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ABSTRACT

Silence has often been treated as simply a negative phenomenon rather than as a communicative device. Four aspects of silence include: (1) negative silence, which is the experience of silence as having no positive value; (2) primordial silence, the phenomenon out of which utterance arises; (3) silence as a mode of being; and (4) silence as a destination. An examination of the different roles that silence plays in the poetry of William Wordsworth reveals the multidimensional nature of silence's communicative aspects. Close attention to a number of moments in Wordsworth's poems indicates that an understanding of silence is central for comprehension of the poet's, or any communicator's, silence. In fact, it is possible to conceptualize the Imagination as, at least in part, the translation of silence into the articulate. The poetic relationship Wordsworth attempts to establisn with nature through silence recalls Martin Heidegger's assertion that silence is necessary for genuine understanding. The complex, often enigmatic relationship of silence to speech demonstrates how poetic texts articulate the heretofore unsaid. Perhaps this faith that the unsaid is not unsayable sustains not only Wordsworth's poetry, but also nourishes the desire of poets to continue writing and readers/students to continue interpreting. (Twenty-five references are attached.) (HB)

The Mother Of Sound: A Phenomenology of Silence in Wordsworth's Poetry

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The Mother Of Sound:

A Phenomenology of Silence in Wordsworth's Poetry

Abstract: Despite our intuitive acquaintance with silence, it has often been treated as simply a negative phenomenon rather than a communicative device. An examination of the different roles silence plays in Wordsworth's poetry reveals the multidimensional nature of silence's communicative aspects. The complex, often enigmatic relationship of silence to speech demonstrates how poetic texts articulate the heretofore unsaid.

Sound presents itself so ubiquitously to consciousness that every waking hour's activities seem accompanied by this phenomenon. Even when listening to the 'peace and quiet' of isolated woods, sounds made by insects, birds, or the wind infiltrate aural awareness. The apparent omnipresence of sound masks the significance of its complementary phenomenon, silence. Silence, however, need not be ignored. J. Vernon Jensen and Richard L. Johannesen, for example, recommend devoting more attention to silence as a communicative phenomenon, and Henry Johnstone (58) advises that silence can function rhetorically. In a recent article, Peter Ehrenhaus answers the plea to research silence by examining how silence functions as a communicative phenomenon in the case of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. It remains unclear, however, in what ways silence might play a productive role in texts.

The purpose of this essay is to reveal the significance of silence in textual material, specifically to understand the ways William Wordsworth portrays silence in his poetry. Another way of phrasing the same objective would be to ask: In what ways do interpreters encounter silence when experiencing Wordsworth's poetry? Such a question deserves attention from a rhetorical standpoint, especially if the demonstration of how a poem works, "to what ends, intended or unintended, and by what means it operates on the readers, the audience--how it manages to realize such potential as it exhibits and what the quality of that potential is" falls within "the province of rhetoric" (Bryant 106). This essay, as an attempt to forge links between rhetoric and poetic, proceeds in the spirit of Cicero's claim that the bonds between literature and oratory demonstrate how "all branches of culture are closely related and linked together with one another" (148).

My discussion focuses on four aspects of silence. First, I summarize negative silence, which is the experience of silence as having no positive value. The exploration of negative silence leads to an understanding of primordial silence, the phenomenon out of which utterance arises. Treatment of primordial silence as a component in the ontogenesis of utterance directs the investigation to silence as a mode of being. Finally, I examine silence as a destination, especially in terms of its importance to Wordsworth's poetic objectives.

Two potential dividends justify embarking on such a phenomenological expedition. First, this study should provide a

more comprehensive understanding of silence as a communicative phenomenon. Second, the investigation should enhance understanding of Wordsworth's poetry. This comprehension would arise from a systematic articulation of Wordsworth's ways of encountering silence and from noting the significance of silence for Wordsworth's project of articulating what remains silent.

Wordsworth's characterizations of silence are by no means always harmonious. The apparent contradictions within his structuring of silence reflect the truism that experience of any kind does not always obey the canons of logical consistency. For example, silence appears as something that "Surpasses sweetest music" ("F. Stone" 10), but then emerges as a lull of activity "if music be not there" (1850 Prelude VI.669). I make no attempt to resolve such inconsistencies, opting instead for Wittgenstein's prescription of a varied perspectival diet as an antidote for philosophical astigmatism (Wittgenstein §593).

Negative Silence

At a glance, silence seems valueless, an impediment to effective communication. Silence is often treated as an obstacle to be overcome, hence the desire of new acquaintances to 'keep conversation going' at all costs (cf. McLaughlin & Cody). The need to remain speaking induces the utterance of any comment, often without regard to its relevance or importance. Guests at a party feel uncomfortable when the crowd momentarily hushes for no apparent reason.

The expression 'dead silence' indicates a lapse of productive activity. Describing silence as 'dead' makes silence

antithetical to all productive activity. In Wordsworth's poem "Michael," the title character's silence (447-482) parallels his lack of activity when he fails to build a sheep-fold. The shepherd's silence accomplishes nothing; he passively listens to the wind (457) after his hopes for his son's success and return are crushed. Wordsworth also mentions a "dead pause" (1850 Prelude X.109) following Robespierre's open challenge to be charged with any crime. Dead silence, however, remains valueless only if death has no value. Bypassing the Christian perspective on death as a reward and as a gateway to greater blessings, I return to the issue of silence and death when discussing deathly silence as a mode of being.

Silence often emerges as emptiness or pause. Wordsworth speaks of the "pause of silence" following a narrative (Excursion IV.8) and conjoins "silence and empty space" ("Address to a Child" 17). The sense of silence as inactivity and unproductivity arises in the poet's reference to his own "barren silence," part of a lifestyle whence he nonetheless derives "great gains" ("Personal Talk" 10, 44). The negative aspect of silence comes forth clearly when someone calls for a companion and receives no answer. Silence in this instance indicates absence of familiar life, so the habitation of silence is akin to the abode of "Wild beasts, or uncouth savages impure" ("Artegal and Elidure" 27-28). Such a silent absence terrifies Betty in "The Idiot Boy" when she cannot hear Johnny's burring or the gallop of his pony (282-283).

Another negative silence is muteness, the withholding of sound or the inability to vocalize. Wordsworth's haunted tree spitefully refuses to make any sound with its leaves ("Haunted Tree" 32-33), perhaps personifying silence's resiliency in the face of poetic attempts to understand natur . Muteness, however, is un-speakable. Whatever is mute cannot articulate, so muteness is the opposite of sound. Silence, however, is not the same as muteness. It might be possible to arrive at a conception of silence as the complement to, not the opposite of, speaking. Silence and utterance are sometimes treated as mutually exclusive (cf. Lustig; Cappella). Silence also could be understood not as a refusal to speak, but as intimately tied to utterance (Froman 136).

Although Wordsworth occasionally does encounter silence as absence or nothingness, characterizing silence negatively captures only a part of its emergence in experience. Silence and speech remain dialectically intertwined (Froman 29), and the difficulty of articulating the silent frustrates--without preventing--poetic expression. The poet's words are his legacy, so he cannot remain silent. Wordsworth rejects the suggestion that Harmony must remain the "destined bond-slave" of silence, replying: "No! though earth be dust / And vanish, though the heavens dissolve, her stay / Is in the WORD, that shall not pass away ("Power of Sound" 222-224). Articulated sound, here the trumpet's blast (213-216), opens the grave, thereby exhuming dead silence and bringing it into the realm of the sayable. Wordsworth's capitalization of 'Silence' in this poem and in

"Musings Near Aquapendente" (196), "Descriptive Sketches" (88), "Intimations of Immortality" (159), and "Wanderer that . . . " (3), also indicate that silence is not a mere thing to be ignored, but a potency with which the poet must deal. Silence adds a dimension of power to natural events. For example, silence lends Evening power, while Evening derives splendor from darkness ("Vernal Ode" 38).

Wordsworth affirms that the poet's utterance does not serve silence. In order for a poem to make it to the page, silence must be used, but not destroyed. Wordsworth describes silence as the "mother of sound" ("The Germans" 5). The maternal metaphor portrays the fragile relationship utterance maintains with silence. The articulated word, like a growing child, must become able to stand independently while maintaining an appreciation of its origin. The next section deals with the extent to which silence can be treated as origin-al.

Primordial Silence

The notion of silence as the mother of sound deserves fu-ther attention. The metaphor indicates that silence is ontologically, but not necessarily causally, prior to utterance. The mother does not cause her child, but her existence is a necessary condition of its birth. Similarly, silence cannot generate sound. Silence is causally prior to speech when silence becomes so unbearable that speech--any speech--is welcome. This phenomenon of unbearable silence becomes noticeable when someone claims, "The silence is deafening," or "The silence is oppressive." In this condition, silence retains a negative

value; speech must overcome quietness. Silence as the mother of sound, however, hints that sound somehow arises from a pre-existing silence.

We speak of 'pregnant pauses', since silence often appears as a "fecund negative" inviting speech (Merleau-Ponty 263). Utterance occurs amidst silence (White 68; Ihde 186). Heidegger considers silence ontologically prior to utterance and warns that speech cannot be understood fully unless conjoined with silence (White 43; Heidegger 208). The poet assumes the task of formulating a linguistic understanding of extralinguistic realities. Poetry represents the transference of objects of consciousness (e.g., a yew-tree) ıto sensible verbal sequences (the poem "Yew -Trees"). Wordsworth claims, "A Voice to Light gave Being," but he entertains the possibility that "Man's noisy years" might be "No more than moments" in the life of silence ("Power of Sound" 209, 217-218).

In the beginning was the Word, but before and between words lies silence. Silence comprises the ontological background out of which utterance emerges (Harries 88). Herein lies one positive aspect of silence, since "originary and fundamental silence is not the contrary of language. Rather than being that which thwarts language, silence is that which opens the way for language's potency" (Dauenhauer 119). Don Ihde summarizes the primordiality of silence: "[T]he beginning of man is in the midst of word, but word lies in the midst of silence" (186). Although Wordsworth does cast his lot for the "stay" of earth with the Word, he rejects silence as it might make utterance lose its

importance. In this sense, Wordsworth wants his inscription poems to be "free-standing" poems able to articulate origin-al silence (Hartman, "Inscriptions" 208).

Indications of primordial silence appear frequently in Wordsworth's poetry. The "timely utterance" in "Intimations of Immortality" (23) occurs after two stanzas filled entirely with visual imagery. The utterance interrupts visualization and inaugurates a stanza overflowing with sounds: cataracts blowing, Echoes in the mountains, and a plea for the Shepherd-boy to shout. The timely utterance enacts a 'breaking of silence'. The expression that speech 'breaks silence' treats silence as a phenomenon existing before verbalization, and the timely utterance ruptures primordial silence. If "Our noisy years" are "moments in the being / Of the eternal Silence ("Intimations" 158-159), then utterance is superimposed on silence. Human speech breaks silence (Excursion II.383, VI.1069, VII.299), and the cuckoo's call breaks the silence of half-consciousness ("Cuckoo and Nightingale" 90).

Wordsworth uses other images that show the primordial nature of silence. Silence appears as "deathlike fetters," reinforcing the connection between silence and death ("Descriptive Sketches" 56). Utterance breaks the fetters, as if spoken words reverse a state in which people find themselves. Silence binds with chains "loosened only by the sound / Of holy rites chanted in measured round" ("Descriptive Sketches" 57-58). Music bursts from the arms of silence ("Ecclesiastical Sonnets" 3.44.9), and this sudden emergence carries the generative connotations of silence

as the mother of sound. Wordsworth's imagery maintains the sense of sound emanating from or superimposed on silence. Silence "yields reluctantly" even to sounds not made as an intentional response to quietness ("Hermit's Cell" II.3).

The expression 'keeping silence' suggests silence is a natural state that can be reclaimed during reticence. One who keeps silent prizes such quietness (Excursion VI.105). The notion of keeping silence recalls 'keeping the faith' or maintaining traditions. When people keep silent, they maintain the silence in which they dwelled prior to speaking. The existential state of being 'in silence' has no corresponding grammatical form of speech (I cannot be in speech, but only performing speech), which reveals a sense of situatedness in silence. Activities such as musing or reading can occur in silence (Excursion II.371), so silence is experienced as a way of being which contextualizes activities. The question remains, however, how the origin-al silent context of utterance makes the transition from a foundational phenomenon to a way of acting.

Silence as a Mode of Being

The experiences associated with silence reveal the tension associated with silence itself. Each of the modes of silence discussed in this section deals with common experiences, such as death, attentiveness, and depth. Despite repeated occurrences of these phenomena, they retain an element of otherness, as if dwelling within these conditions might somehow draw us away from the life we know. For example, death and mortality define the

human condition; death accompanies life, yet the dead body is horrifying.

Ambivalence pervades the understanding of silence. When the Idiot Boy becomes silent, that encourages Betty, because it signifies dedication to his task ("Idiot Boy" 92-93). Silence, however, is foreign to Johnny, and silence puts Betty in a sadder quandary when she cannot hear her son's incessant burring (282-283). Betty's greatest fear is that Johnny "never will be heard of more" (216), since silence retains its close association with separation, especially death. Similarly, people attest to utter unfamiliarity with someone else by claiming 'never to have heard of that person'. On the other hand, silence remains inescapable, infiltrating utterance in the quiet preceding speech and in the 'pregnant pauses' lending utterances expressiveness. The absence of pauses between words makes the Leech-gatherer's speech unintelligible ("Resolution and Independence" 107-108), so silence can render the strange understandable. In this instance, silence would be welcomed.

Silence and Death

The expression 'deathly silence' conveys the understanding of silence as akin to non-existence. In a Christian world, however, death means a departure from one world and an entrance into another. Death, like silence, is not simply an erasure of meaningful activity or significance. The kinship of silence and death reappears in saying 'grave silence'. Trees can be "silent as the graves beneath them" (Borderers 576), and everyone is familiar with "the perpetual silence of the grave" ("Chiabera"

II.18). The dual sense of 'grave' as burial ground and as seriousness or profundity evokes a sense of 'grave silence' as a departure from ordinary experience (speech, mobility, etc.) toward a more contemplative or meaningful experiential mode.

Juxtaposing silence with death imagery makes further connotations of silence less surprising. Death and depth are phonetically similar, and the depth involved in digging a grave lends additional senses to 'deep silence' as an expression of the death imagery lurking in 'grave silence'. Nature's reclamation of Wordsworth's Lucy gives her "the silence and the calm / Of mute insensate things" and leaves "This heath, this calm, and quiet scene" ("Three years she grew in sun and shower . . . " 17-18, 40).

Wordsworth preserves the kinship of silence and death in his depiction of silence accompanying repose. The prone positions of a poet musing silently while lying on a couch ("I wandered lonely . . . " 19-20), ghostly Shapes in "mute repose" listening to sounds of nature ("Yew-Trees" 31-33), or a poet lying on the grass listening to a cuckoo ("To the Cuckoo" 5, 25-28) duplicate the proneness of a corpse. Not only are the positions the same, but the passivity of reclining makes the recline subject to the surrounding sounds. This inactivity recalls Lucy's subjection after death to "earth's diurnal course," her inability to counteract natural processes resulting from her insertion into the depths of the earth itself ("A slumber did my spirit seal . . . " 7).

Silence and Depth

The connection between death and depth points toward a more meaningful understanding possible during silence. Powerful emotions are unspeakable, and they leave people speechless. When the poetic character Leonard learns of his brother's death, his shock robs him of speech ("The Brothers" 408). Silence can seem "deeper far than that of deepest noon" ("The Waggoner" I.6), and silent prayer in religious ceremonies represents the moment of closest communion with holy power (van der Leeuw 423-433). Prayer "'mid silence deep, with faith sincere" brings the worshipper closer to the Holy One ("Thanksgiving Ode" 231). Vows made in silence seem to bind the participants more firmly than do public oaths, and this binding recalls the more frustrated tone of silence as chains broken by utterance. Silence can also consecrate activity, since suffering borne silently elevates agony to heroism or martyrdom (1850 Prelude I.205). The Christmas carol "Silent Night" begins "Silent night, holy night," noting that hushed conditions signify and permit appreciation of religious power.

The conjunction of silence with death helps explain why silence and water mingle in Wordsworth's poetry. The adage 'Still waters run deep' calls attention to the association of depth with lack of apparent activity. The stillness of deep water can mystify and terrify, since its lack of transparency makes the contents of depth unknown. Inhabitants of deep waters are "monsters of the Deep" which "there in ghastly silence sleep" ("To Enterprise" 74, 76).

Nowhere is the ambivalence of quietness more pronounced than in the linkage of silence with water. Water is a foreign realm where humanity never feels totally comfortable. Nonetheless, deep waters can hide great rewards. This hope is nurtured by recurrent tales of rich treasures lying in the hulls of sunken ships. Wordsworth's mariners live dangerously, braving the unpredictable seas as does Leonard in "The Brothers"). Waters "sleep in silence and obscurity" ("A Complaint" 16), so the depth of silence and the depth of water are difficult to penetrate (1850 Prelude IV.256-275). Deep waters also provide resting-places for tumultuous streams ("Song for the Wandering Jew" 3-4) similar to the rest the dead find in depths of the earth.

Silence and Attentiveness

Wordsworth connects silence with reclining and stillness, and these states share a sense of receptivity. When people lie down, relax, and 'be still', they become more attuned to events which would have escaped their attention. Silence is necessary for careful listening, since continual talk would drown out what needs to be heard. Silence is the antithesis of idle talk or chatter (Heidegger 208). "Strongest minds / Are often those whom the noisy world / Hears least" (Excursion I.92-94), and the notion of noise obscuring meaning applies to nature as well as to poets. The "strange release" of Dover "From social noise" is a silence "elsewhere unknown," a mode of being in which a Spirit can convey its message that otherwise would have been drowned out by the din of sound ("At Dover" 6-8). In The Borderers (2339), Marmaduke commands his comrade, "[I]n silence hear my doom," an

imperative highlighting the requirement of silence for comprehension of speech. A din of sound precludes attentiveness, and anyone who enters "all this mighty sum / Of things for ever speaking" ("Expostulation and Reply" 25-26) must learn that such confusion must be sorted out by recovering silence.

> Passivity is necessary to hear obscured messages:
>
> there are Powers
>
> Which of themselves our minds impress;
>
> That we can feed this mind of ours
>
> In a wise passiveness. ("Expostulation and Reply" 21-24)

Anyone who expects to learn must begin to appreciate natural objects by allowing them to manifest themselves, to become present on their own terms. It is no coincidence that Wordsworth lets Imagination come to him when he reclines (Excursion I.260-261). The unsuccessful proddings of Imagination fail because Wordsworth does not remain passive enough to let experiences envelop him.

The child is father of the man insofar as adults understand the world analytically, never appreciating the whole. Science represents a "false secondary power / By which we multiply distinctions" (1850 Prelude II.216-217). Put more simply, we "murder to dissect" ("The Tables Turned" 28). Adults want to make nature conform to human standards of rationality. Wordsworth admonishes, "Let Nature be your teacher," adding:

> Enough of Science and Art;
> Close up those barren leaves;
> Come forth, and bring with you a heart
> That watches and receives. ("The Tables Turned" 16, 29-32)

Wordsworth suggests that children "are blest, and powerful; their world lies / More justly balanced" ("Personal Talk" 23-24) than the adult world because the child-like appreciation of the world does not rely on making nature the object of human manipulation. The infant is not separate from its world. The lack of an subject-object dichotomy in children fuses them with their surroundings, making each child "An inmate of this active universe" (1850 Prelude II.242-244, 254). The child is an inmate with nature, subject to biological impulses. The boy who died before he was twelve (1850 Prelude V.381-390) is able to remain silent and listen to "the voice / Of mountain torrents" (383-384).

Even the child, however, must learn not to merge completely with nature if there is to be any hope of making natural phenomena intelligible to humans. The solitary in "Lines Left Upon a Yew-Tree" proves that appropriating nature to feed egotistical melancholy only feeds the schism between individuals and the human community from which they feel alienated. A life confined to nature is reprehensible, since such self-incarceration never allows the individual to become a spokesperson for nature and convey its messages to the rest of humanity. Distance adds sweetness to the sweetest melodies

("Personal Talk" 25-26), so a poet should avoid the myopia of thinking that nature can tell its own story. The learner must quiet the desire to analyze and appreciate how much remains beyond the reach of mortals.

Wordsworth's abortive journeys toward Imagination tend to force his encounters with his surroundings. The mist in a valley is "to awful silence bound" ("Descriptive Sketches" 410), but Wordsworth sometimes fails to appreciate that silence can be awe-ful, that natural phenomena deserve reverence and attentiveness impossible in active searching for natural wonders. Wordsworth chides himself for making rather than finding what he beheld (1850 Prelude III.515-516). This impetuosity almost allows the moonrise over Mount Snowdon to pass by him unobserved (1850 Prelude XIV.1-62).

The importance of silence emerges in Wordsworth's genius loci poems when the traveller must slow down to permit nature to reveal its messages. An ash-tree's

seeming silence makes

> A soft eye-music of slow-waving boughs,
> Powerful almost as a vocal harmony
> To stay the wanderer's steps and soothe his thoughts.
> ("Airey-Force Valley" 13-16)

The silence of an isolated spot gives the traveller an opportunity to slow his pace and discover what he otherwise might have missed ("Hermit's Cell" 1-4). The attentiveness silence allows, however, requires an object. The next section explores

silence as part of the phenomena toward which attentiveness can be directed.

Silence as Destination

Wordsworth characterizes his poetic dilemma when he describes the tension between silence and the articulation required for some sort of public comprehension or poetic expression:

> I crossed the square (an empty area then!)
> Of the Carousel, where so late had lain
> The dead, upon the dying heaped, and gazed
> On this and other spots, as doth a man
> Upon a volume whose contents he knows
> Are memorable, but from him locked up,
> Being written in a tongue he cannot read
> So that he questions the mute leaves with pain,
> And half upbraids their silence. (1850 Prelude X.55-63)

The physical void of the Carousel parallels its expressive emptiness. The physical scene cannot speak for itself, so the poet faces the most extreme interpretive test. The test is a trial of translation: How can the poet translate acts into verbal articulation? Lacking a system analogous to the substitution of one language for another, how does any poet go about "wresting new land from the vast void of the unexpressed" (Waismann 116)?

The essential issue here is, as Merleau-Ponty (179) puts it, how to transform the world of silence into the realm of the articulated. Jonathan Wordsworth (74) argues that the poet

recovers nature's power by traversing what has not been articulated: "If his work is truly to become 'a power like one of Nature's' (1805 [Prelude] XII.312), he must find the colors and words hitherto unknown to man--a barrier must be broken down, a border crossed". The poet does not treat this dilemma as an insurmountable obstacle, for he does feel only "as doth" the interpreter confronting an untranslatable text. Wordsworth half upbraids the silence, recognizing that the silent text's unfamiliarity is a requisite for its giving new insight. The problem Wordsworth confronts by approaching silence lies at the heart of poetic expression. In lieu of everything speaking for itself, how can the poet transform silence into speech while remaining faithful to the original encounter with the poetic subject?

An understanding of silence now seems central for comprehension of the poet's, or any communicator's, task. If Imagination is at least in part the translation of silence into the articulate, then Wordsworth's passive attentiveness includes attentiveness to natural silence. Wordsworth consistently connects silence with nature. This natural silence should not be confused with impotence, for nature is "powerfully inarticulate" (Hartman, "Prophesy" 24). The intertwined branches of a chestnut grove provide a "purple roof of vines" that "silence loves" ("Descriptive Sketches" 88). The "Majestic Duddon" glides in silence over sand bars ("River Duddon" XXXII.8). The silence of the forest touches Wordsworth (1850 Prelude VII.36-37), and even the noiseless worm deserves mention (1850 Prelude VII.39).

Natural silence is a circular phenomenon in the sense that silence is the primordial source of utterance and the mode of being to which nature reverts when interpositions have departed. Human edifices crumble, merging with the silence of natural objects: "O silence of Nature, how deep is thy sway, / When the whirlwind of human destruction is spent, / Our tumults appeased, and our strifes passed away!" ("Fort Fuentes" 18-20) The noises of frolicking boys, barking dogs, and bleating sheep comprise chatter or "uncouth noise" that interrupts "Nature's quiet equipoise" ("River Duddon" 7-10, 13).

When nature speaks, its utterances are akin to silence because they are unintelligible. Waters murmur ("Yew Trees" 32-33), rocks mutter (1850 Prelude VI.630), hills make "an alien sound of melancholy" ("Influence Of Natural Objects" 43-44). The incomprehensibility of natural sounds requires the translation of sound to articulation. Wordsworth does not let natural objects speak for themselves. If natural objects could speak for themselves, then there would remain no need for the poet's mediating voice. Even if nature could speak through the poet, the result would be lallation, since the natural force still must be brought into the realm of human comprehension (van der Leeuw 432). It is important that "the Poet sing / In concord with his river murmuring by" ("To the Spade of a Friend" 13-14). The poem's words can establish harmony with their subjects. Poetry neither sings for the river nor remains satisfied with murmurings.

Natural silence comes to those who are attentive. The harmony of natural objects coexisting in silence need not be sought in pilgrimages whose destination is the spectacular. The attainment of attentiveness, however, requires effort. The effort involved in achieving passiveness might explain Wordsworth's description of his work as "studious leisure" ("When, to . . . " 2). The Wanderer's host expresses the relationship between silence, natural objects, and wise passiveness in his description of a storm that rages between two mountains:

> Nor have nature's laws
> Left them [the peaks] ungifted with a power to yield
> Music of finer tone; a harmony,
> So do I call it, though it be the hand
> Of silence, though there be no voice; --the clouds,
> The mist, the shadows, light of golden suns,
> Motion of moonlight, all come thither--touch,
> And have an answer--thither come, and shape
> A language not unwelcome to sick hearts
> And idle spirits . . . . (Excursion II.708-717)

The music of natural objects coexisting and acting reciprocally is not a human voice, but the silence into which voices are inserted and to which they return. This silence is still unintelligible; nature must be "smoothed by learned Art" (1850 Prelude VI.674) to be brought into human understanding as poetry. Wordsworth realizes, however, that art must remain an adjunct to

nature in a world where nature is often overwhelmed by poetic and later, technological, artifice.

Conclusion

The poetic relationship Wordsworth attempts to establish with nature through silence recalls Heidegger's assertion that silence is necessary for genuine understanding:

> To be able to keep silent, Dasein must have something to say--that is, it must have at its disposal an authentic and rich disclosedness of itself. In that case one's reticence makes something manifest, and does away with 'idle talk'. As a mode of discoursing, reticence Articulates the intelligibility of Dasein in so primordial a manner that it gives rise to a potentiality-for hearing which is genuine, and to a Being-with-one-another which is transparent. (Heidegger 208)

The silence to which Heidegger refers, and toward which I believe Wordsworth strives, contrasts with the solipsistic withdrawal into one's self associated with reclusiveness and autism. Geoffrey Hartman agrees that treating poetic language as "the voices of silence" does not entail conversion of poetry into a wholly personal, mystical experience (Hartman, "Shuttle" 343). Wordsworth's silence recovers the community of Dasein, or historically situated human existence, with its surroundings. Attention to silence simultaneously realizes the situatedness of Dasein in the world, specifically as a participant-observer of natural processes. The potentiality-for-hearing in the context

of Wordsworth is the opportunity for attending to nature instead of trying to dissect natural events and objects analytically in order to become nature's physical or intellectual master. Silence dis-closes Dasein by avoiding total self-absorption. Re-establishing human contact with silence uncovers and recovers "the requisite mode of existence for all entities capable of being spoken about" (White 48). Just as the closest interpersonal relationships are often those in which the least needs to be said (Ott 210), so the most intimate communion with nature and with self lies in silence.

My conception of Imagination as the translation of silence into meaningful utterance by no means excludes other interpretations. On the contrary, the conversion of silence to speech is a necessary component of any particular manifestations of Imagination. Paradoxically, silence is at least part of the environment within which utterance occurs, the condition the poet seeks to understand, and the means of achieving that understanding. Silence, therefore, infuses the commencement, the method, and the goals of Wordsworth's poetic experience.

The articulation of silence relies on the assumption that silence in any of its forms can be articulated (Ihde 166). Perhaps this faith that the unsaid is not unsayable sustains not only Wordsworth's poetry, but also nourishes the desire of poets to continue writing and readers to continue interpreting. In poetry, there is no last word and no absolute silence.

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