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**A BIBLICAL READING OF WILLIAM
WORDSWORTH'S POEM *ODE:
INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY FROM
RECOLLECTIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD***

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Title: A Biblical Reading of William Wordsworth's Poem *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*.

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Abstract: This paper examines in depth the concepts of childhood and immortality in William Wordsworth's poem *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* in light of the biblical allusions presented in the text. My thesis supports the claim of a hidden transcendental spirituality revealed through a close-reading of the poem, and later clarified in relation to *The Scriptures*. Following the chronological order of the child's cognitive and physical development, I analyze the natural characteristics of the child in terms of memory, nostalgia, and the natural environment. Furthermore, an explanation of the spiritual attributes of the child is given by means of theories which apply to basic theology. Examples of ontological, teleological, and depth psychology arguments are utilized to show the necessity for immortality and to provide an evident spiritual aspect in the poem.

Keywords: William Wordsworth, *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*, childhood, nostalgia, immortality, memory, spirituality, biblical allusions

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1. Introduction

William Wordsworth is an influential writer belonging to the Romantic period in the history of literature. Throughout his life, he received numerous recognitions in honor of his poetry and his writings are still appreciated after his death. For this reason, he has been described as “our great nature poet” with his nature poems, such as *The Daffodils* or the famous *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*, being read with respect by scholars even today (Beach 635). However, although his popularity has allowed his poems to be interpreted in many different ways, the spiritual aspect of them still needs more attention. For instance, his poem *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* has been reviewed as “altogether ‘natural’ [. . .] not founded in any visionary or eschatological intimation”, despite its spiritual character (Fry 152). This example of interpretation is supported by critics who claim that “Wordsworth moves into an account of the forces in nature that helped reconcile him to the outer world and bring him to adult stability,” and that the “Soul that rises” is “an accurate description of the birth process” (Beer 111). As a result, Taylor indicates that “a recent reader”, who is influenced by similar views, “takes no notice of transcendent implications” (633). In contrast, she believes that the reader focuses on the poem’s theme of childhood and its complications, which has been studied extensively by literary scholars in relation to the development of psychological sciences (Anya 633-634).

Predictably, these studies have focused and are still focusing designedly on the child as a subject in literature, because of the numerous works of art that have been written about it. In general terms though, as far as research has been conducted, a significant amount of emphasis has been added to the discussion about childhood as a young stage of being or existence, a developmental level towards adolescence, or a microcosm of what is to be, as Taylor suggests (633). However, according to previous studies as of Linda M. Austin, childhood can be considered retrospectively as a romantic invention in English literature (75). For example, in romantic poetry the child is portrayed as an autonomous, mythic, and innocent subject of nature; or as in Wordsworth’s *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* as a subject closer to God, heaven, and sanctification. On the contrary, during adolescence it appears that this childhood being is overwhelmed by the burdens of life and changes identity (Austin 75). Hence, both of these examples reveal the chasm between the generations and provoke emotions of sadness, distance, and a longing for a lost childhood, or Eden, in the poet.

More analytically, this phenomenon, namely nostalgia in psychological terms, is a pre-Romantic iconology of the child used as a literary device to produce sentimental effects both on the poet and the reader (Hoerner 631-661). That said, the reader of such poems finds himself “locked up in the irrationality of thoughts the image of the child brings”, and finally, he becomes aware of his mortality, but without any transcendental effect (Taylor 632). This type of psychological and naturalistic analysis agrees with Trilling’s dominant naturalistic view. Trilling assumes that all biblical references are simply figurative and excludes any possibility that they could be considered contributing to meaning (130-158). Consequently, the literal and biblical meanings of immortality and the divine related to the child have been ignored, which I believe leads to the conclusion that the poem has been deprived of its contextual meaning; the one that “Wordsworth’s own full title precisely and deliberately indicates” (Taylor 633).

In other words, further study is required to shed light on the biblical allusions and symbolism present in Wordsworth’s poem. For this reason, the purpose of this paper is to illuminate and extend the exploration of the hidden truths about childhood and immortality, and to illustrate the significance of spirituality in the poem. More specifically, I will attempt to answer the following research questions: (a) What does childhood represent in Wordsworth’s poem *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*? (b) How is immortality related to childhood? (c) What is the use of biblical allusions in relation to the poem’s themes?

In order to provide answers to the questions above, I have decided to divide my research into sections, critically studying each theme and their relation, by means of the chosen method and theories. These are depth psychoanalysis, cognitive development, teleology, ontology, and basic theology.

To begin with, the first section is a general introduction to the *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* with a focus on the theme of childhood studied in light of naturalistic theories and psychoanalysis, which have been used in previous research. Clearly, both naturalism and psychoanalysis are secular ideas that perceive childhood and the past as a set of fixed choices influenced and guided by experience that creates one’s memories, which in turn gives birth to further experiences that guide the person’s future choices, and the cycle is continually replicated (Shengold 27-29). However, when dealing with agnostic theories, there is no reference to the divine or God’s existence. As

a result, these theories suggest possible limitations, since immortality cannot be studied from a spiritual perspective. Therefore, while secondary sources regarding psychoanalysis and similar theories can assist in providing a wider understanding of childhood as the majority view it, this approach is used only to create a contrast between this naturalistic view and the biblical aspect I aim to discuss.

Moving on, the following section concerns a discussion of immortality and an explanation of the child's immortal attributes through basic theological theories. In other words, this second part of the close-reading-process takes advantage of psychoanalysis, ontology, and teleology, which show parallels between literature as a felt experience and spirituality, the divine, and faith in God (Hillman, 1975: 180). Thus, I will use these principles to analyze childhood through the eyes of immortality that concerns the child's biblical characteristics.

Finally, the third section is a biblical reading of the poem, or a discussion of the symbolism and biblical truths that childhood prophetically represents in the poem. Simply put, the purpose of this last part is to exemplify and shed light to the use of biblical allusions in the poem, which Wordsworth portrays through the themes of childhood and immortality.

To sum up, by using the theories and methods described to analyze the themes of childhood and immortality, I hope to find answers to my questions that will support the existence of a spiritual aspect in the poem. Moreover, I trust that this research could be used to expand our understanding of immortality as contributing to meaning, not just figuratively, which would add a transcendental effect to the reading of the poem.

2. Childhood

The *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* is a poem revolving mainly around the theme of childhood and the journey towards maturity. To explain the child's progression, as well as the poem's, Wordsworth uses characteristics referring to different chronological periods in the life of the child. For example, flashbacks are utilized in terms of the memories recollected in early childhood, when he describes the adult man's past. Additionally, present and future references, which are a tool to delineate the intimations of immortality, also have a role to play in the child's development towards adolescence. Nevertheless, although it can be concluded that Wordsworth exploits space and time to illustrate adulthood, commentary on his poetical child has been often limited to its relationship to three-dimensional nature, avoiding referring to spirituality. In other words, there have been only a few attempts to synthesize the poet's depiction into one organic vision of childhood. Hiers indicates that when one focuses mainly on the child's responses to nature's stimuli, one forgets to consider the child's transcendental mind: "A comprehensive examination, however, reveals the child's" four-dimensional transcendental mind and that is, "his innate powers to unify the world of natural mutability and to envision the eternal beauty of all life" (Hiers 8). Given these points, this section will analyze the concept of childhood in chronological order, while discussing the discrepancy between a naturalistic and a spiritual view.

To begin with, although the poem indicates the existence of the child's soul prior to birth, the earliest stage of being mentioned after birth is known as infancy. During this period, infants can respond to a wide range of environmental stimuli, especially through the sense of touch, but vision is not richly developed (Piaget online, n.pg.). Oddly, Wordsworth's poetic spirit, or the ability to experience visions, seems to develop at this time, when newborns explore the world and create bonds with nature through playing. Hiers, however, suggests that nature cannot be the sole or "ultimate source of the child's intuitive wisdom" (8) that Wordsworth mentions when he refers to the child as 'a prophet' (115). Rather, Heirs states that "the child enters the world with the ability to create and unify" (8). Additionally, Jean Piaget, who is a pioneer in the study of children's thinking following the ideas of Freudian psychoanalysis, explains this scientifically in terms of cognitive development. His belief is based on two dynamic processes that every behavioral act requires: assimilation and accommodation (Piaget online, n.pg.). The first is a description of the process of acquiring new information about the world that is perceived through the child's senses, and positioning

it in parallel lines, or in unity with already existing information in the brain. Accordingly, it can be assumed that the intimation of the happiness of childhood is the reminiscence of blessedness in a former state that the prophetic child has recollected in his memory (Piaget online, n.pg.). This would then lead to the consideration of “the doctrine of pre-existence” (Hiers 10), which will be discussed in a later section, or to the conclusion that the child’s “transcendental mind not only unifies”, as Hiers claims, “but it also inwardly envisions the eternity of all existence” (10). More specifically, Rader explains that “the child’s intellect functions on another level - an innate vision into absolute, eternal beauty” (qtd. in Hiers 9). He states that in the poem the child deserves the title of ‘best philosopher’ not “by virtue of intellectual penetration, but by reason of those powers which inject sensation with absolute beauty, a possession inborn” (qtd. in Hiers 9). Piaget names these powers as accommodation and describes them as a process of creating concepts that are able to bear new information, and thus allow the child to grow (online, n.pg.).

However, although growing is an inevitable experience in the poem, it is definitely not a pleasant one according to Wordsworth. As approaching adolescence, the once ‘joyful child’ is weighed down by the troubles of this world and the perplexity of daily life, that remembering his youth’s blessedness is feasible only through visions of memory which appear dimmer by the passing of time. More specifically, the child cannot escape the natural maturation that follows childhood; he cannot avoid what is called “the paradox of the child’s causing his own vision” (Hiers 8). Moreover, he cannot keep away from suffering the loss of “his primitivistic, intuitive powers of natural morality” that finally leads to “detrimental complexity of vision, understanding, and moral judgment” (Hiers 8). This retrospective phenomenon of a yearning for the past is nostalgia and is clearly evident in Wordsworth’s description of a lost childhood. His child of nature becomes in the middle of the poem “one from whom the subject felt sadly distant” (Austin 76). However, what is of greater value to Wordsworth is the fact that the vivid visionary perception of an exalted childhood fades with age and thus “severs the being of the child from that of the adult” (Austin 83). Childhood is shown to be the “one period in which everyone’s genius seems to have glimmered”; a period filled with “endless emotional spontaneity and endless potential”, while the latter is “an image of all mature estranged minds” (Austin 83). Either way, the poet implies that “the quality or affect of early experiences does not much matter: “be they what they may,” they become “a master-light of all our seeing” (Austin 84). What is more, Austin suggests that Wordsworth’s greatest argument lies in that “the passing of infancy and early childhood brings a loss of

extraordinariness; even a prosaic existence mourns this passing because, as the poem implies, the existence of everyone beyond such a childhood is prosaic” (84). Hence, the *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* illustrates by means of the child’s journey towards maturity the type of unromantic memory which nostalgia represents, that is, “inorganic, uncondusive to maintaining a sense of self and impersonal despite its significant private application” (Austin 84).

In conclusion, if the poem is read based on a naturalistic view that excludes spirituality, it is deprived of the intimations of immortality from recollections of early childhood. “The extraordinariness of the ordinary childhood” with all its jollity, festive spirit, and bliss is nothing but a bittersweet memory to him who views the poem merely as one that “treats the loss, awe, and estrangement framing the adult’s sense of childhood as features of a common psychological profile” (Austin 83). For instance, Austin names childhood as “one contained in the adult’s perceptual and memorative field and best summarized as a lost sense of potential”, conveying to the reader the “unrecoverability of the condition of childhood” and “the inevitable forgetting of the remoteness of the condition of childhood” (Austin 83). Notwithstanding that this naturalistic perspective of childhood has been dominant, it is important to consider the spiritual aspects of childhood that attach to it eternal value. Joseph W. Beach for example, who believes that life on earth is a short shaping journey towards eternity, when referring to the poem emphasizes “the importance of spiritual legacies upon the child’s imagination, with indifferent concern for the soul’s literal existence before birth” (152). His theory states that “whether or not the individual soul has had an existence before the human birth, a man comes into this life endowed with a spiritual essence which is not from nature but from God. And it is this divine faculty which bestows upon natural objects the glory with which they shine to a child’s imagination” (Beach 152). More clearly, as Hiers notes “the child enters this world with innate spiritual qualities bestowed on his mind by God” (10). Piaget explains the function of these qualities, which are the imaginative powers of the child’s mind, when presenting his theories of assimilation and accommodation, as mentioned previously. Hence, “it is these qualities of the transcendental mind which allow the child to rise above the objective world of nature and which in turn provide the man with visions into the eternal beauties of life and the overall unity of his environment” (Hiers 10).

More analytically, the eternality of childhood visions is rooted in the origin of the child's soul. Wordsworth claims that it comes from 'elsewhere' or 'heaven', another 'home', which is 'God':

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy! (59-67)

In addition, the poet implies that it specifies the child's life for as long as he retains the memory of it, until the vision is overwhelmed by adult duties and roles: "Shades of the prison-house begin to close / Upon the growing Boy" (68-69), "A wedding or a festival, / A mourning or a funeral; / And this hath now his heart, / And unto this he frames his song: / Then will he fit his tongue / To dialogues of business, love, or strife;" (94-99). During adolescence, "the growing child finds himself distant from the glory of heaven as inexorably as the sun lies distant from the dawn and levels all in a uniform clarity, 'the light of common day'" (Taylor 634). Wordsworth illustrates this when he writes that "The Youth, who daily farther from the east / Must travel, still is Nature's priest, / And by the vision splendid / Is on his way attended; / At length the Man perceives it die away, / And fade into the light of common day." (72-77). In fact, the man "travels in the sea of his immortal 'elsewhere' until the moment he is interrupted by the voices of a new generation of children far on the shore, which reminds him of heavenly blessedness" (Taylor 634). The poet states that "Our souls have sight of that immortal sea / Which brought us hither, / Can in a moment travel thither, / And see the children sport upon the shore, / And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore." (168-172). Thus, his hope remains in that since he came from 'elsewhere', this place will await him at the end of his life; and with new eyes he will see the image of this 'home' he has collected in his memory: "We will grieve not, rather find / Strength in what remains behind; / In the primal sympathy / Which having been must ever be; / In the soothing thoughts that spring / Out of human suffering; / In the faith that looks through death," (184-190). In this passage Wordsworth emphasizes even more that faith in immortality "that looks through death" is the only source of strength founded in the recollections of memory, and hence the only source of hope to return 'home'.

Furthermore, the reason for longing of ‘home’ is not only due to the recollections of early childhood memories, but also because of the hostility the child’s soul feels as it is alien to this earth:

Earth fills her lap with pleasures of her own;
Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,
And, even with something of a mother's mind,
 And no unworthy aim,
 The homely nurse doth all she can
To make her foster-child, her Inmate Man,
 Forget the glories he hath known,
And that imperial palace whence he came. (78-85)

Simply put, according to this argument, the soul never becomes acclimated to the earthly world that is time-limited, because it was designed to exist in eternity. Instead, this world is a temporary home that shapes or prepares the soul for eternity. Wordsworth calls the earth “the nurse” (82), or “the foster-mother” (80), who tries in vain to solace the child that yearns for his only mother, eternity.

To sum up, in this chapter I have discussed the different stages of contentment a person can experience throughout the course of life as the theme of childhood in the *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* depicts. At first, as a soul existing in eternity he is filled with God’s life and joy until the moment he is born and is forced to grow. Subsequently, as he matures he becomes engaged to the troubles of earthly life, and the glory he once beheld is gradually lost as he departs further from the source of contentment, God. His life then is transformed into a continual circle of longing for the former ‘home’ and early childhood, or the nostalgic memories of it. Last but not least, the adult man’s desire is the redemption of the soul by returning to ‘home’, heaven, and God, where he comes from.

3. Immortality

The following equally crucial theme in the *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* that has been neglected in the past is that of immortality (Hiers 8). Taylor best exemplifies the reason why immortality has been overshadowed by the theme of childhood, by explaining that interpreters of Wordsworth's poem "often avoid its religious references, choosing to see it as a description of individual growth to maturity, as a process of loss and wise acceptance of loss, of growing up and growing old" (633). Although the validity of their readings is not questioned, Taylor insists that "Wordsworth's own full title precisely and deliberately indicates that he has immortality in mind, and that he plans to argue for it from some aspect of the recollected memories of early childhood, either their content, their promise, or the unease which their loss arouses" (633). Consequently, she suggests that "the ode is transcendent, but that, in addition, it provides a more complex argument for immortality than one resting only on memory's promise" (Taylor 634), which I aim to examine. However, immortality and childhood are strongly interrelated; therefore, in order to analyze either of them, one must study one in light of the other. This section will thus discuss the spiritual aspects of immortality in the poem, in correspondence with the previous chapter analyzing childhood.

Initially, when searching for commentary on Wordsworth's Immortality, one can notice that while reading former scholars' skepticism reversely into the *Ode*, a valuable part of its meaning and of its reverberations of afterlife is neglected. Yet, the argument for immortality lies in a simple fact: "since children remember the eternity they come from, the same place may await for them once they have grown old and are released from the body" (Taylor 633). Hence, the idea of a 'home' resting in the memories of earliest childhood based on the theory of pre-existence in theology informs the poem's underlying themes:

The soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory we come
From God who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy! (60-67)

Why is it so important to discuss immortality in the *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*? What does immortality add to our understanding of the

poem? The answer lies in the words of the poet himself. In the first stanza, Wordsworth states that he can fully perceive the beauty of nature shown in celestial light only through the eyes of the child that has not yet lost the memory of 'home'. As a boy he can still see a reflection of the dream of heaven in nature, but when he reaches adolescence, the light fades away. At this point, he can be partially charmed by nature, as the second stanza implies, "And I again am strong: / The cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep; / No more shall grief of mine the season wrong; / I hear the echoes through the mountains throng. / The winds come to me from the fields of sleep, / And all the earth is gay; / Land and sea" (24-30); but the glory through which he used to intensely experience the natural world has passed: "But there's a tree, of many, one, / A single field which I have look'd upon, / Both of them speak of something that is gone:" (52-54). The following stanzas then depict his struggle to revive the memory of immortality's glory that clothed the earth, "Which we are toiling all our lives to find," (117), and which comes from 'home', from 'God', as a means to relieve the yearning soul: "Whither is fled the visionary gleam? / Where is it now, the glory and the dream?" (57-58). However, the ease that memory brings to the poet is temporary, and his only hope to return to this glory lies after death: "In the faith that looks through death," (190). In other words, there is no cure for him during his life on earth: "Though nothing can bring back the hour" (182).

This argument of discontentment, drawn from traditional theology is "less subject than the first to the vagaries and distortions of memory, and arises from deeply felt experience, another point explained by depth psychology" (Taylor 635). As mentioned in the previous section, according to this idea, the child is an orphan soul surrounded by "Earth's inadequate playthings" that struggles to adapt to the earthly lifestyle (Taylor 635). As a result, he is "increasingly ensnared in the drag of the quotidian" and "conspires in his own entrapment" (Taylor 635). The child thus "seeks to obliterate the pain of loss by self-suffocation, hurrying toward the inevitable yoke and accepting the weight of custom" (Taylor 635). In other words, by quickly burying himself, he would gradually forget the loss. Regardless of his effort to cope with the reality of earth, his yearning never vanishes entirely. This yearning however does provide additional proof of man's immortal past and, moreover, his immortal future. For this reason, in the poem Wordsworth "gives thanks not for the recollections themselves, but for the dissatisfaction they arouse when the recollections are contrasted with present realities" (Taylor 635). That said, the poet appreciates immortality more than all earthly objects and pleasures:

The thought of our past years in me doth breed
 Perpetual benediction: not indeed
 For that which is most worthy to be blest—
 Delight and liberty, the simple creed
 Of childhood, whether busy or at rest,
 With new-fledged hope still fluttering in his breast:—
 Not for these I raise
 The song of thanks and praise;
 But for those obstinate questionings
 Of sense and outward things,
 Fallings from us, vanishings;
 Blank misgivings of a Creature
 Moving about in worlds not realized,
 High instincts before which our mortal Nature
 Did tremble like a guilty thing surprised: (138-152)

More specifically, he questions the significance of the physical world and nature, which are affected by the “fallings from us, vanishings”, or the fragility of the flesh (Wordsworth 148). What is worthy to be blessed? Is it delight or liberty? Or, is it the fact that the memories of the child’s immortal past lead to a noncompromising desire to explore unknown worlds? The poet mentions: “The thought of our past years in me doth breed” (138), “But for those obstinate questionings / Of sense and outward things,” (146-147) Moving about in worlds not realized,” (150). That being the case, humans are eager to have more, and do not settle for what they already possess. Taylor adds that “even the human community of feeling that develops under the stress of mortality does not ease the insistent undertow but rather may increase it” (Taylor 636). Wordsworth justifies this belief in immortality more decidedly in his *Essay Upon Epitaphs I*:

For my own part, it is to me inconceivable, that the sympathies of love towards each other, which grow with our growth, could ever attain any new strength, or even preserve the old, after we had received from the outward senses the impression of death, and were in the habit of having that impression daily renewed and its accompanying feeling brought home to ourselves, and to those we love; if the same were not counteracted by those communications with our internal Being, which are anterior to all these experiences, and with which revelation coincides, and has through that coincidence alone (for otherwise it could not possess it) a power to affect us. I confess, with me the conviction is absolute, that, if the impression and sense of death were not thus counterbalanced, such a hollowness would pervade the whole system of things, such a want of correspondence and consistency, a disproportion so astounding betwixt means and ends, that there could be no repose, no joy. Were we to grow up unfostered by this genial warmth, a frost would chill the spirit, so penetrating and powerful, that there could be no motions of the life of love; and infinitely less could we have any wish to be remembered after we passed away from a world in which each man had moved about like a shadow. (51-52)

In this passage, Wordsworth suggests that immortality “gives meaning to the pathos of human suffering and allows one to endure it”, and hence, without it life is meaningless. Taylor interprets his words by stating that the voice of the authentic “internal being” reaffirms that “we do not die, despite the fact that our experience disagrees; and that love is valuable,

despite the fragility of its objects” (Taylor 637-638). Moreover, Wordsworth’s sense of the disproportion between the needs of reality and the spirit results in a longing for immortality, since without it “hollowness would pervade the whole system of things” (Taylor 637). In other words, both in the *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* and the *Essay Upon Epitaphs I*, Wordsworth argues for immortality from the perspective that it is vital to humanity, “because it gives meaning to a life beset with sorrows” (Taylor 638). Therefore, the fact that we experience the need to seek for, or imagine an ‘elsewhere’ suggests that ‘somewhere’ it does exist (Taylor 638). We may not remember exactly what this ‘elsewhere’ is and where it lies, but, the “residue of regret left in our memory” is so powerful that from “the depths of our insufficiency we hunger for it continuously” (Taylor 638). Furthermore, the poet’s argument for immortality, which was traditionally formed by Anselm and elaborated by Ficino in his *Theologia platonica*, answers certain queries of the post-enlightenment period. Their ideas combine “the ontological argument that what we conceive must exist, with the teleological argument, that our feelings must have a purpose” (Snyder online, n.pg). In particular, Taylor states that Anselm believed that “because we yearn for immortality it must exist, since we could not conceive of it if it were not” (Taylor 639-639).

In conclusion, the *Ode* is irrefutably a spiritual poem which Wordsworth uses to claim deliberately his faith in eternity. Through the flashbacks to his own life and childhood, he creates the imagery around the child, who represents all children. The poet takes advantage of this fact to provoke nostalgic emotions in the reader because of their lost childhood, but also because of their lost ‘Eden’. More importantly, in the ninth stanza (lines 138-152) Wordsworth challenges the *Ode*’s readers to reexamine the value of worldly, natural objects in comparison with love and immortality: “And O ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves, / Forebode not any severing of our loves!” (192-193). Last but not least, it can be said that the poem’s beauty lies in this paradox: some attributes of life become more precious since they are ephemeral (Hiers 8-10). The poet writes: “The clouds that gather round the setting sun / Do take a sober colouring from an eye / That hath kept watch o’er man’s mortality; / Another race hath been, and other palms are won. / Thanks to the human heart by which we live / Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears” (201-206), and “We will grieve not, rather find / Strength in what remains behind; / In the primal sympathy / Which having been must ever be; / In the soothing thoughts that spring / Out of human suffering;” (184-189).

4. Biblical Allusions

Having concluded that the *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* is a spiritual poem, this raises a need to discuss its themes from a biblical perspective. The significance of this type of biblical reading of the poem is based on Wordsworth's own selection of biblical references, which will be presented later in this section. However, to achieve such an analysis, it is necessary to use the Scriptures, that is, *The Bible*, as the main source of information. Therefore, this last chapter's purpose is to explore the biblical allusions and symbolism that Wordsworth has included in his poem, which will reveal the hidden truths about childhood and immortality, and which will further explain the abstract concept of immortality.

To start with, the first stanza of the poem is a comparison between what the poet 'saw' as a child and what he 'sees' as an adult, which I have previously explained in the section of childhood. He describes the beauty of the earth with all its fields, streams, and trees, which appear like heaven, in contrast with the different perception of the world he has during adolescence. Now, although there is still much beauty around him, e.g. roses, rainbows, the moonlight, the sunlight, these sights lack the glory of what he once 'saw' as a child, "The things which I have seen I now can see no more" (Wordsworth 9). However, what brings this concept into perspective is the sentence "That there hath pass'd away a glory from the earth" in the second stanza (Wordsworth 18). When studied in depth, these two stanzas symbolize Eden, the garden that used to be 'heaven', and the fall of man with all its consequences. To clarify this symbolism, the book of *Genesis* describes the creation of the earth with all its beauty, trees, flowers, waters, stars, etc., and everything that humans needed (*Genesis* 1: 1-31). "The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food" (*Genesis* 2:9). However, Wordsworth mentions "there's a tree, of many, one/ A single field which I have look'd upon, / Both of them speak of something that is gone:" (52-54). In *Genesis* God commanded "you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die" (*Genesis* 2:17). Indeed, the protoplasts ate from the fruit and what followed was 'the fall', or their exit from Eden, their 'home'. To put it another way, Wordsworth does not only imply that the child is an eternal being that remembers 'heaven', but, also, that this innocent creature represents humanity before the fall, before the glory of God's life passed away with man's sin that brought spiritual death, and that adolescence illustrates humanity after the fall.

Further on, as the poet continues to praise spring and nature, the birds and their song, the lambs that dance, he is suddenly afflicted by a ‘thought of grief’ (Wordsworth 22). He remembers the ‘tree’, ‘sin’ and its wages, the glory with which man used to be clothed, and the fact that it is no more. Even so, he realizes that there is a solution to ‘sin’, ‘death’, and the ‘loss of glory’, and that is through “Thou Child of Joy, / Shout round me, let me hear thy shouts, thou happy/ Shepherd-boy!(Wordsworth 34-36). In fact, Wordsworth is using biblical allusions to Christ, the ‘child of joy’, the ‘shepherd-boy’, and the promised ‘lamb’ that was slain to redeem humanity from the power of sin, as it is written: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Therefore, the first allusion refers to Christ as the Savior, or as the second Adam that would be crucified to restore eternal life. *The Bible* explains:

“Wherefore, as by one man (Adam) sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned [...] For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! [...] For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ! (Romans 5: 12-17)

Simply put, Wordsworth finds the cure for his grief in Christ, who as the second Adam obeyed God, and therefore allowed those who believe in Him to experience triumph, joy, and hope in life; but, who also restored the hope of returning ‘home’, and that means ‘heaven’.

The second allusion refers to Christ as the “Child of Joy”, or the baby-born Jesus (Wordsworth 34). According to *The Bible*, an angel appeared to some shepherds to guide them to the manger where they would meet for the first time the Savior, “And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:10-11). What this passage says in plain words is that this child would bring joy to the people, for He is the Savior of the world, and thus Wordsworth calls him the “The Child of Joy” (34). The third allusion refers to Jesus as the “Shepherd-boy” and it can be interpreted in two interrelated ways (Wordsworth 36). Initially, the shepherd boy in *The Bible*, who is a prophetic representation of Jesus, is King David. David ruled successfully over Israel, although he was just a shepherd. In the same way today, Jesus is the shepherd of the church, which symbolizes the spiritual Israel that consists of the believers, and He reigns over his sheep: “I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine” (John 10:14). The latter regards David as Jesus’s physical ancestor. In *The Scriptures* it is written that “The

Lord God will give him (Christ) the throne of his father David,” (Luke 1:32) and that “regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David” (Romans 1:3). Conclusively, in the stanzas mentioned, Wordsworth utilizes the various biblical profiles of Jesus to create the poetical character of the child.

Similarly, the rest of the poem follows the same pattern of biblical parallelisms. For example, in the fifth stanza Wordsworth portrays birth as the awakening from a momentary sleep in which the soul existed in the celestial realm. He writes: “Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting: / The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star, / Hath had elsewhere its setting, / And cometh from afar: / Not in entire forgetfulness, / And not in utter nakedness, / But trailing clouds of glory do we come/ From God, who is our home:” (Wordsworth 59-66). The poet uses this picture of a blurred memory to claim that the soul’s existence is preordained and originates from God, just as *The Bible* mentions “even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4a); and “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29a). Yet, as in the sixth and seventh stanza, Wordsworth states that the memory fades as the child becomes a boy and is attracted by earthly desires, pleasures, and promises:

Earth fills her lap with pleasures of her own;
Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,
And, even with something of a mother's mind,
And no unworthy aim,
The homely nurse doth all she can
To make her foster-child, her Inmate Man,
Forget the glories he hath known,
And that imperial palace whence he came. (78-85)

More analytically, in this passage Wordsworth refers to these natural pleasures as a representation of fleshly desires, which try to captivate the child and urge him to forget of God and eternity. According to *The Bible*, after the fall of man, humanity has been enslaved under the yoke of sin and has been victim of its desires. It is written: “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God” (Romans 6:12-18). That said, the poet depicts the perpetual battle between the spirit and the flesh; the will of God and the will of sin:

Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy,
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,

He sees it in his joy;
 The Youth, who daily farther from the east
 Must travel, still is Nature's priest,
 And by the vision splendid
 Is on his way attended;
 At length the Man perceives it die away,
 And fade into the light of common day. (68-77)

Some fragment from his dream of human life,
 Shaped by himself with newly-learnèd art;
 A wedding or a festival,
 A mourning or a funeral;
 And this hath now his heart,
 And unto this he frames his song:
 Then will he fit his tongue
 To dialogues of business, love, or strife;
 But it will not be long
 Ere this be thrown aside,
 And with new joy and pride
 The little actor cons another part; (93-103)

Nonetheless, Wordsworth repeatedly presents the young child's image as one that incomes ease. Some specific characteristics of the child also reveal that it is an allusion to Christ. For instance, *The Scriptures* refer to Christ as "the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29c). Likewise, Wordsworth writes "Behold the Child among his new-born blisses" (86). In addition, Wordsworth indicates that this child is filled "With light upon him from his father's eyes!" (90), and mentions "Some fragment from his dream of human life," (92). In the same manner, *The Bible* refers to God's satisfaction with the work of His Son, Jesus, who had to live a human life on earth for the sake of the world. He says: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." (Matthew 17:5). Hence, it can be assumed that 'The Child', Christ, is also the solution to the adult man's strife that Wordsworth describes. Moreover, in the *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* the poet calls the child "Thou best philosopher," (111) and "Mighty prophet!"(115), which are attributes of Jesus. *The Bible* ascribes to Jesus the title of 'the best philosopher' because "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness." (1st Corinthians 3:19-20). By the same token, it ascribes to Him the title of 'Mighty prophet', as it is written "And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people." (Luke 7:16). Additionally, lines such as "thou eye among the blind," (112), "On whom those truths do rest, / Which we are toiling all our lives to find," (116-117) and "thy Immortality" (119) suggest that Wordsworth does indeed use similes of Christ from *The Scriptures*. Likewise, *The Bible* clarifies that Jesus is the one who possesses the absolute truth and thus the sole person who can lead humanity. When referring to mankind, *The Bible* questions "Can the blind lead the

blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch?(Luke 6:39). Obviously, the answer is negative and therefore the poet suggests that only He who is the way, the truth and the (eternal) life can guide men, who toil all their lives to find this truth (John 14:6): “Mighty prophet! Seer blest! / On whom those truths do rest, / Which we are toiling all our lives to find,” (115-117). Even more, *The Scriptures* summarize the different profiles that Wordsworth ascribes to Jesus in a few verses:

Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. (Colossians 1:15-17).

These verses reveal the greatness of Jesus as the image of God, the Creator, “Nature’s priest”, the everlasting, “the eternal mind”, and the one who was, is, and will be (Wordsworth 73, 114). In the same way the poem shows the greatness of the child who preexisted: “Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting: / The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star, / Hath had elsewhere its setting, / And cometh from afar:” (59-62); who was born with the ability to create and unify: “And by the vision splendid / Is on his way attended;” (74-75), “Shaped by himself with newly-learnèd art;” (93); and who will live eternally both in terms of the memories and of the afterlife: “O joy! that in our embers / Is something that doth live, / That nature yet remembers / What was so fugitive! / The thought of our past years in me doth breed” (134-138), and “Our noisy years seem moments in the being / Of the eternal Silence: truths that wake, / To perish never: / Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour, / Nor Man nor Boy, / Nor all that is at enmity with joy, / Can utterly abolish or destroy!” (159-165).

Eventually, after referring to desire’s destructive power, Jesus’s solution through His cruciform sacrifice, and God’s attributes, Wordsworth reaches the zenith of biblical allusions: Jesus’s burial and resurrection. In the eighth stanza, he depicts men’s or Christ’s battle with darkness and the grave, meaning death. He writes: “In darkness lost, the darkness of the grave; / Thou, over whom thy Immortality / Broods like the Day, a master o’er a slave, / A presence which is not to be put by;” (Wordsworth 118-121). However, he emphasizes that the child’s, or Christ’s immortality, leads to the resurrection and victory over the slavery of death. *The Bible* concludes this allusion by saying that “Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.” (Romans 6:9).

Last but not least, the *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* ends with stanzas encouraging the adult man to endure all earthly sufferings, because at least the natural surroundings manifest a glimmer of celestial light and of God that

lies within him: “We will grieve not, rather find / Strength in what remains behind; In the primal sympathy / Which having been must ever be; / In the soothing thoughts that spring / Out of human suffering; / In the faith that looks through death, / In years that bring the philosophic mind.” (184-191). The poet continues:

And O ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves,
Forebode not any severing of our loves!
Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might;
I only have relinquish'd one delight
To live beneath your more habitual sway.
I love the brooks which down their channels fret,
Even more than when I tripp'd lightly as they;
The innocent brightness of a new-born Day
Is lovely yet;
The clouds that gather round the setting sun
Do take a sober colouring from an eye
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality;
Another race hath been, and other palms are won.
Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears. (192-208)

The biblical truth and Romantic sentiment that Wordsworth alludes to is the revelation of God through nature, as *The Scriptures* state: “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20). Wordsworth writes: “The innocent brightness of a new-born Day / Is lovely yet; / The clouds that gather round the setting sun / Do take a sober colouring from an eye / That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality;” (199-203). In these lines he refers to God's eye that is upon humanity, as it is written in the *Psalms*: “From heaven the Lord looks down and sees all mankind; from his dwelling place he watches all who live on earth” (33:13-14). This knowledge allows him to rejoice with the songs of May and to forget that a time would come when all the flowers and fields of spring would be forever gone; because he is aware that greater glories await humans beyond death: “To me the meanest flower that blows can give / Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears” (207-208), as *The Bible* writes, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2nd Corinthians 4:17).

5. Conclusion

By examining William Wordsworth's *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* in terms of a biblical reading encompassing the themes of childhood and immortality, this essay has provided a clarification of the significance of spirituality in the poem, and of how it contains biblical allusions in direct relation to the *Scriptures*. In other words, this paper supports the claim that the *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* is transcendental and that childhood and immortality are strong illustrations of biblical symbols and truths.

The first section gives a general introduction into the theme of childhood and its complications in contrast to adolescence. It discusses the cognitive development of the child in connection with scientific studies and the differences between an adult's vision and a child's. In addition, it explains the spiritual attributes of the child. For instance, the poem assumes the theory of preexistence, that is, children are closer to God through their memory of immortality, whereas adults are further from it as the memory fades through the years. The chapter concludes with a depiction of the discrepancy of viewing the theme of childhood from a naturalistic and a spiritual aspect.

Mentioning spirituality, the second chapter analyzes the theme of immortality and the spiritual concept that lies beneath childhood and memory. Through the analysis of the aspect of discontentment, this section discusses the significance of immortality and the necessity of its existence. Moreover, by examining theories drawn from traditional theology that Wordsworth himself uses to justify his belief in immortality in his *Essays Upon Epitaphs I*, such as Anselm's ontological and teleological arguments, the chapter elaborates spirituality and its role. The chapter closes with the discussion of the poets challenging lines about life's important objects and ideas, and with the poem's paradox: life's beauty arises from the fragility of its purpose and meaning.

The final section is a parallel reading of the *Ode* and of *The Bible*. I have used the *Scriptures* to interpret the biblical allusions present in the poem, in order to gain a deeper insight into the spiritual metaphors and symbols that Wordsworth utilizes in his poetic language.

In conclusion, this paper has studied in depth William Wordsworth's *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* from a secular and a biblical perspective based on former research. However, the importance of this thesis lies in the fact that it discusses various aspects of the poem and the interrelated connection between

childhood and immortality, and *The Bible*. Hence, this essay has sought to show the poem's transcendental allusions, as well as its spiritual essence.

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