The Silent, yet Outspoken Nature in Wordsworth:
“Michael” as an Example

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Nature equals to William Wordsworth, and plays a vital part in his life. He writes about, lives through, and fills his mind with it. That is why we see nature in almost every one of his poems. Some poems are directly related to nature, others indirectly. When relating to poems on other topics, he inevitably puts nature into the background, which can obviously be seen in his narrative poems.

The position of being “in the background” usually denotes an underprivileged position in importance. Yet in my reading of the narrative poems by Wordsworth, I see equal importance of being in both the foreground and the background. Nature, though put in the background, still carries an equal weight in conveying the meaning and passions of a story. The appearance of a seemingly mute, silent scene of nature often helps to nurture an atmosphere, and bring out the whole feelings to be deeply felt by the reader.

Yet to say the background scene of nature always has the potential of bursting out powerful feelings does not mean it solely works out the meaning and feelings on its own; the pictorial images of nature can generate in the reader powerful feelings under the guidance of the story plot line. Basically, these pictorial images work either by according or conflicting with the narration they are positioned to conjure up different emotional significance in the reader. Nature not only links and combines the messages conveyed in the story line, but makes them ferment and expand in the mind of the reader to bring out strong passions and feelings through its seemingly hollow effect of a valley echoing and magnifying whatever sound it receives. It says nothing, yet means almost everything the story line can offer.

Nature personified as a compassionate, yet mute fellow of man:

When nature is put into the background, Wordsworth makes it a silent onlooker by constantly inserting here and there natural scenes in the whole story line. He merges these scenes into the main narrative. In doing so, he does not make nature lesser, but treats her as equally important by letting her talk, yet in a silent way—besides being a hollow valley magnifying sounds, the silence of nature also make her a friend of human, ever-present, compassionate, though speechless, but always witnessing, caring and feeling. The silence of nature leaves much room for thoughts, which can trigger different emotions in the reader.
Objects … derive their influence, not from properties inherent in them, not from what they are actually in themselves, but from such as are bestowed upon them by the minds of those who are conversant with or affected by those objects.¹

In fact, nature never does speak in language; it speaks through making our heart feel. I cite Peter Burra to make clear that in fact it is all the operation of our mind that makes nature speak. In the mind of the reader, a strong feeling can be aroused when the detail of the story line and the silence of nature combine or clash. A powerful feeling can be forced out through either an echo—when nature scenes help make the reader feel the same as narrated in the plot line—or a conflict—resulting from irony generated between nature and the story line. A major technique Wordsworth employs in making nature “speak” is to make the same nature scene appear repeatedly, but in different contexts of the plot. A nature scene, when appearing for the first time, may connote nothing significantly, and the feel it gives the reader is casual and easy. Yet as the scene makes its appearance for the second or third time, it cast a deeper and deeper impression on the mind; different meanings are gradually formed when ideas start to take shape in the reader. These different meanings appear and are layered up, resulting in a complex meaning-stock which is easy to arouse the reader’s sympathy and feelings. In addition, the magnifying effect of the hollowness of nature strengthens what feeling already expressed in the narrative and further magnifies it. As more detail is put into the narrative, the hollowness of nature also forms stronger echoes, magnifying every element to help bring out the deep feelings much felt by the reader.

Probing deeply into the hollowness and echoing effect of nature, I see it mainly work through two ways: contrast and foreshadows. Contract is brought out through the positioning of the same nature scene in the contexts bearing opposite notions. Foreshadow is originally felt as a simple nature scene when it is first introduced without letting us know why. However, we gradually realize the meaning of it as the narration of the story gradually reveals its history. Wordsworth is good at using as foreshadowing a natural image, which I term a foreshadowing spot. This foreshadowing spot is just the main natural scene that appears time and again. Through the appropriate arrangements of the foreshadowing spot combined with the echoing effect of the hollow and silent nature, nature speaks!

With the notions listed above, I would like to do a thorough examination by using “Michael” to see how strong passions are delicately and intricately built up, and how

nature speaks by emptying itself and echoing—through working with the detailed, but gradually offered plot line. Since what I want to discuss is the story line and Wordsworth’s arrangement of some effects contributing to the burst of powerful feelings, I would like to do a thorough analysis by following the sequence of the whole narration presented by Wordsworth.

Examination: “Michael”

Before the central story line is really touched on, Wordsworth already starts to pave the way for some awaited effects by seemingly aimlessly creating a simple atmosphere of the rural nature. We see at the beginning a designed detour—an introduction to the geographical location where the story is to happen later.

If from the public way you turn your steps
Up the tumultuous brook of Green-head Gill,
You will suppose that with an upright path
Your feet must struggle; in such bold ascent
The pastoral Mountains front you, face to face.
But, courage! for beside that boisterous Brook
The mountains have all open'd out themselves,
And made a hidden valley of their own.

The first natural scene that catches the eye is “the tumultuous brook Green-head Gill.” It is what I termed a foreshadowing spot, but so far the reader is still left in the dark. The trip up there is by no means easy—“Your feet must struggle.” The hiking seems to lead a reader-traveler on a Sunday outing. The general atmosphere is casual and relaxing. After the struggle, the reader is suddenly faced with the second nature scene—“the pastoral Mountains” “Pastoral” originally relates one to a feeling of easiness and an association of the carefree good old days, yet the narrator suddenly pulls the reader out of this comfortable association when he says “courage” to indicate the high and steepness of the hill. Hard labor comes before a blessing; the reader is then released and bestowed with a right to access an open view of the seldom visited valley—the “hidden” valley. Coming along with the “hidden valley” is a “hidden story.”

After the rough geographical description, the narrator adds more detail. The natural scene presents a solitary look, following the notion of “hidden” mentioned in the first paragraph, when “No habitation there is seen; but such / As journey thither find themselves alone / With a few sheep, with rocks and stones, and kites / That overhead are sailing in the sky.” Since there is no habitation, the reader is naturally led to doubts as to what will go on, in this “utter solitude.” The narrator then shows
the third scene of nature, but seemingly in a somewhat preserved way. This reluctance arouses curiosity in the reader, when he says “Nor should I have made mention of this Dell / But for one object which you might pass by, / Might see and notice not.” In fact, through the layers of suspicion built up, the attention of the reader is already directed to what may be originally passed by without notice—unworthy stones on the roadside. Then the reader hears the same natural scene echo again, but something different is added! -- “Beside the brook / There is a straggling heap of unhewn stones!” Here the foreshadowing spot is noticed, yet the function is not so clear, given what little information is offered in the context. We see the naturalness of the stones by the word “unhewn”, reminding us of its origin from nature. Then the narrator makes the reader finally have a contact with the focused nature scene --“to that place a story appertains,” and the reader starts to feel its unusualness for the first time. What happens may have to do with the natural scene!

On the third paragraph the story line begins. Right before the story, the narrator shows reluctance, seeming to try to stick to nature again, even just for a moment. He then relates again a bit about the geological as he tells about his own childhood. He describes himself as a boy “having felt the power / Of Nature, by the gentle agency / Of natural objects led me on to feel / For passions that were not my own.” By so doing, he indirectly hints at his sensitiveness and familiarity to the power of nature, thus making us feel the sincerity and truthfulness of the story he is to relate. That the power of nature is indirectly hinted at purposefully by the narrator can also be seen as the narrator’s seemingly wanting to relate to us the sympathetic power of nature and her static yet passionate observance of human beings as he, a man of nature, indirectly personifies nature in him—a being of nature, so he is born passionate and sympathetic, and can therefore “think / At random and imperfectly indeed / On man; the heart of man and human life.” The narrator, like Jesus, reverses the order of hierarchy—raising the low while debasing the high as he humbles himself by saying the story is only “homely and rude”, and is only “[f]or the delight of a few natural hearts.”

The story finally begins, yet before that, the narrator brainwashes the reader by indirectly putting emphasis on nature again when he mentions “the Forest-side in Grasmere Vale.” When he mentions the location, it makes the reader review afresh the memory of this “hidden” vale and the geographic landscapes, and also the “natural man’s” power from nature, making them, before the story really starts, already soften their minds, ready to follow what is to be told amicably. Then Shepherd Michael is first introduced. His firm characters are described--“stout of heart, strong of limb, of
an unusual strength, keen, intense, frugal, prompt, and watchful.” Yet they seem to bear no relationship with the reader’s reserved passions, except that Michael is a shepherd, an occupation outdated though denoting also a feel of the good old days, when people still led a rural and much carefree life.

Next sees Michael as one diligent man of nature, who understands well every detail of nature, having even the ability of learning “the meaning of all winds, / Of blasts of every tone.” In the narrator’s description, nature is right beside as the reader is also on the hill top experiencing the winds with Michael, and “heard the South.” Then nature appears, in the form of a storm, which “summon’d him / Up to the mountains: he had been alone / Amid the heart of many thousand mists / That came to him and left him on the heights.” These lines draw an analogy between God and Moses; Nature and Michael. Moses, leaving behind the Israelites at the foot of the mountain, comes up to the mountain top to hear God speaking to him from the clouds, while Michael also listens to the winds—the voice of nature. This suggestion makes one identify Wordsworth’s nature with God. God is silent, yet He speaks through different means, so does nature. Nature, through this analogy, is deified and personified as living, and compassionate as God.

Michael as a man of nature is further explained as his whole thoughts and life experience are in “the green Valleys, the Streams and Rocks, Fields, and the hills.” The narrator then numerates details such as “hardship, skill or courage, joy or fear” as proof of the closeness of Michael to nature. Then the narrator abruptly switches the position of Michael and nature, making Michael the master rather than a subordinate of nature, thus causing a slight doubt in the reader when he mentions Michael’s gains of nature—“the certainty / Of honorable gains; these fields, these hills / Which were his living Being, even more / Than his own Blood…had laid / Strong hold on his affections, were to him / A pleasurable feeling of blind love, / The pleasure which there is in life itself. Though still pleasant to read, the reader can see Michael’s whole-hearted devotion or to nature, or to land. What lies behind this reversion is a sense of uncertainty under the seemingly pleasant feel of blind love. Yet at this point, we don’t know why; once nature is subordinated to man’s control, what will happen? “Can this be a foreshadowing of something?” may be the question the reader has in mind.

Michael’s wife is next introduced to let the reader know their joint industriousness and frugality—the trait of the rural, especially when the narrator mentions the image of two spinning wheels: “two wheels she had / Of antique form, this large for spinning wool, / That small for flax, and if one wheel had rest, / It was because the other was at
work. The ceaseless working of the two wheels are compared to the shifts of the sun and the moon; though the sun and the moon take turns resting, the person behind the wheels never does rest, which serves to be a foreshadowing when later Michael complains of his bad luck and compares his industriousness to that of the sun. The third persona, their only child, is introduced also to help form a complete family tie of Michael, which he works hard to maintain. Here Wordsworth plays a trick on numbers: one and two—“This only son,” and “two brave sheep dogs.” But how they work is yet to be known, until later when Michael and the dog is left alone, deserted by Luke.

The narrator continues to have more detailed description of industriousness. Nature seems to be put aside for the moment. The reason for going to such great length in introducing the industry of Michael’s family should work in some way. In the lengthy illustration, the reader is imprinted with a deep impression about their industry and frugality. Michael’s house is a symbol of industry, frugality, and the virtues of the rural. “Their Cottage on a plot of rising ground / Stood single, …/ And from this constant light so regular / And so far seen, the House itself by all / Who dwell within the limits of the vale, / Both old and young, was nam'd The Evening Star.” The Evening Star is not of nature and at most is only a mere manifestation of human labor, whereas a real star is of nature, immortal and permanent, at least in human conception. While naming the house Evening Star shows the family’s industry, it has its irony—it is only temporal, and might suffer from any outside changes easily. Compared with nature; man is temporal and short-lived.

After relating the hard construction work, the narrator comes to the description of the mental. He compares the love Michael bears towards both his wife and son: “This Son of his old age was yet more dear.” Through comparison the narrator brings out the issue of hope, when he narrates “a child, more than all other gifts, / Brings hope with it, and forward-looking thoughts.” Yet the narrator gives a hint at the end of the stanza—a child may also bring “stirrings of inquietude.” This might hint at something that may happen later, besides its usual meaning of the trouble of caretaking.

What ensues is a sense of dependence on the uncertain. A hope can be something promising, but it can lead to a dream which is to come true, or a total disillusionment and failure.

…to the thoughts
Of the old Man his only Son was now
The dearest object that he knew on earth.
Exceeding was the love he bare to him,
His Heart and his Heart's joy!

The strength of love is intensified as the reader experiences more detail of Michael’s love for Luke. This intensification brings him both hope and uncertainty. The minute detail is narrated to make the reader feel the ever strong love and comradeship. Yet the stronger the love, the greater disillusion it will lead him to.

Old Michael, while he[Luke] was a babe in arms,
Had done him female service, not alone
For dalliance and delight, as is the use
Of Fathers, but with patient mind enforc'd
To acts of tenderness; and he had rock'd
His cradle with a woman's gentle hand.

The real emphasis is on the female work Michael does for Luke; this establishes a reasonable logic for him to build unusually strong affections. Yet behind the strong love brings an even stronger attachment that is to make him suffer!

Then nature in the form of The Clipping Tree is mentioned to locate Michael’s Evening Star: “Beneath that large old Oak… / Stood, and from it's enormous breadth of shade…was call'd / The CLIPPING TREE, a name which yet it bears.” The large old oak, though named by humans, is part of nature and symbolizes the immortal. The shift of the tense from the past into the present--“bears”--indicates that something may have changed, but the old tree remains, which brings out a sense of uncertainty in the reader.

The detailed description of the history between Michael and Luke is related until Wordsworth inserts a decisive episode that changes the easy and cozy pastoral life—“While this good household thus were living on / From day to day”—to a tragic one: “to Michael's ear there came / Distressful tidings.” He has to pay for the debt of his relative—“to discharge the forfeiture.” Yet, how much is it that makes him feeling so painful? The narrator plays a trick on the seemingly trivial matter, yet lying behind is the narrator’s hint of Micahel’s indulgence in the love of money--his property: “A grievous penalty, but little less / Than half his substance.” Only not half as much as he has owned is really what he should pay. Michael’s indulgence is further minutely but ironically described: It (The bad news) “for a moment took / More hope out of his life than he supposed / That any old man ever could have lost.”
Yet, up to this moment, the narrator’s blame on the old man is not too obviously detected until a sharp contrast to come later.

Then comes the description of the inner conflict: Michael is painstakingly considering the possibility of selling part of his land: “Such was his first resolve.” Yet his attachment to his property soon overwhelms him—“his heart fail'd him…if these fields of ours / Should pass into a Stranger's hand… I could not lie quiet in my grave.” Michael’s worry is revealed. In his complaint, he is still thinking of some “remedies and of a chearful hope,” trying hard not to lose any land. Finally, he comes up with a seemingly good idea: “Our Luke shall leave us… the land / Shall not go from us.” In letting Luke leave to pay off the debt, the land “shall be free…as is the wind / That passes over it.” The word “free” is trickily used here. Of course, its superficial meaning is that it totally belongs to Michael. Yet on a deeper level, “free” connotes also the freeing of any bondage. When so defined, the reader sees an irony: Since the land is free, it should not be possessed by even humans. Who can really claim to own the land, or nature? The long stanza then explains to us why he decides to let Luke leave, instead of selling part of their land. Then, the episode of the kinsman comes up—“He is a prosperous man, / Thriving in trade, and Luke to him shall go, / And with his Kinsman's help and his own thrift, / He quickly will repair this loss.” Most important is that Luke “[m]ay come again to us.” That’s the best “hope” Michael can ever think of! He is trying to think of a good way to both hold the land and pay his debt, but that is the best he can figure. Michael does not say much to persuade his wife, for in her free association of mind, a similar prosperous story seems to be building a fancy in her. She thinks of the past and gains temporary comfort.

The wife thinks about the successful case of Richard Bateman, with whom she compares Luke, thinking about the potential of equally gaining the same profit in an equal way. Richard, a parish-boy, leaves nature “at the church-door” and receives blessing. He goes “up to London,” the capitalistic society. The parish boy belongs to nature, successfully withstands any temptations from the city, and is therefore blessed and becomes prosperous. Wordsworth uses similar structures and even the same wording to express two similar things ending up differently to try to let the reader associate these two events and make a contrast naturally.

… chose the trusty Boy  
To go and overlook his merchandise  
Beyond the seas, where he grew wond'rous rich,  
And left estates and monies to the poor,
And at his birth-place built a Chapel, floor’d
With Marble, which he sent from foreign lands.

Yet a clear picture of the contrast cannot be sharply detected until the very last moment, when the reader sees the parallel structure appear at the end of the story and compares automatically.

Finally, they happily decide to let Luke follow in Bateman’s footsteps. The next sees the family busy preparing, or seemingly celebrating, for Luke’s departure. They “[m]ake ready Luke's best garments, of the best / Buy for him more.” The repetition of the same words at best is only meant to express their deep love for their son. Then, the industrious Michael resumes his usual work: “to the fields went forth / With a light heart,” thinking that he and Luke may both see a better day. The land can be kept while they still can pay off the debt; there is a chance for Luke to be as prosperous as Bateman.

The narrator then presents some more detail of Michael’s deep attachment to this son, as his wife Isabel hears him having trouble sleeping, and from the nightmare of Michael she can tell that “all his hopes were gone,” seeing that he has a deep attachment to this boy. Yet the story still goes on, as if ignoring the just-happened uneasiness at night when the three of the family is described to have a feast, preparing for the best; they join and feast “[l]ike happy people round a Christmas fire.” The jollity they have at that time may prove only to be an irony later as the unfortunate story unrolls.

The happy mood stays on, but only superficially: “all the ensuing week the house appear'd / As cheerful as a grove in Spring.” Wordsworth prolongs the description of the happiness only to prepare for an even greater sense of irony and loss later in the mind of the reader. The strength of merriment predicts the equally strong sense of loss. Then comes the time for a real departure of Luke excited with pride and happiness, for what lies ahead seems to be a hope for a better tomorrow. A letter arrives and decides the time for Luke’s departure, and also the start of his corruption. This letter from the capitalistic world betokens a sign of pride, but also a start of the unpredictable and misfortune.

The main plot line almost comes to an end when at this time nature silently but abruptly shows up and the sense of irony starts to permeate. The resonant echo of nature bounces back as it seems to silently show itself: “Near the tumultuous brook of Green-head Gill, / In that deep Valley…..” A foreshadowing spot, with its same locale and wording, catches our attention, yet the different actions following it make
the reader feel extremely uncertain. A contrary scene to nature is mentioned—a sheepfold: “Michael had design'd / To build a Sheep-fold, …he had gathered up / A heap of stones, which close to the brook side / Lay thrown together, ready for the work.” The familiarity of the reappearance of this heap of stones, another foreshadowing spot, makes the reader feel even uneasy. The image of the bond between Moses and God shows up as Michael also symbolically asks Luke to lay a corner stone for the never finished sheepfold. Before their “contract” is signed, Wordsworth prepares a touching scene of Michael’s monologue over his paternal-maternal love. From the mouth of Michael comes loving kindness; from the mouth of Luke returns sobs caused by the touching words of the father. The sobs are to create another irony as comparing to his later betrayal, also indirectly hinting at man’s betrayal to God.

Michael’s description of industry continues, most of all emphasizing the idea of family tie and devotion. In this description, he mentions again his property—land. It stands for the retaining of a family, yet here the irony of the overly attachment to worldly gains can be felt as Michael says,

"I toil'd and toil'd; God bless'd me in my work,  
And 'till these three weeks past the land was free.  
--It looks as if it never could endure  
Another Master. Heaven forgive me, Luke,  
If I judge ill for thee, but it seems good  
That thou should'st go."

The reasonable logic is that the result of labor should bring about the possession of land, yet the irony here presented is that it finally turns out to be not so. An interesting use of the word “free” is another irony. The land may go into Michael’s hands, and then it is “free.” Another interpretation is that the land is of nature and accordingly should be free from the possession of even any human beings. The old man’s over-indulgence of his property is detected as mixed with irony, “It looks as if it never could endure / Another Master.” Michael may conceal his real intention of greed, which Wordsworth may indirectly want to reveal to the reader. When he said “it never could endure / Another master,” it is he that really cannot give up on the material. A foreshadow is slightly hinted at when Michael begs Luke to forgive him if this decision for him turns out to be evil. When contrasting the later development of the story, this pleading links to Luke’s later evil, thus creating a contrast and irony in the reader. Nature is mentioned again to serve as a symbol for a contrast between man’s capriciousness and nature’s remaining unchanged and true.
… the Old Man paus'd,
…pointing to the Stones near which they stood,
Thus, after a short silence, he resum'd:
"This was a work for us, and now, my Son,
It is a work for me. But, lay one Stone.

The stone comes from and stands for nature. Yet here it is used as a kind of symbol of the contract between father and son. The contract is in fact broken as the work intending to be done by both—“for us” — can only be left to Michael himself—“for me.” This also foreshadows the departure of father and son, for good.

The sad mood Wordsworth nurtures based upon what mishap might happen to this old man is the reason for his detailed description of the plot line. The industry of Michael is described again and again; all for the purpose of the later and final outburst of the tragic emotions in the reader. Michael’s industry is listed in sharp contrast to Luke’s escaping from his duty. Luke bursts into tears at the sound of Michael’s description of his fatherly and motherly devotion. Yet, here Luke’s tears are ironic: the weeper is not the betrayed but the betrayer—it is he that breaks the covenant. These soothing words from Michael —“Nay, Boy, be of good hope: —we both may live / To see a better day.” — sound sarcastic and sad, seeing what may happen next. The same nature scenes then appear again and nature is ready to “speak,” as Michael says to Luke: “Up to the heights, and in among the storms, / Will I without thee go again, and do / All works which I was wont to do alone.” The meaning these same nature scenes convey varies with different contexts. Up to this far, the tragic result is still unknown, therefore the nature scenes only bespeak a returning back to the normal on the part of the old man Michael—the resuming of industry, in the hope of a better tomorrow.

While the positive result— paying off all the debts with what Luke will earn— is wishfully anticipated, the uncertainty is also contemplated. One way seems to be able to prevent the mishap from happening—the link of love. By showing the paternal love to try to bind Luke to Michael, the narrator puts love under a strict trial. Wordsworth then gives a detailed, loving and touching scene. Old Michael says,

Luke, thou hast been bound to me
Only by links of love, …
Lay now the corner-stone,…
…should evil men
Be thy companions, let this Sheep-fold be
Thy anchor and thy shield; amid all fear
And all temptation, let it be to thee
An emblem of the life thy Fathers liv'd,

When thou return' st, thou in this place wilt see
A work which is not here, a covenant
'Twill be between us…

Michael wants to lessen the uncertainty by having a covenant with Luke, but the bond of their covenant is much too loose, as it is maintained only through fragile love. If successful in preventing Luke from going astray, this proves the power of this bond. Yet, once love fails, a counter effect arouses in the reader a sense of mishap. The covenant is made through the testimony of nature—a stone—to want to keep love working in the young mind, which is something risky and Michael is not really sure about. Even so, he still expresses his love to Luke and hopes for the best: “--but whatever fate / Befall thee, I shall love thee to the last, / And bear thy memory with me to the grave.” That is a bet Michael wishes to win, even though he also sees some possibility of failure. He tries to build a sheepfold not only to enclose his sheep, but symbolically also wanting to keep Luke away from any temptation. Luke is a symbolic sheep that is tend to go astray any moment. He wants to keep Luke under the protection of nature (sheepfold is laid up using stones—a symbol of nature), and wishes him to use nature as a tool in fighting against any possible temptations lying ahead. Jesus-like Michael outpours his devotion and love in tending his one and only beloved sheep!

What follows is an image hinting at the possibility of his being easily tempted by the outside world—the pride on Luke’s face: “the Boy…put on a bold face,” which, when compared with the good intention from nature --“with wishes and with farewell pray'rs”—already hints at something, but not very clearly to the reader at this point. The bold face may hint at something good or bad.

Everything seems to go smoothly, at least so far. A “good report did from their Kinsman come, / Of Luke and his well-doing.” The description of pride still continues, though we don’t know if the pride of Luke will come “before a fall.” Wordsworth’s detailed addition of Luke’s home letter serves as an intensifier of the pride coming from the city—the material, as “the Boy / Wrote loving letters, full of wond'rous news, / Which, as the House-wife phrased it, were throughout / The
prettiest letters that were ever seen.” What comes at first is positive and good, and a sense of hope is generated in the reader in sharing Michael’s feelings.

The initial success seems to justify Michael’s decision in sending Luke away, so he is pacified and therefore peacefully “went about his daily work / With confident and cheerful thoughts.” With hopes, he finds it meaningful to keep on —“He to that valley took his way, and there / Wrought at the Sheep-fold.” The narrator, however, is quick in his act to bring both the reader and Michael into despair, when the industry on Michael’s part is contrasted with a gradually slackening of duty on the part of Luke. A sharp contrast is brought out with mixed feelings when the afore-mentioned words used to described the successful parish boy are used again to indicate Luke’s failure, when “[h]e in the dissolute city gave himself / To evil courses:…so that he was driven at last / To seek a hiding-place beyond the seas.” “Beyond the seas” used to mean an honor for the parish boy Bateman, as it stands for the trust he won and the place he prospered later. However, the tone of honor these words carry in relating to Bateman turns sour in Luke’s case and becomes a symbol of shame. Up to this point, the main story line comes to an end, but the mixed feelings are just starting to ferment in the reader, through the unheard, but felt words coming from nature.

The narration is supposed to stop where the story ends, but, just like the beginning, Wordsworth adds more to help leavening up the whole feeling. The senses of irony, gloom and loss are not deeply felt until Wordsworth adds some afterthought. However, this addition is not added abruptly and randomly, but elaborately, slowly and naturally. He continues with the theme of love, which is the covenant made but broken by the son. The tragic feel lies in the breaking of the covenant of love—there is no returned comfort. The conflict and imbalance result in sadness and a strong emotion in the reader. Though unbalanced; Michael’s love brings about endurance, which makes him even more pathetic. The following narration shows the endurance of Michael in the face of his ineffable loss: “There is a comfort in the strength of love; / ’Twill make a thing endurable, which else / Would break the heart.” The effect of “grin and bear it” in the face of this hardship produces a sense of pity and sorrow in the reader. The narrator now steps further back, serving only as a narrator of the narrator, and only relates what he has heard, making the whole narrative sound objective: “I have convers’d with more than one / Remember the Old Man, and what he was / Years after he had heard this heavy news.” From nature bursts in the reader a thundering echo, which is produced by blending all effects of foreshadows, contrast, irony, and pity arranged in the story. The objective presentation of the hard facts by nature without making any complaining comment makes the whole story a much sadder one. Wordsworth turns
the focus to the wordless natural scenes again to let it silently bear the unbearable heaviness of beings, and also let it finally magnify all these mixed feelings in the reader. The foreshadowing spot showing up at the very beginning of the story appears again, wrapping up this story, but already contains in it completely different notes.

Among the rocks
He went, and still look'd up upon the sun.
And listen'd to the wind; and as before
Perform'd all kinds of labour for his Sheep,
And for the land his small inheritance.

Now nature takes on the notes of irony, sadness, solitude and loneliness after it magnifies and pours these into the reader when he reads the whole story. In the Bible, the father anticipated the return of his prodigal son, and this son did return finally. Here Michael also anticipates Luke’s return; he still “look’s up upon the sun / son,” but “all hope is a good hope.” Sadness permeates into the afterthought of the story and the mind of the reader. Among the same rocks, old Michael does the same work; everything still goes on as it was, even the murmuring water. Yet they are not the same in the mind of the reader. The covenant is broken, love traded with sadness and misery. The broken love may still store for Michael some strength to endure the loss; but it is far too heavy to bear all the meaning of his life. The whole happy mood the natural man possesses and experiences in his daily life changes completely. The moment the reader reads about the same natural scene, he hears it talking to him about the sadness, and capriciousness of human conditions. Even the dell feels like desolate, empty and hopeless with its “hollowness”—“to that hollow Dell from time to time / Did he repair, to build the Fold of which / His flock had need.” As the reader turns to Michael again, he suddenly feels him a meaningless living creature acting mechanically but hopelessly; “he thither went,” to the planned site for his sheepfold, yet “never lifted up a single stone.” No motivation lies behind to goad him on.

Nature—in the form of a foreshadowing spot—presents itself time and again, each time adding sadder notes than before. When at last, “by the Sheep-fold, sometimes was he seen / Sitting alone.” The sheepfold remains the same, but the mood of Michael and the reader change. The loneliness is strongly felt with no one accompanying him, but “his faithful Dog, / Then old, beside him, lying at his feet.” The former scene of the three accompanying one another is brought to the mind of the reader to create a sharp contrast with the present scene of only two accompanying each other pathetically—an old man and an old dog, both with their days numbered.
The unfinished work of the sheepfold testifies to the too much sadness the old man has to bear, and too much for him to bear.

Before the poetry ends, the reader sees for the last time the foreshadowing spot. The scene appears again, at this moment, helping the reader bring back countless mixed feelings generated through the whole story. The peaceful, relaxing and comfortable part of the scene is in clash with the uncertainty. All these mix together, serving as reminders for the memories of the reader to review and turn against in the mind. Isabel the industrious wife dies not long after Michael’s death. A series of incidents strike the reader’s mind hard. At the end, what Michael does his best to prevent sadly and inevitably happens. The land that cannot “bear to suffer in another person’s hand,” goes “into a Stranger's hand.” The light boasting its equal brightness to that from the stars up in the heaven disappears, forever—“The Cottage which was nam'd The Evening Star / Is gone.” What remains is a solitary ploughshare standing in the same position to sadly mark the once bright but now faded glory of an industrious family. It also signifies the abandoned ruins after human changes: “the ploughshare has been through the ground / On which it stood.”

The unwillingness to change on the part of Michael finally proves only to be a shattered dream ending in irony and bitterness when finally “great changes have been wrought / In all the neighbourhood.” What is left now is only bare nature, showing up for the last time, with some human work left unfinished, and deserted: “the Oak is left / That grew beside their Door; and the remains / Of the unfinished Sheep-fold may be seen / Beside the boisterous brook of Green-head Gill.”

The poem ends in the “boisterous” sounds of the brook. It is the sounds of nature wanting to tell and tell too much, though silently, metaphorically and symbolically. From the “ferocious” sounds it utters, the reader also meditates on the whole matter. The boisterous sounds may want to tell us the sad change of the social environment from a rural one into an industrial one, resulting in many tragedies of human beings, though it does bring material comforts. When the reader looks back again, he can obviously see Michael make a wrong decision; he loses not only his son, but all his properties. Were he not so addicted to his land and properties, maybe the story would end up differently--Luke would still stay with him, though some land is sold to pay off the debt. That’s what nature has been telling us, and will tell us more, with each rereading, each time when we listen carefully to the ferocious boisterousness of the brook!

**Conclusion:**
Seen from the examination given above, we see how the story line and nature speak in a parallel and interwoven way. Though nature is put in the background, she echoes and conflicts with the plot line, magnifies all the feelings and tells much to the reader. The narration tells us the development of the whole event, while nature adds meaning and magnifies feelings. From “Michael,” we see Wordsworth always has nature in mind even if his focus does not seem directly to be on nature in every poem. He let nature show in a decisive way, enlivening the whole poem with emotions and feelings the reader will deeply feel, each time with a reread.
Works Cited
