or one the speaker ultimately regrets:

I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

("The Road Not Taken" p. 72)

The reader celebrates the fact that the speaker chose the unpopular road. It implies that he did not follow the mainstream of society, but followed a path of individuality, which is traditionally seen as more difficult, but also more rewarding. Whether his choice made a satisfactory difference in his life is unclear. The lack of clarity in the final line strengthens the effect of the poem because it exemplifies the precarious position of man and emphasizes his limited state. Man begins by limiting himself in his decisions, eventually pursues a selected path, but often ends up being limited in knowing even the correctness of his choice; therefore he is left dissatisfied and unfulfilled.

While Frost concentrates upon man's emotional struggle in finding freedom, Wordsworth discusses some of the intellectual limitations man places on himself. In Book V of The Prelude, we meet the young student who has been kept away from the natural world by his Science and History books:

...he sifts, he weighs;
All things are put to question, he must live
Knowing that he grows wiser every day
Or else not live at all...
For this unnatural growth the trainer blame.
Pity the tree.

(The Prelude, Book V 11. 322-325, 328)

From these lines Wordsworth implies that gathering information and memorizing scientific facts have little to do with real living. These types of activities keep us from using all of our senses. Ultimately they limit our view of the natural world and restrict us from understanding ourselves.

In "The Tables Turned" Wordsworth warns us of the dangers of book learning and its tendency to limit our perception of the world. What we find in books can not be compared to what can be discovered in Nature:

Books! 'tis a dull and endless strife:
Come, hear the woodland linnet,
How sweet his music! on my life
There's more of wisdom in it.

("The Tables Turned" 11. 9-12)

Wordsworth's basic premise rests on the power of the human senses. Our inherent limitations become more intense when we fail to realize and utilize our senses. In regard to the damaging effect of books on one's growth, Wordsworth further argues his
case by criticizing illustrated books:

A backward movement surely have we here,
From manhood - back to childhood; for the age-
Back towards caverned life's first rude career.
Avaunt this vile abuse of pictured page!
Must eyes be all in all, the tongue and ear
Nothing? Heaven keep us from a lower stage!

("Illustrated Books and Newspapers" ll. 9-14)

One could almost go so far as to say that any technological advancement, such as the ability to print pictures on a page, or educating young students in scientific studies, may become a cause for outrage in the mind of Wordsworth. Science and technology give way to artificiality where the human senses are all but forgotten, their natural development stifled.

If books are to be used at all, they must be those which stimulate the imagination and exercise the senses. Mary Moorman explains in her biography of Wordsworth:

Throughout his life he continued to recommend a diet of fairy tale and heroic legend as the best reading for children. He could not bear the 'instructive' stories of the Sanford and Merton kind, which became at that time fashionable, and were calculated to turn children into walking encyclopedias, responding mechanically and correctly
Wordsworth remains skeptical of those scholars who have taken on the responsibility of molding the minds of children. He faults them for being limited in their perception of the dangerous situation they have created:

...They who have the skill
To manage books, and things, and make them act
On infant minds as surely as the sun
Deals with a flower, the keepers of our time,
The guides and wardens of our faculties,
Sages who in their prescience would control
All accidents, and to the very road
Which they have fashioned would confine us down
Like engines; ...

(The Prelude, Book V 11. 350-358)

The influence of these organized and practical men on the lives of children are a deep concern for Wordsworth. To train the mind into something resembling an engine directly violates all that makes up the Romantic sensibility; feeling vs. mechanism, the heart vs. the head. These men, limited in their own sensitivity to the natural world, hamper the creative development of those who are exposed to their influence:

...when will their presumption learn,

That in the unreasoning progress of the world
A wiser spirit is at work for us,
A better eye than theirs, most prodigal
Of blessings, and most studious of our good,
Even in what seem our most unfruitful hours?

(The Prelude, Book V 11. 358-363)

That wiser spirit of which Wordsworth speaks is, of course, the human imagination. All men possess it, and all men can discover it as an aid to finding freedom in the world. Yet, this discovery must begin in childhood if it is to be fully effective; thus the reason for fairy tales and heroic legends instead of primers and encyclopedias:

Oh! give us once again the wishing-cap
Of Fortunatus, and the invisible coat
Of Jack the Giant-Killer, Robin Hood,
And Sabra in the forest with St. George:
The child, whose love is here, at least doth reap
One precious gain, that he forgets himself.

(The Prelude, Book V 11. 341-346)

When Wordsworth speaks of the child forgetting himself he is talking about a state of other-directedness. To use a modern example, the man who single-handedly lifts a car to save the child trapped beneath is in the state of other-directedness. In the usual manner of thinking, the man would logically conclude that the weight of the car exceeds the strength of his body. Therefore,
the feat would not be attempted. But, in his other-directed state, the desperate desire to save his child pervades his mind, thus enabling him to carry out the superhuman act of lifting the car. Likewise, the child who reads of fanciful worlds and extraordinary people discovers the imaginative power within him; it sends his mind soaring beyond the printed words on the page into an experience of heightened sensual perception. The material in the book, therefore, is merely a vehicle used to discover the power of human imagination. And that power, continually developed, will allow for movement away from human limitation. It is Wordsworth's key to finding freedom and obtaining ultimate insight into the self and the world. Anyone who takes up fairy tales and legends, who partakes in any experience which would be considered as one of those "unfruitful hours," is really a person on the road to true knowledge.

In the following chapters of this thesis, discussions on Wordsworth will invariably fall hand in hand with that of imagination and its power. Similarly, interpretations of Frost's poetry will most always conclude with discussions pertaining to his philosophy of Acceptance. For, in spite of the fact that both poets explore the limitations of man, their perspectives on how man must deal with his limitations differ. Regardless of the comparisons which can be made, the many distinctive qualities of each poet keep them and their works separate and unique.
Chapter Two
Man Limits Man

While man's desire for freedom is rooted deep within himself, and the search for freedom is confined largely to the individual's unique self-growth and self-knowledge, the fact that man is not an isolated being, but part of a larger, outer world can not be ignored. Besides confronting the inner workings of his own mind, man must also face his human companions in this world. On one hand, man can be comforted in knowing that he is not alone and that his quest for freedom is shared by all men. The achievement of harmony among all men would result in bringing the individual closer to the freedom he seeks. On the other hand, the achievement of social harmony is as much a problem as the attainment of individual freedom. In spite of the existence of common needs and goals, the differences among men often appear larger than the similarities and result in discord and sadness. Consequently, the individual's relationships with other men and his participation in the general society can become a deterrent to his discovery of freedom.

Frost and Wordsworth both show how we men limit one another and how our struggle for freedom is complicated by the human relationships we establish and our inability to maintain harmony within them. One such limitation concerns the problem of communication. In "Mending Wall" Frost creates a scene in which two men
complete the yearly chore of repairing the stone wall which divides their property. The image of the "wall" remains consistent throughout the poem. Even though the two men complete the job together, the wall is always there to separate them:

I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.

("Mending Wall" p. 23)

As the labor progresses, the narrator questions the reason for having such a wall in the first place:

... It comes to little more:
There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
... Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offense.

("Mending Wall" p. 24)

Because the narrator sees little reason for this particular wall, he feels that to spend hours mending the wall is a virtual waste of time and energy. Yet, the reader is given to understand that the neighbor thinks quite differently.
In the poem two separate lines are repeated. The first is: "Something there is that doesn't love a wall." This line reflects the narrator's feeling about repairing a wall which, in itself, has no practical purpose. No matter how carefully the wall is mended each spring, the job will always have to be repeated because the natural cycle brings winter, spilling stones upon the ground. The narrator suggests, therefore, that walls are unnatural, or else they would remain steadfast.

The second line which is repeated is "Good fences make good neighbors." It is the line of dialogue attributed to the neighbor in response to the narrator's questions. The line is paradoxical. It suggests that men can exist peacefully together only when there is something built to keep them apart. Limits must be made and lines drawn to keep each one in his place. Crossing over the lines, or doing away with the wall is not seen as a step towards cooperation and unity, but as trespassing, as a violation of privacy. Therefore, the two opposing views of the wall become representative of differing philosophies, symbolic of those differences which keep all men from ever achieving true harmony.

The two men, even though neighbors, do not appear to be close friends. The wall, then, separates much more than simple pieces of land. The wall becomes a symbol of all that prevents us from working happily together. Whether the wall be one of fear, ignorance, or prejudice, it is quite clear that these walls exist in all of us. By limiting us in our understanding of each other, they point toward a larger misunderstanding of life itself.
In the short poem entitled "A Time To Talk" we find the "wall" again. Basically, the poem stresses the importance of friendship because we see the speaker choosing it over the opposing claim of his day's work:

When a friend calls to me from the road
And slows his horse to a meaning walk,
I don't stand still and look around
On all the hills I haven't hoed,
And shout from where I am, 'What is it?'
No, not as there is a time to talk.

("A Time To Talk" p. 79)

Intuitively, the speaker drops his hoe and approaches his friend for a chat, goes "up to the stone wall/ For a friendly visit."
The scene presented here by the poet is common enough, yet the heavy presence of the wall prompts deeper consideration. The fact that the farmer does not go beyond the wall to talk with his friend, that friend remaining outside on the road, defines the fact of separation once again. We will - or can - go only so far in our relationships with other humans.

A wall need not be physically present in order to exist. Such a wall exists between husband and wife in the poem "Home Burial." Both have shared the loss of a child, an experience which might possibly have drawn them closer together. Yet, because each partner has dealt with the death in a widely different way, feelings of anger, resentment, and misunderstanding have festered
within the wife. She builds a wall of grief, isolating her from her husband. Communication between the two breaks down and the death of the child becomes a prelude to the mortal conflict in their marriage.

In "Home Burial" Frost shows us that at the heart of every difficulty we have with others lies our expectation that others will act and react in the same manner as ourselves. What most upsets the bereaved wife in the poem is her husband's failure to deal with the death exactly as she has. Because the husband is trying to accept the death while he responds to the demands of daily living, he appears to be indifferent and even callous to his wife's grief. Consequently, none of his words or actions serve to comfort her:

My words are nearly always an offense.
I don't know how to speak of anything
So as to please you. But I might be taught
I should suppose. I can't say I see how.
A man must partly give up being a man
With women-folk.

("Home Burial" p. 43)

What happens to this husband and wife underscores the central irony of many human relationships: we build walls to shut out those most important to us. The husband pleads:

... 'Don't--don't go.
Don't carry it to someone else this time.
Tell me about it if it's something human.
Let me into your grief. I'm not so much
Unlike other folks as your standing there
Apart would make me out. Give me my chance.

("Home Burial" p. 43)

Instead, we choose to share our inner feelings with those who
are comparative strangers. We reject the aid of a loved one and
are ultimately left to deal with our problem alone. By the end
of the poem, the reader is left with the impression that unless
the wife learns to face her grief more realistically, the wall be­
tween husband and wife will grow more formidable and the marriage
relationship will collapse.

Frost expands these walls of man in the poem "Triple Bronze."
We build walls to protect ourselves and simultaneously to shut
others out. We build an inner wall which insulates us from emo­
tional pain or disappointment, but also prevents others from learn­
ing about us. We build walls around our homes to protect us from
intruders, yet the same walls shut out our neighbors. Finally,
we build walls around a nation to protect its citizens, but to
find in the end that this wall is the source of insecurity and
conflict:

I make myself this time
Of wood or granite or lime
A wall too hard for crime
Either to breach or climb.

Then a number of us agree
On a national boundary.
And that defense makes three
Between too much and me.

("Triple Bronze" p. 230)

Frost creates a rather frustrating picture. Every time man tries to make a move, a wall bars the way. Ironically, these walls which prevent progress are walls built by man himself. Thus, we return to the premise of Chapter One; that many of man's limitations are self-imposed. Man is basically alone in all he does.

In "The Tuft of Flowers" Frost continues to question the connection between man and man. Here, as in "Mending Wall," we come across two laborers. This time, the laborers have separate jobs which are completed at separate times. One man mows the field while the other overturns the mowed grass. The grass-turner begins his chore only after the mower has left the field:

But he had gone his way, the grass all mown,
And I must be, as he had been, — alone,
'As all must be,' I said within my heart,
'Whether they work together or apart.'

("The Tuft of Flowers" p. 18)

These lines from the beginning of the poem stimulate a sad tone and suggest men's failure to exist in true harmony. This
mood continues until the speaker discovers the tuft of flowers. The mower had evidently spared the flowers from his blade, mowing around them to allow their continual growth. This gesture suggests an appreciation of beauty on the part of the mower; an appreciation shared by the grass-turner. In spite of the mower's physical absence, a part of him lingers in the presence of the flowers, and the grass-turner no longer feels alone:

Nevertheless, a message from the dawn,
That made me hear the wakening birds around,
And hear his long scythe whispering to the ground.

And feel a spirit kindred to my own;
So that henceforth I worked no more alone;

("The Tuft of Flowers" p. 19)

The tuft of flowers becomes a symbol of unity and fellowship between the two laborers, and by the end of the poem the grass-turner has changed his mind regarding the relationships men have with one another:

'Men work together,' I told him from the heart,
'Whether they work together or apart.'

("The Tuft of Flowers" p. 20)

While the majority of these poems concentrate on the limitations on men's relationships and exemplify a philosophy of modern skepticism on the part of Frost, "The Tuft of Flowers" offers
an element of hope, an idea more akin to the Romantic philosophy of Wordsworth, that ultimate harmony among men is indeed possible.

Yet, in spite of such random samples of optimism, further examination of Frost's poetry leads one far more often to examples of the negative consequences of living with others. Frost sympathizes with those individuals who have somehow failed to achieve a satisfying bond with their fellow man. He illustrates lives of loneliness in such poems as "The Hill Wife" and "The Death of the Hired Man."

In "The Hill Wife" the reader finds a woman who has fallen into a state of insecurity and depression as a result of an unsuccessful marital relationship. For some reason she and her husband have grown apart, leaving her isolated in an environment where she is uncomfortable:

It was too lonely for her there,
And too wild,
And since there were but two of them,
And no child.

And work was little in the house,
She was free,
And followed where he furrowed field,
Or felled tree.

She rested on a log and tossed
The fresh chips,  
With a song only to herself     
On her lips.  

("The Hill Wife" p. 83)

To describe the wife as being "free" offers a sense of irony to the reader. Her freedom does not result from her ability to break the bonds of human limitations in order to live in peace and happiness. Hers is not true freedom at all, nothing but an empty idleness, a trap, a further limitation which creates loneliness rather than fulfillment. The irony continues as the wife runs away, never to be found again, proving to the reader that our relationships with other humans can be a deterrent in our search for a genuinely free existence. Once again, that search becomes one which must be undertaken alone.

In "The Death of the Hired Man" an old man returns to a farm where he once worked as a field hand. He has come "home," primarily because he has nowhere else to go. The couple who operate the farm are in conflict with each other over his return. Their dialogue makes up the content of the poem. The husband, arguing (rightly) that old Silas is worthless to them, insists that he not be welcomed back. The wife sympathizes with the hired man and challenges her husband's words. While this petty disagreement takes place outside on the porch of their home, the old man inside quietly dies. The unsettling conclusion of the poem is a grim reminder of man's inability to recognize the needs of his fellow
man. No matter what Silas's faults may have been, to have him die alone in a world where he has been rejected by those around him certainly seems to be the greatest human crime. It is the most tragic consequence of human relationships.

William Wordsworth presents the struggles of human relationships in an equally interesting way. In *Poems Founded on the Affections* we find the story of two brothers, Leonard and James. The strong bond of love which unites the two boys is broken when Leonard must leave home to seek fortune as a sailor. Although this move is made out of economic necessity, it is one which prevents the relationship between Leonard and James from developing further. After Leonard leaves, it is either through the circumstances of his life at sea or his own negligence that James never hears from him again. James is consequently plagued with loneliness:

His absent Brother still was at his heart,
And, when he dwelt beneath our roof, we found
(A practice till this time unknown to him)
That often, rising from his bed at night,
He in his sleep would walk about, and sleeping
He sought his brother Leonard.

("The Brothers" ll. 47-53)

James' sleepwalking eventually leads him to a rock from which he falls and dies.

We might be quick to say that it is the intrusion of society's
demand for financial security which destroys the bond of Leonard and James. Yet, we can also consider how their broken bond is dealt with by the persons involved. James is obviously so dependent upon his brother that his brother's absence makes it impossible for him to live a life of his own. His desire to find his brother again limits him in finding peace within himself. Likewise, Leonard becomes limited as a result of the relationship:

This vale, where he had been so happy, seemed
A place in which he could not bear to live;
So he relinquished all his purposes.

("The Brothers" ll. 425-427)

Sorrow and guilt make it impossible for Leonard to remain in the home he loves so much; he is compelled to return to the sea and lead a life he'd rather not live.

The problem dealt with by Wordsworth in his poem "Michael" is similar to that of "The Brothers." Again the corruptive forces of society invade the simplicity of the natural world. We also have the breaking of a strong relationship between two people. The whole poem turns on the idea of covenant: between Michael and his son, Luke. Michael remains true to both covenants; but Nature is more constant that Luke.

We can easily blame society for taking Luke from his father. Yet, we must observe the way Luke handles himself within society:

... Meantime Luke began
To slacken in his duty: and, at length,
He in the dissolute city gave himself
To evil courses: ignominy and shame
Fell on him, so that he was driven at last
To seek a hiding-place beyond the seas.

("Michael" ll. 442-447)

Although society is, indeed, a powerful force, the strength of the individual can preserve one from being totally influenced by that force. Thus, the actions of Luke as he allows the indifferent elements of society to replace the personal, more important elements which have been established in his relationship with Michael exemplify that weakness in all men.

In the end, Michael becomes the victim of his son's choices. The deterioration of the father-son relationship limits Michael's happiness in his own world:

\[
\ldots \text{ 'Tis not forgotten yet}
\text{The pity which was then in every heart}
\text{For the old Man -- and 'tis beloved by all}
\text{That many and many a day he thither went,}
\text{And never lifted up a single stone.}
\]

("Michael" ll. 462-466)

Michael's sheep-fold is the symbol of his covenant with Luke, and even though Michael continues his daily work with all intentions of completing the sheep-fold, the structure never gets built:
The length of full seven years, from time to time,
He at the building of this Sheep-fold wrought,
And left the work unfinished when he died.

("Michael" ll. 470-472)

That the sheep-fold is left undone at Michael's death emphasizes the drastic effect Luke's actions have had on his father. While Nature remains constant, the consequences of human relationships can often leave a man's life unfulfilled.

Several of Wordsworth's "Lucy Poems" reflect man's overwhelming need for other people as well as the pain which results from that need. In "Strange Fits of Passion" the poet contemplates the possible death of his lover and the effect it would have on him:

What fond and wayward thoughts will slide
Into a Lover's head!
'O mercy!' to myself I cried,
'If Lucy should be dead!'

("Strange Fits of Passion" ll. 25-28)

The fear of being left alone often pervades the thoughts of man, particularly when he has involved himself in a relationship based on romantic love:

She lived unknown, and few could know
When Lucy ceased to be;
But she is in her grave, and, oh,
The love between man and woman can produce a sense of freedom which allows one to view the world in a new light. The road of life is clearer, the appreciation of beauty is sharper, and the problems of the world appear less significant when true love is present. Love creates an energy which makes man eager to carry on with the matters of daily living. Yet, this freedom of spirit is not unconditional. Simply because it is temporary, the love relationship is limiting in the happiness it can create. Man is limited in controlling the eventual departure of a loved one, and the absence of his lover can produce effects that could restrict his life's progress even further. Each time man gives of himself to another, he risks his own security.

While loss of love through death is indeed difficult, reminding man of his limited condition, it is nevertheless natural. When love is lost through rejection, the problem of survival becomes more complex. Rejection shows us how destructive man can be.

In the poem "Ruth" Wordsworth presents the reader with a young girl who has been rejected by her father after he remarries. Like Frost's "Hill Wife," Ruth is left to wander freely on her own, and must seek companionship, not with her family, but with her natural environment:

A slighted child, at her own will
Went wandering over dale and hill,
In thoughtless freedom, bold.
And she had made a pipe of straw,
And music from that pipe could draw
Like sounds of winds and floods;
Had built a bower upon the green,
As if she from her birth had been
An infant of the woods.

Beneath her father's roof, alone
She seemed to live; her thoughts her own;
Herself her own delight;

("Ruth" 11. 4-15)

As a young woman, Ruth meets a romantic, reckless foreigner, who offers her a new life as his bride. She goes away with him, expecting to find all those aspects of life which had been missing in her youth. But her husband can not control his careless ways, and while he roams about the land, Ruth is alone once more. Her husband vows to reform his life, but eventually he deserts her completely.

Ruth can not deal with this second rejection of love; she spends three years locked away. Finally, she returns to her homeland and lives alone with nature as she did in her childhood:

Among the fields she breathed again;
The master-current of her brain
Ran permanent and free;
And, coming to the Banks of Tone,
There did she rest; and dwell alone
Under the greenwood tree.

("Ruth" 11. 211-216)

To others Ruth is known as a beggar. People pass her in their travels, but no attempt is made to invite her into society. The poet presumes that she will be united with the world only in death, when others will join together to sing at her funeral.

While the poets examine the existing conflicts in man's personal relationships, the discussion of how man limits man is not complete without looking at man's relationship with society as a whole. In spite of the fact that society is a creation of man, and is composed of unique individuals, it is often viewed as a powerful, corrupt machine, devoid of compassion and human feeling. Society becomes an overwhelming abstract force which poses a continual threat to the personal progress of the individual.

More often than not, the plight of the human individual and the desperate situations in which he finds himself are ignored by society. Such is the case in Wordsworth's "Last of the Flock." The speaker meets a tearful man carrying a lamb in his arms on one of the public roads. Because the lamb is a healthy one and the man himself has a sturdy, vital appearance, the speaker questions his weeping. The man proceeds to explain that in his youth he began with one lamb and managed to build an entire flock.
He married, and continued to increase his flock of sheep year after year. He became quite wealthy. Life was satisfying. But after a time he had six children and, in order to feed them, he had to start selling his sheep. The pressures of supporting his family became so great that his wealth diminished steadily. Ultimately he was left with a single lamb again, the one he was carrying down the public road:

'Six children, Sir! had I to feed;
Hard labour in a time of need!
My pride was tamed, and in our grief
I of the parish asked relief.
They said, I was a wealthy man;
My sheep upon the uplands fed,
And it was fit that thence I took
Whereof to buy us bread.
"Do this: how can we give to you,"
They cried, "what to the poor is due?"

("The Last of the Flock" ll. 41-50)

The "Parish" is representative of a more general society which sets its own standards of poverty and refuses to recognize the financial downfall of a given individual. Charity is therefore limited to those who have never known comfort in their lives. Because this man has tasted success at one time, he is not considered poor regardless of his present state. The man is innocent, like the lamb he carries. Because he did the right thing by pro-
viding for his family, he now must suffer alone in an unsympathetic world.

Further examples of man's conflict with society can be found in Wordsworth's impressions of the city of London. The restrictive London society stood in opposition to the freedom of the natural world. But when viewed from afar, at a certain time of day, the city created a sense of grandeur and romance as Wordsworth describes it in his sonnet "Composed on Westminster Bridge:"

This City now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
("Composed Upon Westminster Bridge" ll. 4-11)

By day, the reality of London's degeneration would become more apparent. "Wordsworth loved London, but he also hated London. Even when he loved it, he hated himself for loving it. He knew he could never really live there, but its loveliness and its hatefulness always fascinated him. . . . The reality of the crowds, the squalor, the freaks, the cheap entertainment, the maimed and the beggars appalled him when he eventually saw them, but even so, the city at night, when the great tide of human life stood still,
had almost a hypnotizing effect on him. "16 Most of what Wordsworth observes in London conflicts with his ideal image of man. London society can strip man of individuality and leave him struggling against vice and folly:

Oh, blank confusion! true epitome
Of what the mighty City is herself,
To thousands upon thousands of her sons,
Living amid the same perpetual whirl
Of trivial objects, melted and reduced
To one identity, by differences
That have no law, no meaning, and no end—
Oppression, under which even highest minds
Must labour, whence the strongest are not free.

(The Prelude, Book VII, ll. 722-730)

Besides his experiences in London, Wordsworth spent time in France. Perhaps the most striking example of man's limitation by other men comes from his own reactions to the French Revolution. Wordsworth became excited by the revolution primarily because its philosophy agreed with his own romantic conception of man and his place in the world:

Oh! pleasant exercise of hope and joy!
For mighty were the auxiliars which then stood
Upon our side, we who were strong in love!
Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very heaven!—Oh! times,
In which the meagre, stale, forbidding ways
Of custom, law, and statute, took at once
The attraction of a country in romance!

("French Revolution" ll. 1-8)

Wordsworth views the French Revolution as a new beginning for man. Its goals of Liberty, Brotherhood, and Equality represent the hope for all men. It is viewed as man's strongest attempt to achieve happiness, harmony, and freedom in the world:

Now was it that both found, the meek and lofty
Did both find, helpers to their heart's desire,
And stuff at hand, plastic as they could wish;
Were called upon to exercise their skill,
Not in Utopia, subterranean fields,
Or some secreted island, Heaven knows where!
But in the very world, which is the world
Of all of us,—the place where in the end
We find our happiness, or not at all!

("French Revolution" ll. 32-40)

Yet, when the quest of the revolution becomes perverted, resulting in violence and bloodshed, man is once again reminded of his limited state:

Frenchmen had changed a war of self-defense
For one of conquest, losing sight of all
Which they had struggled for: up mounted now,
Openly in the eye of earth and heaven,
The scale of liberty. I read her doom,

(The Prelude, Book XI, ll. 207-211)

The tragic consequences of the revolution exemplify not only man's inability to agree with his fellow man, but his inability to attain that which he wants most in the world: freedom. Because man is forced to deal with other men in a society of law and lawlessness, his noble aspirations remain trapped within his own mind, never to be realized in the outside world.

Both Frost and Wordsworth appear to agree that man lives in a fragile world where true freedom remains abstract, where human limitation exists as a constant reality. The limits we place on one another range from the conflicts arising from the personal relationships of neighbors, husbands and wives, fathers and sons, to the larger relationship between man and his created society. As Wordsworth reflects on the political and historical events of his own time, I feel he speaks for both poets:

I heard a thousand blended notes,
While in a grove I sate reclined,
In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts Bring sad thoughts mind.

To her fair works did Nature link
The human soul that through me ran;
And much it grieved my heart to think

What man has made of man.

("Lines Written In Early Spring" ll. 1-8)
Chapter Three

The Power of Nature

Although man may find that he can place limits on himself and others, there are forces which are far more overwhelming in his struggle to be free. One of these is Nature itself. It is evident through a study of their lives and their poetry that Robert Frost and William Wordsworth share a deep love of Nature. The elements of Nature are a source of comfort in their personal lives, and a source of inspiration in their written works. Each poet, through keen observation and deep meditation, captures Nature's beauty and transforms it into poetic expression. More important, their mutual appreciation of Nature extends beyond mere picturesque description.

Robert Frost recognizes Nature's ability to control man, and even to create problems for him. Returning to the poem "The Mountain," for instance, we find the image of "the wall" again. Only this time the wall is a natural one:

The mountain held the town as in a shadow
... I felt it like a wall
Behind which I was sheltered from a wind.

("The Mountain" p. 31)

While the mountain can be viewed as a source of protection, its presence is also a source of frustration for the farmers nearby.
It is the mountain which makes travel difficult and progress slow. It stifles growth. As an unhappy farmer complains:

There is no village—only scattered farms.
We were but sixty voters last election.
We can't in nature grow to many more:
That thing takes all the room!' He moved his goad.
The mountain stood there to be pointed at.

("The Mountain" p. 31)

The farmer, representative of the common man, resigns himself to the fact that the mountain can not be overcome. He can not destroy it, but must deal with it and work around it.

Nature is the force which limits our time to work, and which often makes our work seem futile. At the beginning of "The Star Splitter" Frost describes the problems Nature creates for us:

And rising on his hands, he looks in on me
Busy outdoors by lantern-light with something
I should have done by daylight, and indeed,
After the ground is frozen, I should have done
Before it froze, and a gust flings a handful
Of waste leaves at my smoky lantern chimney
To make fun of my way of doing things,
Or else fun of Orion's having caught me.

("The Star-Splitter" p. 112)

If Nature often seems to laugh at man, he can do little about it.
He continues by asking a question: "Has a man, I should like to ask, no rights / These forces are obliged to pay respect to?"

Frost answers this question, not here but in other poems, by concluding that Nature will go on doing what it will. We must accept what it gives. In "Gathering Leaves," the speaker describes his yearly chore of raking dried, dead leaves from his land. While there are enough leaves to fill an entire shed, they have no immediate purpose. They can not even provide any aesthetic appreciation for they are faded and dull. In a sense, the speaker feels foolish having to occupy his time with such a worthless chore. Perhaps Nature is just playing another one of its jokes. Yet, the man is obligated to take up such a task because he is dependent upon Nature's changing seasons for his own livelihood. Having cleared the land of Nature's debris, he can then look forward with hope to another year of fruitful harvest:

But a crop is a crop,
And who's to say where
The harvest shall stop?

("Gathering Leaves" p. 147)

From "In Time of Cloudburst" we receive another clear picture of Nature's controlling force. A rain storm washes out a garden; the owner's hard work is laid waste. While he watches the rain do its destruction, he ponders on the more powerful damage it might do:

Some force has but to apply,
And summits shall be immersed,
The bottom of seas raised dry—
The slope of the earth reversed.

("In Time of Cloudburst" p. 187)

Then the speaker seems simply to shrug his shoulders and accept the fact that he must begin his garden anew. He only hopes that this task of repeating a job will not make him bitter or resentful of his human condition.

Frost presents the same idea in "Our Hold On the Planet."

Here again, we observe human resignation to lack of control over Nature. Having mustered up the courage to ask Nature for a little rain, man is relieved that Nature did not misunderstand the request:

We asked for rain. It didn't flash and roar.
It didn't lose its temper at our demand.
And blow a gale. It didn't misunderstand
And give us more than our spokesman bargained for;
And just because we owned to a wish for rain,
Send us a flood and bid us be damned and drown.

("Our Hold On the Planet" p. 230)

Yet, Nature still provided more rain than was necessary, causing the speaker to observe a major truth: that many aspects of Nature oppose the wishes of man. Refusing to despair, the speaker tries to look at the struggle between man and Nature in a positive sense. He concludes that in spite of the overwhelming forces of Nature,
man continues to exist. He celebrates the hope that Nature must in the long run, favor man, or else man would not have survived as long as he has.

Nature is a constant reminder of our humanity. We must learn to work with it harmoniously in order to survive. We must protect ourselves against it when it overwhelms with wind and snow. We must be grateful when it brings sunshine and rain. Its water is our source of life; its soil, our source of growth; its mountains our source of challenge. Whenever man reaches a point where he thinks he has conquered the elements and is free of their controlling forces, Nature will remind us of our frail condition and set us back in our place.

Frost presents this continuing conflict in "On A Tree Fallen Across The Road." Through the use of the "tree" image, the poet shows how Nature constantly forces us to stop and consider our destiny. Nature always offers itself to us as a challenge, daring to keep us from achieving our goals or living out our desires. It is the force which keeps us humble:

The tree the tempest with a crash of wood
Throws down in front of us is not to bar
Our passage to our journey's end for good,
But just to ask us who we think we are
Insisting always on our own way so.
She likes to halt us in our runner tracks
And make us get down in a foot of snow
Debating what to do without an ax.
("On A Tree Fallen Across The Road" p. 148)

In spite of his limitations, man is a survivor. He continues to forge ahead, searching for life's meaning. Nature will make him stumble a bit along the way, but it will never stop him totally from moving forward. In fact, man needs the presence of Nature even to exist. Nature often appears as a threat to man, but its strength and beauty help man to grow. In the poem "The Vantage Point" for instance, the natural world is viewed as a welcome alternative to the world of men. The speaker implies that he can, at any time, turn his back on Nature, and involve himself in the changing world of man. When he grows tired or disillusioned by man's activities, Nature remains to provide solace and refreshment for the individual:

And if by noon I have too much of these,
I have but to turn on my arm, and lo,
The sun-burned hillside sets my face aglow,
My breathing shakes the bluet like a breeze,
I smell the earth, I smell the bruised plant,
I look into the crater of the ant.
("The Vantage Point" p. 14)

Nature often provides a welcome escape for man. It provides him with the opportunity to reflect upon his station in life, comparing the natural world with the human world. Man desires to
achieve a sense of harmony with Nature; its very existence means that man will never feel totally alone. In "Tree At My Window" Frost illustrates this essential bond between Nature and man:

Tree at my window, window tree,
My sash is lowered when night comes on;
But let there never be curtain drawn
Between you and me.

("Tree At My Window" p. 158)

Through his observation of the tree, the speaker finds that he has much in common with it. The tree must withstand the forces of the outer world. Although it is often tossed about and disturbed by wind, rain, and snow, it continues to survive and grow. Likewise, man is tossed and shaken in his own world with inner conflicts and daily pressures. Thus, the actions of the tree and the man complement one another:

Your head so much concerned with outer,
Mine with inner weather.

("Tree At My Window" p. 159)

The recognition of this link between man and Nature provides the speaker with the strength he needs in his own survival.

An even clearer illustration of the relationship between man and Nature is found in "The Aim Was Song." In this poem Frost presents Nature through the image of the wind, an untamed element
blowing in no particular direction. Man appears as the controller, who uses the wind to produce something meaningful:

Man came to tell it what was wrong:
   It hadn't found the place to blow;
   It blew too hard--the aim was song.
   And listen--how it ought to go!

He took a little in his mouth,
   And held it long enough for north
   To be converted into south,
   And then by measure blew it forth.

("The Aim Was Song" p. 139)

The wind and the man work together in a physical sense, creating sound. The sound is patterned and becomes a song, harmonious and beautiful. The song is evidence of cooperation between man and Nature, and because of this cooperation something new is issued forth:

   . . . It was word and note,
   The wind the wind had meant to be--
   A little through the lips and throat.
   The aim was song--the wind could see.

("The Aim Was Song" p. 140)

Finally, Robert Frost makes great use of the natural cycles to provide further comparisons between man and Nature. Through
keen observation of Nature's seasonal change, man discovers much about the course of his own life. Any of Frost's images relating to spring, summer and winter, or morning, noon, and night parallel the movement of man from birth to maturity to old age; from youth to love to death. Occasionally, he adapts these images to the cycle of farming. The process which begins with the sowing of seeds and ends with the harvest directly relates to the cycle of man's growth from birth to death.

William Wordsworth, like Frost, views Nature as an ever-present factor in the life of man. It is man's developing relationship with Nature which produces an understanding of self and one's own existence. He illustrates how the emotions and knowledge man receives from Nature make him aware of his own limited condition. On one hand, man sees in Nature what is present in himself. Like external Nature, man is limited by time and space. For instance, a flower is limited to the space and time it has to exist. It grows, buds, blossoms, withers, and dies. The difference lies in man's consciousness of the changes which take place in his life. While he is conscious of his individuality, a flower is not. Man and the flower will both die, but man's knowledge of his eventual death burdens him and prevents him from achieving that total sense of peace and freedom he longs for. This condition of total peace from which man is excluded can be seen in the poem "To A Butterfly." Here, the speaker observes the activity of a butterfly with a sort of innocent envy:

I've watched you now a full half-hour
Self-poised upon that yellow flower;
And, little Butterfly! indeed
I know not if you sleep or feed,
How motionless! and then
What joy awaits you, when the breeze
Hath found you out among the trees,
And calls you forth again.

("To A Butterfly" ll. 1-9)

To the speaker the butterfly seems to be representative of that carefree existence which is so often sought for by man. The "motionless" state of the butterfly suggests a peace which is uninterrupted by the need for sleep or for food. When the butterfly is uplifted again by the wind and led on to another flower, it is a welcome experience of change, whereas man often meets change with fear and disappointment. Therefore, while Nature itself may not limit man directly, it certainly makes man aware of qualities he can not possess.

On the other hand, man is aware of Nature's ability to renew itself. When a flower dies, we simply have to wait for it to come again with the continuing cycle of the seasons. Thus, though the elements of Nature pass through change, like man, ultimate death in Nature does not exist. The moon, for example, is born in the sky, passes through change, and fades away into nothingness each month, but it does not die. When man realizes this regenerative process in Nature, he also realizes his basic separation from
Nature and is faced with his most profound limitation, that of his own mortality.

Because there exists an absence of death in Nature, it takes on a higher position in the eyes of man. Nature becomes the eternal teacher which guides man to self-knowledge and freedom in spite of his basic human weaknesses.

In Book XIII of The Prelude, Wordsworth illustrates this idea of Nature as the ever-present teacher:

From Nature doth emotion come, and moods
Of calmness equally are Nature's gift:
This is her glory; these two attributes
Are sister horns that constitute her strength.
Hence Genius, born to thrive by interchange
Of peace and excitation, finds in her
His best and purest friend; from her receives
That energy by which he seeks the truth,
From her that happy stillness of the mind
Which fits him to receive it when unsought.

(The Prelude, Book XIII, 11. 1-10)

The "emotion" and "calmness" which come from Nature teach man to discover the power of his own mind. Nature gives man the "energy" which he needs to find the "truth" about himself. The key to this truth lies in the development of man's imagination.

Nature becomes for man a constant source of nourishment which stimulates the imagination and allows it to grow to its full
potential. Wordsworth illustrates this growth process in two particular collections of poetry: *Poems of Fancy* and *Poems of the Imagination*. His poems based on fancy represent the first step in the development of the imagination. They are exercises which force the mind to concentrate on the detailed aspects of Nature, and make the poet more fully aware of its beauty:

With little here to do or see
Of things that in the great world be,
Daisy! again I talk to thee,
For thou art worthy,
Thou unassuming Common-place
Of Nature, with that homely face,
And yet with something of a grace
Which love makes for thee!

Oft on the dappled turf at ease
I sit, and play with similes,
Loose types of things through all degrees,
Thoughts of thy raising:
And many a fond and idle name
I give to thee, for praise or blame,
As is the humour of the game,
While I am gazing.

("To The Same Flower" ll. 1-16)

The poet uses Nature to refine his perception of the world.
and to sharpen his sensitivity to beauty by directing his attention to commonly overlooked details of the natural world such as the daisy. As Wordsworth states in his Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, the poet "considers man and Nature as essentially adapted to each other, and the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting properties of nature." In order for the mind to become such a mirror, the poet must begin by making fanciful observations of the natural world. This practice will help feed the imagination and transform simple observation into true poetic experience. A close reading of "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" illustrates this development within the poet's mind:

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay;
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company;
I gazed--and gazed--but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

("I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" 11.1-24)

The first part of the poem describes the poet as he may have been during one of his hours of fancy: his mind floating away from the world of man and becoming totally engrossed in the natural scene around him. With simile, metaphor, and personification, the poet describes the field of daffodils he has discovered. The first three verses, therefore, can be viewed as still another of Wordsworth's exercises in fancy. Yet, the addition of the fourth and final verse adds a new dimension to the poem. Suddenly, the element of fancy disappears and is replaced with the more significant element of imagination. The "inward eye" Wordsworth refers to is the imagination itself. The imagination allows the poet to recreate the daffodil scene in his mind, not only allowing him to see the physical beauty of the scene once again, but to re-live all the
emotions which accompanied the initial experience. Thus, the bond between Nature and the poet becomes so strong that the poet may experience Nature regardless of its physical presence. Nature teaches man to discover and use the imaginative power within him and to realize that it is the imagination which will lead the man to fulfillment.

Here might I pause, and bend in reverence
To Nature, and the power of human minds,
To men as they are men within themselves.

(The Prelude, Book XIII, 11.224-226)

Both Wordsworth and Frost conclude that a close, harmonious relationship with Nature must exist in man in order for him to live happily within his limits. Frost puts faith in the development of a sense of acceptance of the world, as it is the key to happiness. Wordsworth relies on the power of man's imagination and Nature's ability to nurture that power as the way to the fulfillment of man's existence on earth.
Chapter Four

Limited By Time and Space

The existence of time is both a blessing and a curse for man. On one hand, it is the passing of time which softens pain and lightens grief. It is growth and maturation, change and progress. Time creates memories to be cherished. On the other hand, time is the pressure to get things done. It is that which can be lost because it comes and goes so quickly. Time is what we have, but cannot keep. The passing of time is what occurs between birth and death, and it is irreversible. Two facts of life which remind man that he is limited by time are his own aging process and death, topics which are contemplated by both Robert Frost and William Wordsworth.

Frost is very clear in his images relating to time. As mentioned previously the seasons of the year and the hours of the day relate directly to the passage of time in a person's life. As the day passes towards evening and the year toward winter, man is increasingly limited as to what he can accomplish. Likewise, as man grows old he must face the effects his advancing age may have on him and possibly lose control over his own life. In "An Old Man's Winter Night" we see such a man suffering from the loneliness his age creates:

All out-of-doors looked darkly in at him
Through the thin frost, almost in separate stars,
That gathers on the pane in empty rooms.
What kept his eyes from giving back the gaze
Was the lamp tilted near them in his hand.
What kept him remembering what it was
That brought him to that creaking room was age.
He stood with barrels round him--at a loss.

("An Old Man's Winter Night" p. 74)

He is too old to keep up his home. He is too old even to remember what brings him stomping from one room to another.

The entire poem is filled with images associated with the dark and the cold, suggesting not simply the end of the day and the year, but the end of the man's life. The only light is that of his lamp, the glow from the wood stove, and the dim moon. All of these will slowly fade and flicker out as the night wears on and the old man sleeps in the loneliness of old age. Time has brought him to this point. He must accept his state for there is no turning back.

A poem which deals with the problem of time in a broader sense is "The Grindstone." Here the poet raises the question of whether or not time is synonymous with progress. First of all, the speaker describes the grindstone as being a tool which has more or less been discarded. While all the other farm machinery has been stored away from the cold, the grindstone is left to sit in the snow and rust. Evidently, as the result of technical ad-
vances, some more modern and efficient tool has replaced it, and
the speaker wonders of its past use:

I wonder what machine of ages gone
This represented an improvement on.
For all I knew it may have sharpened spears
And arrowheads itself.

("The Grindstone" p. 116)

Now that the grindstone is of no practical use, it becomes
a symbol. It represents motion without progress:

Having a wheel and four legs of its own
Has never availed the cumbersome grindstone
To get it anywhere that I can see.
These hands have helped it go, and even race;
Not all the motion, though, they ever lent,
Not all the miles it may have thought it went,
Have got it one step from the starting place.

("The Grindstone" p. 115)

Perhaps this image can best be applied to man himself, and
the precarious position in which he often finds himself. At cer-
tain times man rushes about but accomplishes little; he moves but
follows no given direction.

The speaker, continuing to reflect on the past use of the
grindstone, recalls one summer's day when he and a stranger ground
a blade together. Because this stranger is described as "A Father-
Time-like man" the remainder of the poem becomes a personification of man's conflict with time. Just as the speaker needs the old stranger in order to operate the grindstone effectively, man is dependent upon time to fulfill his life's goals. Yet, time is the dominating partner.

Oftentimes, man has difficulty in knowing whether he has done all he is capable of doing or whether he has over extended himself. Often, we realize our accomplishments as well as our mistakes only after it is too late. It is only through time that we can judge the progress we have made. The speaker expresses this fear in terms of the sharpness of the blade being ground:

The thing that made me more and more afraid
Was that we'd ground it sharp and hadn't known.
And now were only wasting precious blade.
And he raised it dripping once and tried
The creepy edge of it with wary touch,
And viewed it over his glasses funny-eyed,
Only disinterestedly to decide
I needed a turn more, I could have cried
Wasn't there danger of a turn too much?

("The Grindstone" p. 117)

Like the stranger who decides when the blade is sharp enough and the job is done, it is time which rules over a man's life. The speaker thinks it unfair that time should always have the final say:
I wondered who it was the man thought ground--
The one who held the wheel back or the one
Who gave his life to keep it going round?
I wondered if he really thought it fair
For him to have the say when we were done.
Such were the bitter thoughts to which I turned.

("The Grindstone" p. 117)

Regardless of the speaker's frustration over the power of
time, the poem ends with a note of satisfaction to remind us that
we, too, must accept the consequences of time. Whether we pro-
gress, stand still, or grow worse in our years of living, we must
be satisfied with the chances we were given in spite of the outcome.

William Wordsworth reflects on the passage of time in the life
of man from still another vantage point. In the poem "Tintern
Abbey" the poet meditates on how the constancy of Nature reveals
the passage of time in a man's life:

Five years have past; five summers, with the length
Of five long winters! and again I hear
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
With a soft inland murmur.--Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
That on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.

("Tintern Abbey" 11. 1-8)
While Nature remains the same, man undergoes a series of changes resulting in intellectual and emotional growth that consequently alter his perspective on Nature itself. Fearing that these changes will weaken his relationship with Nature, the poet wishes to make the past become alive in the present and create a sense of continuity which will actively lead into the future. The poet would like to completely recapture his youthful bond with Nature and all the feeling which surrounded it:

I cannot paint
What then I was. The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye.--That time is past,
And all its aching joys are now no more,
And all its dizzy raptures.

("Tintern Abbey" ll. 75-85)

Despite his innocent desire and his sense of loss regarding the joys of childhood, he does value the wisdom gained in age:

For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:

("Tintern Abbey" 11. 88-99)

The passing of time in a man's life may bring age and its accompanying pain, but it also provides man with a greater knowledge and understanding of the world and himself. It allows him to view all things with greater insight into the reasons for existence, and to reach a greater acceptance of those reasons. Thus, the experience of age is just as important as the carefree pleasures of youth. We can only contemplate the fact that time does not allow us to enjoy the benefits of each period simultaneously.

Another poem which supports the ideas presented in "Tintern Abbey" is "The Fountain." With the introduction of the youthful speaker and the character of Matthew, aged seventy two, Wordsworth attempts to draw youth and age together. The speaker and Matthew share a close relationship in spite of their ages:

We talked with open heart, and tongue
Affectionate and true,
A pair of friends, though I was young,
And Matthew seventy-two.

("The Fountain" ll. 1-4)

Together on a spring day they enjoy Nature's beauty. The speaker, in his youthful way, wants to spend the time singing and telling tales. But Matthew is caught with other thoughts prompted by the sight and sound of the stream nearby. Its presence causes Matthew to think on the passing of time in his own life contrasted with the apparent timelessness of Nature:

'No check, no stay, this Streamlet fears'
How merrily it goes!
'Twill murmur on a thousand years,
And flow as now it flows.

'And here, on this delightful day,
I cannot choose but think
How oft, a vigorous man, I lay
Beside this fountain's brink.

("The Fountain" ll. 21-28)

Touched by Matthew's words, the speaker, in his innocence, offers himself as a son to Matthew. He wants to provide himself as a loving replacement for Matthew's lost family. Yet, Matthew, in his aged wisdom, knows that nothing can replace that which has gone before. He must, instead, continue to accept his position
in life, while cherishing the memories of all that is past:

'And, Matthew, for thy children dead
I'll be a son to thee!'

At this he grasped my hand, and said,
'Alas! that cannot be.'

("The Fountain" ll. 61-64)

Because man must succumb to the passage of time in his life, he must face the fact of his own mortality. Throughout the course of his existence, man is conscious of the presence of death in human life. Even so, because he strives for ultimate freedom, man prefers to conduct himself as if he will live forever, the fact of death conveniently ignored.

Once a man reaches the age when the certainty of death necessarily becomes more real to him, it is not so much death itself which is in question, but what may come after death.

Returning to the poetry of Robert Frost, we find several poems which express man's desire to understand Death and Eternity. In the poem "After Apple-Picking" the speaker wonders about death and whether anything follows it:

One can see what will trouble
This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.
Were he not gone,
The woodchuck could say whether it's like his
Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,
Or just some human sleep.

("After Apple-Picking" p. 53)

The speaker wonders about the "sleep" of death only after he has reached a point in his life when he is tired with age and is ready to bring his life's work to an end:

But I am done with apple-picking now.
Essence of winter sleep is on the night,
The scent of apples: I am drowsing off.

("After Apple-Picking" p. 52)

As in "An Old Man's Winter Night," we find the poet here using sleep, winter, and night as images to suggest the approach of death. These images recur also in "Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening."
The speaker contemplates death, but only momentarily:

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

("Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening" p. 140)

Unlike the apple picker, the speaker here is not yet ready to face death. He has commitments, responsibilities, and accomplishments to be made before he can rest in Death's sleep. Also, he is aware of his own human limitation in regard to the understanding of death. The woods, like the Death and Eternity which they rep-
resent, are attractive, mysterious, and complex. He would like to stay and contemplate what the woods may hold in store, but he knows that the answers are beyond his grasp, and that such deep thought will get him nowhere.

While thoughts of death come as a natural consequence of old age, we know that Death presents itself in all ages; complicating our understanding of it and compounding our fear. In "Out, Out,..." we experience the death of a child, an even more mind-boggling problem than the death of an aged adult. A child's death multiplies all of our death-related fears. One may puzzle why a child had to die, but may be perplexed even more seriously by wondering why he, an adult, should still be living. Frost insists on coming to the same conclusion here as in "Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening": the idea is too complex to understand; therefore, don't stop to wonder why, just go on with living:

No one believed. They listened at his heart.
Little--less--nothing!--and that ended it.
No more to build on there. And they, since they
Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs.
("Out, Out,..." p. 90)

We see the sense in Frost's warning when we turn back to "Home Burial." Whereas the husband has continued with daily living, the wife has not. She can not and will not relieve herself of the intolerable burden of death. Frost shows us the danger in taking this path, for the wife's own life has lost meaning, and
we are in doubt that she will ever regain her equilibrium.

Death is the final limit placed on man. Since man's nature militates against his accepting limits of any kind, human lives are often seen as fragmented and incomplete. In "Unharvested," Frost chooses an untended apple tree as his subject. Its fruit has been left unpicked by its owner. The apples have fallen to the earth, soon to decay. Frost hints at an analogy with human life. Death will always come before we have done all we have desired to do. Therefore, we must be content with the dream or the desire and not hunger unduly for the completed action:

May something go always unharvested!
May much stay out of our stated plan,
Apples or something forgotten and left,
So smelling their sweetness would be no theft.

("Unharvested" p. 199)

Many of Wordsworth's poems support Frost's ideas about death. In the poem "There Was A Boy" the poet presents a theme somewhat the same as in Frost's "Unharvested." A young boy has just begun to develop a sensitivity to the sights and sounds of Nature and what they can do for him. When death takes him at age twelve, all the creativity which could have grown within him is cut off. Wordsworth questions why something like this can happen. The poem ends with the poet staring at the boy's grave, speechless, unable to justify such a loss.

Like Frost, Wordsworth spends time with the death of children.
He seems to encourage the same attitude of simple acceptance in the face of human incapability to understand such tragedy. Wordsworth, like Frost, illustrates ways in which people must deal with losses caused by death.

In the poem "Maternal Grief" the speaker realizes the finality of death and turns to God in hope that He will bring her the strength to accept:

Absence and death how differ they! and how
Shall I admit that nothing can restore
What one short sigh so easily removed?--
Death, life, and sleep, reality and thought,
Assist me, God, their boundaries to know,
O teach me calm submission to thy will!

("Maternal Grief" ll. 8-13)

In "The Sailor's Mother" a woman chooses to deal with the death of her son by keeping something which belonged to him:

'The bird and cage they both were his;
'Twas my Son's bird; and neat and trim
He kept it: many voyages
The singing-bird had gone with him;
...And now, God help me for my little wit!
I bear it with me, Sir;--he took so much delight in it.'

("The Sailor's Mother" ll. 25-28, 34-35)

The woman's effort to find and possess her son's bird is her way of
retaining her son himself, easing the pain of loss and facilitating acceptance. As long as his bird lives, so will a part of her son.

"The Childless Father" emphasizes the idea that even with the death of a loved one, life must continue:

Perhaps to himself at that moment he said;
'The key I must take, for my Ellen is dead.'
But of this in my ears not a word did he speak;
And he went to the chase with a tear on his cheek.

("The Childless Father" ll. 17-20)

That Wordsworth expresses the man's remembrance to take his key emphasizes life's continuation in spite of death. It is the routine of daily life which forces man to move onward. He must put aside his confusion over death and concentrate on his own survival.

Even though man, in dealing with the deaths of those closest to him, manages to survive the pain, it must not be forgotten that Death is the most frustrating limitation of all. That inevitability painfully reminds him of his frail, even helpless human condition.

In Wordsworth's "Lucy" poems, we find that even the thought of death baffles us and makes us feel insecure:

What fond and wayward thoughts will slide
Into a Lover's head!
'0 mercy!' to myself I cried,
'If Lucy should be dead!'

("Strange Fits of Passion" ll. 25-28)

Thoughts of losing one's beloved are emotionally devastating. The limitation lies at the core of our inability to conquer and control this frightening force.

Through their poetry, Robert Frost and William Wordsworth make it clear that man can ignore the certainty of death only temporarily. If he returns to Nature after years of worldly living, he finds that only himself has changed from youth to age, while Nature has retained its freshness and youthful qualities. Nature continually renews itself with its seasonal cycle, whereas man passes through the season of growth but once. Man watches those around him fall into Death's arms and is rudely reminded of his own inevitable end. Is it, therefore, the passage of time towards Death which makes man's search for Freedom a futile quest? Or is it the passage of time and the experience of Death which brings man to the freedom he seeks, that of Eternity? Whatever the answers, we are forced to wait, biding time in our limited state.

Along with the discussion of death and the question of eternity, it is appropriate to include man's desire to understand that outer realm which makes up the universe. Although both poets insist that it is life on earth with Nature and Man that is most important, the desire to discover knowledge of what lies beyond
in time and space often becomes man's concern.

Because the future of man, the universe, and the question of eternity are too overwhelming for man to grasp, Frost leaves us with questions he does not even attempt to answer. Like any man, Frost would love a chance to view the heavens up close, and return to earth with knowledge of the infinities. As he expresses in "Birches":

I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,
And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk
Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more.
But dipped its top and set me down again.

("Birches" p. 78)

At the same time, he is fearful of knowing for certain what lies in that outer realm, and reminds himself that it is Earth he loves so much. Earth is where he wants to stay:

May no fate willfully misunderstand me
And half grant what I wish and snatch me away
Not to return. Earth's the right place for love;
I don't know where it's likely to go better.

("Birches" p. 78)

In "The Star-Splitter" Frost emphasizes man's burning desire to gain knowledge of the universe. His chief character puts a torch to his house in order to gain insurance money to purchase a telescope. Although the arsonist's interests are philosophical,
not scientific, he still feels a telescope is the best instrument to use in finding the answers to his questions - and he must have one at all cost. The arsonist and a friend spend one whole night searching the sky with the telescope. Much valuable discussion takes place, the two men grow close, but no answers are found. The speaker concludes that they are no better off in their wisdom now than they were before purchasing the star-gazing instrument:

"Lost In Heaven" expresses the same frustration over man's inability to grasp any clear understanding of the universe. The speaker finds an opening in the clouds and searches for some revelation. But he views nothing except unidentifiable constellations. He wonders of his place in the universe, but then decides that it is best not to know. He surrenders to a question which is too big to answer, concludes that he is better off leaving well enough alone:

"The Star-Splitter" p. 115

"Lost In Heaven" expresses the same frustration over man's inability to grasp any clear understanding of the universe. The speaker finds an opening in the clouds and searches for some revelation. But he views nothing except unidentifiable constellations. He wonders of his place in the universe, but then decides that it is best not to know. He surrenders to a question which is too big to answer, concludes that he is better off leaving well enough alone:

"Lost In Heaven" expresses the same frustration over man's inability to grasp any clear understanding of the universe. The speaker finds an opening in the clouds and searches for some revelation. But he views nothing except unidentifiable constellations. He wonders of his place in the universe, but then decides that it is best not to know. He surrenders to a question which is too big to answer, concludes that he is better off leaving well enough alone:

"Lost In Heaven" expresses the same frustration over man's inability to grasp any clear understanding of the universe. The speaker finds an opening in the clouds and searches for some revelation. But he views nothing except unidentifiable constellations. He wonders of his place in the universe, but then decides that it is best not to know. He surrenders to a question which is too big to answer, concludes that he is better off leaving well enough alone:

"Lost In Heaven" expresses the same frustration over man's inability to grasp any clear understanding of the universe. The speaker finds an opening in the clouds and searches for some revelation. But he views nothing except unidentifiable constellations. He wonders of his place in the universe, but then decides that it is best not to know. He surrenders to a question which is too big to answer, concludes that he is better off leaving well enough alone:

"Lost In Heaven" expresses the same frustration over man's inability to grasp any clear understanding of the universe. The speaker finds an opening in the clouds and searches for some revelation. But he views nothing except unidentifiable constellations. He wonders of his place in the universe, but then decides that it is best not to know. He surrenders to a question which is too big to answer, concludes that he is better off leaving well enough alone:

"Lost In Heaven" expresses the same frustration over man's inability to grasp any clear understanding of the universe. The speaker finds an opening in the clouds and searches for some revelation. But he views nothing except unidentifiable constellations. He wonders of his place in the universe, but then decides that it is best not to know. He surrenders to a question which is too big to answer, concludes that he is better off leaving well enough alone:

"Lost In Heaven" expresses the same frustration over man's inability to grasp any clear understanding of the universe. The speaker finds an opening in the clouds and searches for some revelation. But he views nothing except unidentifiable constellations. He wonders of his place in the universe, but then decides that it is best not to know. He surrenders to a question which is too big to answer, concludes that he is better off leaving well enough alone:

"Lost In Heaven" expresses the same frustration over man's inability to grasp any clear understanding of the universe. The speaker finds an opening in the clouds and searches for some revelation. But he views nothing except unidentifiable constellations. He wonders of his place in the universe, but then decides that it is best not to know. He surrenders to a question which is too big to answer, concludes that he is better off leaving well enough alone:

"Lost In Heaven" expresses the same frustration over man's inability to grasp any clear understanding of the universe. The speaker finds an opening in the clouds and searches for some revelation. But he views nothing except unidentifiable constellations. He wonders of his place in the universe, but then decides that it is best not to know. He surrenders to a question which is too big to answer, concludes that he is better off leaving well enough alone:

"Lost In Heaven" expresses the same frustration over man's inability to grasp any clear understanding of the universe. The speaker finds an opening in the clouds and searches for some revelation. But he views nothing except unidentifiable constellations. He wonders of his place in the universe, but then decides that it is best not to know. He surrenders to a question which is too big to answer, concludes that he is better off leaving well enough alone:

"Lost In Heaven" expresses the same frustration over man's inability to grasp any clear understanding of the universe. The speaker finds an opening in the clouds and searches for some revelation. But he views nothing except unidentifiable constellations. He wonders of his place in the universe, but then decides that it is best not to know. He surrenders to a question which is too big to answer, concludes that he is better off leaving well enough alone:

"Lost In Heaven" expresses the same frustration over man's inability to grasp any clear understanding of the universe. The speaker finds an opening in the clouds and searches for some revelation. But he views nothing except unidentifiable constellations. He wonders of his place in the universe, but then decides that it is best not to know. He surrenders to a question which is too big to answer, concludes that he is better off leaving well enough alone:

"Lost In Heaven" expresses the same frustration over man's inability to grasp any clear understanding of the universe. The speaker finds an opening in the clouds and searches for some revelation. But he views nothing except unidentifiable constellations. He wonders of his place in the universe, but then decides that it is best not to know. He surrenders to a question which is too big to answer, concludes that he is better off leaving well enough alone:

"Lost In Heaven" expresses the same frustration over man's inability to grasp any clear understanding of the universe. The speaker finds an opening in the clouds and searches for some revelation. But he views nothing except unidentifiable constellations. He wonders of his place in the universe, but then decides that it is best not to know. He surrenders to a question which is too big to answer, concludes that he is better off leaving well enough alone:

"Lost In Heaven" expresses the same frustration over man's inability to grasp any clear understanding of the universe. The speaker finds an opening in the clouds and searches for some revelation. But he views nothing except unidentifiable constellations. He wonders of his place in the universe, but then decides that it is best not to know. He surrenders to a question which is too big to answer, concludes that he is better off leaving well enough alone:
Let's let my heavenly lostness overwhelm me.'

("Lost In Heaven" p. 194)

After many attempts to find answers in the heavens, Frost eventually settles on simple acceptance of the fact that man, despite his limitless desire to know, is indeed limited in reaching satisfactory solutions. The speaker in "On Looking Up By Chance At The Constellations" assures us that we will have to wait a very long time for any revelation from the skies. Amid continual motion, nothing essential will change, nothing will give us any useful clues to our questions about eternity. Therefore, we must concentrate on earthly things, for only the changes which take place on earth will lend themselves to human understanding:

We may as well go patiently on with our life,
And look elsewhere than to stars and moon and sun
For the shocks and changes we need to keep us sane.
It is true the longest drouth will end in rain,
The longest peace in China will end in strife.

("On Looking Up By Chance At The Constellations" p. 173)

It is a veritable waste of time to hope in heavenly change, since for so long the heavens have been so constantly unchanging.

Just as knowledge of the universe is something which can not be found, so it is with the future life of man, whether it be his future on earth or the possibility of life eternal. Frost reiterates his advice simply to accept things as they are. In
"Acceptance" Frost watches the approaching sunset, the birds flying to the safety of their nests. As the sky becomes darker and man grows older, he finds refuge in the hope that the future will remain a secret:

Now let the night be dark for all of me.
Let the night be too dark for me to see
Into the future. Let what will be, be.

("Acceptance" p. 156)

Besides using images of stars, sky, and heavens as he pursues the question of our place in eternity, Frost also uses water symbolism. Water is something into which we gaze hopefully — but find nothing. Water is the life source. Perhaps if we turn our attention toward it, we will somehow discern the meaning for our existence. In "For Once, Then, Something" the speaker gazes into a well, again searching, but all he sees is his own reflection. Then, for once, he does appear to see something deeper. The whiteness that he spies lasts only for a second, not long enough for him to grasp any meaning from it. So it is with all of us. It is very hard to see past ourselves in our quest for understanding. In fact it is our own humanity which prevents us from perceiving, let alone understand, much of anything beyond our own physical existence. There are moments when we have a thought which seems a potential key to answers, but those moments vanish as quickly as they arrive. Yet, it is those thoughts, those visions which keep us searching.
What was that whiteness?
Truth? A pebble of quartz? For once, then, something.
("For Once, Then, Something" p. 141)

Frost uses the same image in "Neither Out Far Nor In Deep."
He says that oftentimes we turn our backs on our earthly life, and contemplate that which goes beyond the earth. We constantly search for truth. Our inability to see anything does not stop us from looking, or from hoping:

The land may vary more;
But wherever the truth may be--
The water comes ashore,
And the people look at the sea.

They cannot look out far.
They cannot look in deep.
But when was that ever a bar
To any watch they keep?

("Neither Out Far Nor In Deep" p. 197)

Like Frost in "Birches," Wordsworth expresses a desire to be raised up above the earth to a higher plane, such as in the life of a sky-lark:

Life me, guide me, high and high
To thy banqueting place in the sky.

("To A Sky-Lark" ll. 14-15)
He would like to experience that which is above him, but he knows that his true position is on earth. He must be content merely with watching and listening to the joyful song of the bird. He must rely on the hope that someday he will be able to reach greater heights:

As full of gladness and as free of heaven,
I, with my fate contented, will plod on,
And hope for higher raptures, when life's day is done.

("To A Sky-Lark" ll. 29-31)

Wordsworth does not pursue the mystery of the universe with the same energy as Frost. In his poem "Star-Gazers" the scene is similar to that in Frost's "The Star-Splitter," with people gathered around a telescope hoping for a glimpse of the beyond, searching for answers to questions about the universe. Whereas the speaker in Frost's poem actively involves himself, seeking answers, Wordsworth's speaker merely observes the scene without desire to participate. Instead, he questions the crowd's motives for looking beyond. He, himself, is satisfied with what surrounds him on earth:

Is nothing of that radiant pomp so good as we have here?
Or gives a thing but small delight that never can be dear?
The silver moon with all her vales, and hills of mightiest fame,
Doth she betray us when they're seen? or are they but a name?

("Star-Gazers" ll. 13-16)
We must not assume that Wordsworth never contemplates the mystery of the stars and universe, for in Book VI of *The Prelude* he states:

Yet may we not entirely overlook
The pleasures gathered from the rudiments
Of geometric science. Though advanced
In these enquiries, with regret I speak,
No farther than the threshold, there I found
Both elevation and composed delight:
With Indian awe and wonder, ignorance pleased
With its own struggles, did I meditate
On the relation those abstractions bear
To Nature's laws, and by what process led,
Those immaterial agents bowed their heads
Duly to serve the mind of earth-born man;
From star to star, from kindred sphere to sphere.
From system on to system without end.

(*The Prelude*, Book VI 11. 115-128)

Wordsworth acquaints himself with this mystery, but does not seriously investigate it. Since he believes so strongly in Nature and its gifts to man, to delve into the wonders of those elements which lie beyond our earthly vision, to pry into the outer realm of the universe, would seem a violation of his bond with Nature. For Wordsworth, all that man is and all that he can hope for lies in Nature. Nature itself can provide those visions of eternity
which man so eagerly seeks:

In depth, in height, in circuit, how serene
The spectacle, how pure!--of Nature's works,
In earth, and air, and earth-embracing sea,
A revelation infinite it seems;

("View From The Top Of Black Comb" ll. 29-32)

Man's sensitivity to the beauty of Nature, coupled with the power of his own imagination, enables him to catch glimpses of eternity while in his limited mortal state. In fact, it is the imagination itself which links man's earthly existence with eternity. Imagination is the key to man's freedom.

Perhaps the best illustration of these ideas is found in Wordsworth's *Prelude*, Book VI. When Wordsworth was traveling through the Alps, he looked forward with great excitement to the view of Mont Blanc. When he finally reached the sight, however, he experienced anti-climax:

That very day,
From a bare ridge we also first beheld
Unveiled the summit of Mont Blanc, and grieved
To have a soulless image on the eye
That had usurped upon a living thought
That never more could be.

(The *Prelude*, Book VI ll. 524-528)

The anticipated view of the mountain which had been created by
his imagination was by far more magnificent than the actual sight. Consequently, the imagined Mont Blanc, that "soulless image," was suddenly destroyed when faced with the reality.

Traveling onward, the poet and his companion eagerly seek the highest point of the Alps, the Simplon Pass. Having crossed a stream, unsure of which direction to take next, the travelers meet a peasant who shows them the way. Unfortunately, the only way they can go is down:

And, that our future course, all plain to sight,
Was downwards, with the current of that stream.
Loth to believe what we so grieved to hear,
For still we had hopes that pointed to the clouds,
We questioned him again, and yet again;
But every word that from the peasant's lips
Came in reply, translated by our feelings,
Ended in this--THAT WE HAD CROSS ED THE ALPS.

(The Prelude, Book VI 11. 583-591)

Realizing that he had begun his descent from the Alps, Wordsworth was again faced with disappointment. He had crossed the Alps without even knowing it. The peaks and summits he had encountered did not equal those which his mind had imagined.

From such disenchanting experiences, Wordsworth achieves a profound revelation. He finally realizes the full power of his own imagination and is able to express the way in which imagination can free man from his mortal bonds:
Imagination--here the Power so called
Through sad incompetence of human speech,
That awful Power rose from the mind's abyss
Like an unfathered vapour that enwraps,
At once, some lonely traveller, I was lost;
Halted without an effort to break through;
But to my conscious soul I now can say--
'I recognise thy glory:' in such strength
Of usurpation, when the light of sense
Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed
The invisible world, doth greatness make abode,
There harbours; whether we be young or old,
Our destiny, our being's heart and home,
Is with infinitude, and only there;
With hope it is, hope that can never die,
Effort, and expectation, and desire,
And something evermore to be.

(The Prelude, Book VI 11. 592-608)

The creative powers which lie within every man are the source of his own sense of freedom. While it is certain that man needs the physical world to trigger his emotions and inspire his thinking, he must not make the mistake of depending solely on this outside influence as he seeks satisfaction and meaning in life. He must learn to look inward as well. He must delve deep into his own soul. Discovery of his own imagination will lead him to greater
understanding of himself and will provide him with far more happiness than anything the outside world can offer. Wordsworth has shown us that the real and the imagined are often in great contrast with one another; the visions of life and the world which are rooted in the imagination usually surpass physical reality in their beauty. Whatever is real is also temporal; thus the hope of eternity rests within man himself and his imagination. The imagination becomes the eye of the soul. It allows man not only to observe the realities of the material world, but to peer into the meaning of all things and thereby to gain a perception of the world which is unique, beautiful, and everlasting:

I seemed about this time to gain clear sight
Of a new world--a world, too, that was fit
To be transmitted, and to other eyes
Made visible; as ruled by those fixed laws
Whence spiritual dignity originates,
Which do both give it being and maintain
A balance, an ennobling interchange
Of action from without and from within;
The excellence, pure function, and best power
Both of the object seen, and eye that sees.

(The Prelude, Book XIII 11. 369-378)

To Wordsworth, all men are poets and must be made aware of the great power they possess. Once that power is uncovered, man will be free. Wordsworth feels obliged to make this revelation known to all,
and in *The Prelude* he shares his life's purpose with his friend:

Prophets of Nature, we to them will speak
A lasting inspiration, sanctified
By reason, blest by faith: what we have loved,
Others will love, and we will teach them how;
Instruct them how the mind of man becomes
A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
On which he dwells, above this frame of things
(Which, 'mid all revolution in the hopes
And fears of men, doth still remain unchanged)
In beauty exalted, as it is itself
Of quality and fabric more divine.

(*The Prelude*, Book XIV 11. 444-454)

Through this discussion of man's conflicts with time and space, Death and Eternity, again we find man beset with so many limitations that it is no wonder freedom often seems an illusion.

Robert Frost continually reminds us of our limitations through his poetry and suggests that happiness can be found only in accepting the unanswerable, simply by living life for what it is. It is pointless to theorize and involve ourselves in endless discussions of life, death, and the beyond. Because we are merely human, the answers remain secret, and they will continue to be secret as long as we are alive:

We dance round a ring and suppose,
But the Secret sits in the middle and knows.

("The Secret Sits" p. 245)

William Wordsworth also encourages us to find satisfaction in our world as it exists, but he invites us to use our own minds more fully. By doing so, we can discover a power within us which can lessen the burden of our limitations and allow us to view the world imaginatively. The ability to do such a thing will give us joy and peace and a gratifying sense of freedom:

The spiritual Love acts not nor can exist
Without Imagination, which, in truth,
Is but another name for absolute power
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
And Reason in her most exalted mood.
This faculty hath been the feeding source
Of our long labour:

(The Prelude, Book XIV 11. 188-194)
Conclusion

Since the passing of both Wordsworth and Frost, man has made great strides towards a better understanding of his world. Through educational, social, and scientific advances man has greater knowledge of himself, his fellow man, what Nature provides for him, and what lies beyond in the universe. In short, man has achieved a greater awareness of all the topics presented in this thesis.

While we applaud man for all his capabilities, there are still some fearful questions which remain. Will man, with all his proof of worldly success, conclude that he is invincible and deny his limited state? Will he continue to push forward and discover, only when it's too late, that he has gone too far? If he endeavors to reach beyond his own limitations, will he lose control of all that he has achieved? Will all that he has attained gain control over him and leave him less free than he ever was? Indeed, it is the concern of many that what man has brought about through his great knowledge will ultimately destroy him.

In order to prevent such consequences, it is necessary, therefore, to stop from time to time and consider what it is we seek in life, and what elements of life are of chief importance. Great poets like William Wordsworth and Robert Frost help us to do just that. They remind us of our frail mortal existence, but they also encourage us to find the powerful depth of our minds. They offer answers to problems which arise from the matters of daily
living. They introduce us to the constancy and wisdom of Nature, and illustrate its powerful force. They question the mysteries of the world, the universe, time, death, and eternity, and simultaneously assure us that we need not completely solve these mysteries before we can experience joy and peace.

They suggest ways in which man can deal with his limited condition. First, we must accept the fact that we are limited. Through acceptance we lessen the chances of living a life of frustration and inner-turmoil. Secondly, we must recognize beauty, especially as it is found in Nature. Once recognized, it must be observed, reflected upon, and incorporated into the growth of the individual mind. Lastly, we must search within to find our full human potential. As long as we do this our lives will have purpose and meaning.

The fact that the writings of Wordsworth and Frost remain with us today, that they are still studied and appreciated, offers the hope that modern man will never completely lose his sensitivity, compassion, and belief in the heart.
Notes


2 Moorman, p. 3.


8 *PTLB*, p. 734.


10 Isaacs, p. 86.

11 *PTLB*, p. 738.


All other passages taken from this edition will be cited in the context of the paper by title and page references.


15 Moorman, p. 10.


Bibliography


