



The Literary Mind of “Being”: Healing Power in *The Prelude*

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ABSTRACT

Book Fourteenth of *The Prelude* by William Wordsworth serves as a religious conclusion that signifies that a spiritual communion with God, infinite and transcendental and magnificently expressed by Nature, can heal and restore man’s mind in his crises of life. God’s being is a supreme Dasein, which in terms of essence is the Word/Logos, and which embraces the feature of “de-severance”, that is, eternity. And as a creator, God’s being-in-the-world is essentially caring. This article aims to employ hermeneutics to explicate the religious significance of Book Fourteenth, pointing out that Being housed in Logos is actually the healing power in life crises. I apply hermeneutics to explicate the theological significance of Book Fourteenth.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Book Fourteenth of *The Prelude* by William Wordsworth serves as a religious conclusion that signifies that a spiritual communion with God, infinite and transcendental and magnificently expressed by Nature, can heal and restore man’s mind in his crises of life. Besides being philosophical and associated with the

tradition of Romanticism, Book Fourteenth conveys a religious significance, which will be hermeneutically explained and interpreted in this article. Accordingly, the universal truths in *The Prelude* can be explicitly manifested.

The Prelude is associated with the tradition of Romanticism, which more often than not upholds the value of Nature and imagination. The strongest passages

in Wordsworth's autobiographical poem are devoted to Nature's ministry of fear rather than her ministry of beauty. His poetry, with its emphasis on the "infinite variety of natural appearances" can enrich mind. [1] Nature and human consciousness are interdependent or "correspondent powers." Especially in the first two books of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth describes the education—mainly by natural influences—of a young boy. From the age of about five to thirteen consciousness of self is merged with nature-consciousness. And the last book of *The Prelude*, in symmetry with its first book, opens with a literary walk which translates itself into a metaphor for the climatic stage of both of the journey of life and of the imaginative journey which is the poem itself. Actually, Nature and imagination are two key words frequently recurring in this autobiographical poem.

In addition, Book Fourteenth serving as a conclusion of *The Prelude* is a paean to the Romantic Imagination, which to Wordsworth was the mystic experience. The climatic vision is taken from his walking tour of Wales with Robert Jones in 1791. In moonlight, from atop Mount Snowden, Wordsworth beholds a gigantic spectacle of sky, mountains, and ocean that to him is "the emblem of a mind/ That feeds upon Infinity" (Book Fourteenth, lines 70-71). This ecstatic experience is vouchsafed by the Almighty as a symbol of Its Imagination, and within Wordsworth's spirit is the divinely implanted Imagination that can thus create universal truths. [2] Actually, Book Fourteenth reflects the history of a poet's mind of which rational 18th-century Nature is discarded for an intuitive Nature in which the poet is one with the cosmos, fully prepared for all of life and eternity.

As W. B. Gallie put it, *The Prelude* is a philosophical poem. It is of course a reflection of the poet's life story; it contains profound reflections on psychology,

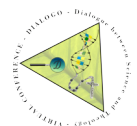
education, and politics; and there are passages of an almost purely lyrical character. And it also contains philosophical poetry.[3] Furthermore, Gallie pointed out that besides being philosophical achievements, the greatness of *The Prelude* lies, like that of all Wordsworth's successful poetry, in its passion, its humanity, its conscientious realism.[4]

II. LOGOS AS THE HOUSE OF BEING, A HEALING POWER

In this paper I apply Heidegger's concept of Being to conduct a theological reflection of "Being" in the Book of Ecclesiastes, which per se emerges as the healing and restoring power in the life crises of the poet. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger's analysis of the features of being can be mainly sorted out in the following ways. First, Being is always the Being of an entity, so it can be considered as an ontological theme. Second, an understanding of Being belongs to Dasein. Third, temporality is the meaning of the Being of that entity which we call "Dasein." Fourth, logos as "discourse" is being of the Dasein of God. Fifth, Being-in-the-world is characteristic of "de-severance." Finally, Being-in-the-world is essentially care.

Being is always the Being of an entity. The totality of entities can, in accordance with its various domains, become a field for laying bare and delimiting certain definite areas of subject-matter. Thus, Being is considered as an ontological theme. It comports itself proximally and in a way which is essentially constant—in terms of the 'world.' In Dasein itself, and therefore in its own understanding of Being, the way the world is understood is reflected back ontologically upon the way in which Dasein itself gets interpreted.[5]

An understanding of Being belongs to Dasein, but this understanding develops or



decays along with whatever kind of Being Dasein may possess at the time. Any of the 'categories' such an idea prescribes may not be forced upon Dasein without proper ontological consideration.[6]

Furthermore, the being of Dasein of God is logos. If we say that the basic signification of logos is "discourse," then this word-for-word translation will not be validated until we have determined what is meant by "discourse" itself. Logos gets translated as "reason," "judgement," "concept," "definition," "ground," or "relationship." [7] Indeed, logos is a letting-something-be-seen. One must let them be seen as something unhidden; that is, they must be discovered. Similarly, 'being false' amounts to deceiving in the sense of covering up; putting something in front of something and thereby passing it off as something which it is not. "Truth" has this meaning, and logos is actually a definite mode of letting something be seen. And because the function of the logos lies in merely letting something be seen, in letting entities be perceived, logos can signify the reason. [8]

In addition to being characteristic of the Hebrew world view, Wordsworth's "The Prelude" also explicitly portrayed his cosmology. Just as God is the center of the universe, man rules over all creations. The created world is confined to an absolute patriarchal power frame in which God is "the compass of the universe." This theological conception of Wordsworth is consistent with Alfred Tennyson's lines in his poem—Crossing the Bar in which he depicted God as an infinite pilot in his life journey.

*For though from out of our bourne of
Time and Place*

*The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar. [9]*

Regarding the infinity and sovereignty

of the transcendental God, I tend to accept Hegel's explanation of world history by the concept of Spirit. "The movement of understanding is constantly from the whole to the part and back to the whole. Our task is to extend in concentric circles the unity of the understood meaning. The harmony of all the details with the whole is the criterion of correct understanding". [10] Wordsworth's language that speaks to us is inseparable from a theological understanding of the following lines:

*To hold fit converse with the spiritual
world,*

And with the generations of mankind

*Spread over time, past, present, and to
come,*

Age after age, till Time shall be no more.

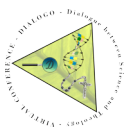
Such minds are truly from the Deity,

*For they are Powers. (Book Fourteenth,
lines 108-13)*

Therefore, I will manifest the theological significance of *The Prelude* on the axis of Logos, which is letting-something-be-seen. [11] I intend to let the theological significance be seen as something unhidden; that is, it must be discovered. Since the Logos is a definite mode of letting something be seen, the universal truths contained in Book Fourteenth of *The Prelude* can be manifested, highlighted, and even applied to our real life.

III. A HERMENEUTICAL EXPLICATION OF THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCES

For it is the whole of scripture that guides the understanding of the individual passage; and again the whole can be reached only through the cumulative understanding of individual passages. The circular relationship between the whole and the parts is not new.[12] Accordingly, as I put it right at the beginning, Book Fourteenth of *The Prelude* signifies that



a spiritual communion with God, infinite and transcendental and magnificently expressed by Nature, can heal and restore man's mind in his crises of life. This presupposition or pre-understanding as a whole can be supported by the following interpretation of the individual parts of Book Fourteenth.

The hero of *The Prelude* restored and built up himself by "beholding the emblem of a mind/ That feeds upon infinity" (Book Fourteenth, lines 71-72). The poet "recognized the transcendental power/ In sense conducting to ideal form" (75-76). It is the infinity which nourished and restored the mind of the poet. "He hath made every thing beautiful in his time; also he hath set the world in their heart, so that man findeth out from the beginning to the end the work that God doeth" (Proverbs 3: 11). The poet sought his salvation and healing via infinity, which embraces transcendental power in Nature.

In addition to the Romantic tradition, the Western civilization is characterized by Christianity, which has its absolute temporal moment in the unique redemptive event. God's chosen people are destined to be restored to the "immediacy of God." And theology was concerned with the biblical tradition. The poet, a hero in the biblical tradition, remembered "that glorious faculty/ That higher minds bear with them as their own./ This is the very spirit in which they deal/ With the whole compass of the universe" (Book Fourteenth, lines 89-92). Instead of seeking what is its own, the poet turned to the transcendental and glorious God who is the compass of the universe. Indeed, all individuality is a manifestation of universal life, so the poet went further to recognize the divine sovereignty of God after experiencing redemption in his communion with Infinity in Mother Nature.

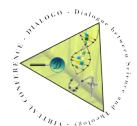
Just as Arthur O. Lovejoy pointed out in *The Great Chain of Being*,

God willed that man should in some measure know him through his creatures, and because no single created thing could fitly represent the infinite perfection of the Creator, he multiplied creatures, and bestowed on each a certain degree of goodness and perfection, that from these we might form some idea of the goodness and perfection of the Creator, who, in one most simple and perfect essence, contains infinite perfections. [13]

Furthermore, David, a well-known Hebrew king and poet, echoed Lovejoy's and Wordsworth's cosmology in Psalms 8:

O our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! Who hast set thy glory above the heaven. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger. When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him (man) to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet; all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beast of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the path of the seas. O Lord our lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!

In addition to being characteristic of the Hebrew world view, this poem also explicitly portrayed Wordsworth's cosmology. Just as God is the center of the universe, man rules over all creations. The created world is confined to an absolute patriarchal power frame in which God is "the compass of the universe." This theological conception of Wordsworth is consistent with Alfred Tennyson's lines in his poem—*Crossing the Bar* in which he depicted God as an infinite pilot in his life journey.



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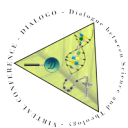
*For they are Powers. (Book Fourteenth,
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The theological understanding of these lines is the interplay of the movement of the biblical tradition and the movement of the interpreter. "The grace of the Lord Jesus, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen" (2 Corinthians 13: 14). The poet's conversation with the spiritual world is essentially a communion with the Holy Ghost. Apostle Paul highlighted the divine communion especially in Galatians. For example, he pointed out the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5: 22-23: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance; against such there is no law." Through the divine communion with the Holy Spirit the

poet can be recovered and rebuilt and led out of his own crisis, eventually reaping the heavenly blessings. In addition, "for he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Galatians 6: 8). "Such minds are truly from the Deity,/ For they are Powers" (Book Fourteenth, lines 108-13). Everlasting life is truly from the Deity, and the fruits of the Holy Spirit are powers. The poet conversed with the Holy Spirit just as Abraham talked with God like a friend in the 18th chapter of Genesis, in which the forefather of Israel argued with God about the fate of a sinful city which had fallen from grace. The divine conversation with the spiritual world leads to eternal life, which can definitely redeem an individual's crisis in his history of life.

Understanding tends to be a reproductive attitude. Hence the hermeneutically trained mind will also include historical consciousness. If we fail to place ourselves in this way within the historical horizon out of which the biblical tradition speaks, we shall misunderstand the significance of what it has to say to us. The spiritual communion with God in Nature leads to a poet's theological education and mental growth. M. H. Abrams argues that "the Bildungsroman (Wordsworth called *The Prelude* a poem on "the growth of my own mind") and the Künstlerroman (Wordsworth also spoke of it as "a poem on my own poetical education,") were specifically "of a Poet's mind".[16] In other words, the role of *The Prelude* is to recount the mental growth of a "transitory Being," culminating his achievement of a life philosophy.

All affections in the divine communion are "from earth to heaven, from human to divine" (Book Fourteenth, lines 117-19). And the vision goes with the holy words of Scripture, which saturates the poet with peace and freedom, enlarging him in the



vision of Apocalypse, in which the Lamb will be in a union with His chosen people.

*And all affections, by communion raised
From earth to heaven, from human to
divine;*

*Hence endless occupation for the Soul.
(Book Fourteenth, lines 117-19)*

...

*Our hearts—if here the words of Holy
Writ*

*May with fit reverence be applied—that
peace (125-26)*

...

*Oh! who is he that hath his whole life long
Preserved, enlarged, this freedom in
himself?*

For this alone is genuine liberty. (130-32)

It should be noted that the “communion raised from earth to heaven, from human to divine” is “after the Spirit” which a soul’s mind is spiritually set on. And to be spiritually minded is life and peace. This can be proven by Romans 8: 5b-6—“but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.”

Furthermore, a spiritual mind results from a meditation of “the words of Holy Writ.” This theological principle can be well supported by Psalms 1: 2-3a—“But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season.”

And then because of meditating on the law of the Lord, the poet’s life is “preserved and enlarged,” and gains “freedom in himself.” This echoes 2 Corinthians 3: 17—“Now the Lord is that Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”

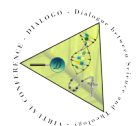
“Horizons change for a person who is

moving, and the horizon of the past, out of which all human life lives and which exists in the form of tradition, is always in motion”, [17]but we can reach “a fusion of horizons” by applying the biblical verses to the interpretation of the poet’s lines.

Furthermore, because understanding is a particular case of the application of something universal to a particular situation, the universality of experience passes into the new universality of the logos. The particular situation of the poet can be universally interpreted by the logos. Judging from the poet’s concepts such as “communion,” “the words of Holy Writ,” and “the freedom in himself,” we can reach a better understanding of the universalities which are proven and supported by Scripture. In his life of journey, the poet contacted the Creator in Nature via a divine communion which set him free from the bondage of the past tragedy and crisis. In addition, his meditation of the holy logos “enlarged” and “preserved” him, restoring and rebuilding him. And this poetical education eventually led to the growth of his own mind.

In fact, *The Prelude* is based on the life experience of the poet. And from the angle of hermeneutics, experience here is something that is part of the historical nature of man. That is, true experience is that of one’s own historicity.

Hermeneutics is a conversation with the text. In addition, it is the whole of Scripture that guides the understanding of the individual passage; and again the whole can be reached only through the cumulative understanding of individual passages. The circular relationship between the whole and the parts is not new.[18] As mentioned before, the fore-understanding of Book Fourteenth is that the poet had been rebuilt and restored mentally and spiritually via a communion with the Creator in Nature. And the following



quoted lines can show us how the divine conversation has been conducted. Indeed, the individual parts of the poem maintain a circular relationship with the fore-structure or fore-understanding.

Yet—compassed round by mountain solitudes,

within whose solemn temple I received.

(Book Fourteenth, lines 139-40)

...

Love that adores, but the knees of prayer,

By heaven inspired; that frees from chains the soul,

Bearing, in union with the purest, best. (183-85)

According to these lines, we can see that the poet's conversation with the transcendental, infinite Creator is conducted by prayers in solitude. In moonlight, from atop Mount Snowden, Wordsworth beholds a gigantic spectacle of sky, mountains, and ocean that to him is "the emblem of a mind/ That feeds upon infinity." It's in his solitude that he prays on knees to experience infinity. This can be echoed by Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane where he prayed to God to seek his will in solitude (Matthew 26: 36-44). Prayers in solitude lead to the mysterious experience of a divine communion, which surely builds and educates the poet during his journey of life.

After indicating the way of conversing with God, the poet further points out the fruits of the spiritual communion.

This spiritual love acts not nor can exist

Without Imagination, which, in truth,

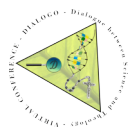
Is but another name for absolute power. (188-90)

According to these quoted lines, we can see that the poet's divine communion with the eternal God produces spiritual love, which is well defined by 1 Corinthians 13:

4-8—"Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up; Doth not behave itself unseemly, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth." Moreover, the spiritual love proves to be absolute power, which can be explicitly understood by Song of Songs 8: 6-7—"Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned." Since whoever has language has the world, the poet's language is intimately associated with the biblical world. And the fusion of horizons can not be complete without religious faith.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, first I would like to point out that this article aims to contribute to the studies on Wordsworth's *The Prelude* by applying hermeneutics to explicate its theological significances. It is expected that the biblical and theological analysis of the text can supplement the insufficiency of the past studies at home and abroad. Second, the operation of understanding or interpretation takes place within the principle of the hermeneutical circle. This principle calls for the interpreter's pre-understanding or fore-understanding as a whole. Furthermore, the individual parts of the text are supposed to be dealt with in relation to the whole. It is the whole of the text that guides the understanding of the individual passage; and again the whole can be reached only through the cumulative understanding of individual



passages. Third, the pre-understanding of Book Fourteenth is that the poet has been rebuilt and restored mentally and spiritually via a communion with the Creator in Nature. And the insight marks a significant step in the development of interpreting Book Fourteenth, which can be divided into certain constituent parts understood when the meaning of the whole can be grasped. Fourth, I attempt to incorporate the “specific hermeneutics” of biblical exegesis into a “general hermeneutics” that aims to provide the rules for any interpretation of signs. Thus, I make efforts to facilitate a meaningful interaction between the author’s horizon and the biblical horizon.

Hopefully, a fusion of horizons can be reached. Finally, the spiritual principles based on the life experience of the poet are applicable to the real world. The hermeneutic experiences such as meditating on God’s words, praying in solitude, and practicing a spiritual communion with God in Nature can serve as practical rules to help us with any life crisis.

Actually, theology was concerned with the biblical tradition. And based on a theological understanding via a hermeneutical circle, we can see that all individuality is a manifestation of universal life, and that texts are expression of life. And *The Prelude* is “the history of a poet’s mind” (Book Fourteenth, line 415), which has been restored and rebuilt by religious faith.

And lastly, from its progress have we drawn

Faith in life endless, the sustaining thought

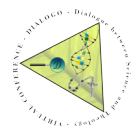
Of human being, eternity, and God. (203-05)

Thus, through a divine communion in faith, the poet can voice his inspiration in eternal Being. He is like a prophet of his

age and race, and his revelation can be eternally preserved as cultural legacy and conventional wisdom.

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BIOGRAPHY



Paul Tseng, was born in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, and got his PhD in Philosophy at National Kaohsiung Normal University, Kaohsiung, Taiwan in June, 2009.

He is running a workshop of editing and translation to serve the needs of the campus, and he has been an assistant professor at three local universities (Taipei University of Technology, Taipei University of Nursing and Health Sciences, Open University, Taipei, Taiwan.) The last three published books are as follows. “Explore Journalism”, Taipei: Tunghua Company, 2021, “Essential Written Grammar”, Taipei: Tunghua Company, 2020, and “Advanced Written Grammar”, Taipei: Tunghua Company, 2018.

