

*Wordsworth's Empiricist Poetic and its Influence in the  
Twentieth Century*

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SUBMITTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

THE SCHOOL OF ENGLISH

SEPTEMBER 2006

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## Abstract

### *Wordsworth's Empiricist Poetic and its Influence in the Twentieth Century*

This thesis has two connected aims. Firstly, it claims that it is meaningful to describe Wordsworth's aesthetic, and his beliefs about the subject-object relationship, as substantially empiricist. However, it is not claimed that Wordsworth is consistently empiricist in the way that a philosopher might aspire to be: indeed, there is a place to be found within this argument for the recognition of his transcendentalism. While it is granted that the word "empiricist" is not always used in the most rigorous philosophical sense, the influence of philosophical empiricism on Wordsworth naturally figures in the argument. Secondly, the thesis demonstrates that the continued influence of Wordsworth in the twentieth century has to be understood primarily as the influence of his empiricist aesthetic. The thesis concludes by suggesting that there are wider possibilities for poetry than are encouraged by this aesthetic. The importance of undertaking this project does not lie only in objections to Wordsworth's theory or practice, but arises also from a consideration of his continuing influence.

Chapter One argues that on the basis of his poetry and criticism of the period 1787 to 1805, the description "The Empirical Wordsworth" is a meaningful one. This is established through an examination of Wordsworth's writings, his sister's journal entries, his correspondence, his poetry and contemporaneous literary reviews of *The Prelude*.

Chapter Two, in order to demonstrate the antecedents of Wordsworth's empiricist beliefs, is a study of his philosophical development from the influences of Hartley, Burke and Berkeley.

Chapter Three examines the influence of Coleridge on Wordsworth. This is predominantly an empiricist one contrary to received notions of it being transcendentalist.

Chapter Four reviews the reading of Wordsworth in the twentieth century. This has to be understood in terms of the reaction to Romanticism in the twentieth century.

Finally, Chapter Five looks at twentieth-century poetry that largely avoids the empiricist influence of Wordsworth. It also introduces the concept of "Empirical Identifiers": an analytic tool for literary criticism.

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## Introduction

The stimulus behind this thesis lies in a question, namely: What is the value of a poem if it does not enable one to identify personally with it to the extent that (to paraphrase Keats): it becomes a wording of one's own thoughts?<sup>1</sup> In other words, why should a person persist in reading a poem if it fails to prompt in their mind images and emotions that specifically are their own? This question, although seemingly naive, if treated seriously, leads to a much wider area of discussion: that of the relationship between the reader and the text. In academic circles, this debate is hardly new and has arguably been the main motivation behind the development of most forms of literary theory—from New Criticism to Post-structuralism. This literary discussion was indirectly influenced by ideas that were present in art during the first quarter of the twentieth century; ideas that in turn had been influenced by discoveries in science and technology during that period.

Before that time the predominant philosophical idea in science was that of positivism, which was formulated by French philosopher Auguste Comte who, as Arthur I. Miller says in *Einstein, Picasso*, 'advocated progress toward a science cleansed of theology and metaphysics'.<sup>2</sup> In the 1880s, Ernst Mach expanded this concept by stating that 'only phenomena reducible to sense perceptions (or laboratory data) could be considered physically real'.<sup>3</sup> The resultant implication was that physical objects existed independently of the senses. However, this view began to be seriously challenged with the appearance of new technologies in science. New inventions such as the aeroplane, the motorcar, and wireless telegraphy were significant in changing people's ideas about time and space.<sup>4</sup> The discovery of X rays 'seemed to render inside and outside ambiguous, the opaque became transparent and the distinction between two and three dimensions became blurred'.<sup>5</sup> In mathematics, new geometries could be conceived of as more than three dimensional, with the implication of movement in time and space.<sup>6</sup>

These new discoveries and their implications had ramifications that were becoming apparent outside of scientific discourse. In painting, the arrival of postimpressionism signalled a reaction against representation and naturalism.<sup>7</sup> The pioneering cinematography of Edward Muybridge and Etienne-Jules with their multiple images ‘permitted change with time to be portrayed either on successive frames of film or on a single frame, in addition to depicting different perspectives on serial frames’.<sup>8</sup> The new discoveries in science thus led to new ways of thinking about and practicing art. Miller writes:

The general line of argumentation among art historians is that the roots of cubism are in Paul Cézanne and primitive art. This view discounts completely how astounding developments in science, mathematics and technology contributed to the very definition of “avant-garde”. It has long been known that the roots of science were never really within science itself. Why then should the roots of the most influential art movement of the twentieth century lie totally within art?<sup>9</sup>

Artists who have proven to be influential in the art of the twentieth century were not operating in an intellectual and aesthetic vacuum but were actively engaged in discussing and learning about the scientific ideas surrounding them. For instance, Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger* included ideas of four-dimensional space that were introduced to him by Maurice Princet, an insurance actuary in Picasso’s circle who had an interest in advanced mathematics. Picasso ‘listened to his discourses on non-Euclidian geometry and the fourth dimension, which Princet gleaned mostly from Poincaré’s widely read book *La Science et l’hypothèse*’.<sup>10</sup> Princet’s discussions fascinated Picasso and significantly changed his thinking. Poincaré had proposed that the fourth dimension be understood as a sequence of scenes, however Picasso drastically modified this by representing ‘different views of a scene all at once, simultaneously’.<sup>11</sup> This resulted in an ambiguous visual representation, which was probably one of Picasso’s objectives.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the geometrical representation of spatial simultaneity that Cubism depended upon necessarily produced visual ambiguities.

Furthermore, the geometrical imagery underlying cubism (largely engendered by mathematics<sup>13</sup>) assisted Picasso in his goal ‘of seeking a representation based in conception rather than perception’.<sup>14</sup> This movement away from an empirical representation of phenomena marked a radical shift in the

aesthetic of visual art. This aesthetic is described by Thomas Vargish and Delo Mook in *Inside Modernism*:

In Western art before Modernism the principal visual model for representing the world was that of optical similitude or perspective, [...]. This model valorized the space of a single-point perspective, [...]. Such space is sometimes called “classical” by art historians and sometimes “realist” or “realistic”, [...]. As the cubist and other modernist artists were fond of pointing out, [...] single-point perspective was not realistic but actually “illusionist,” [...]. “Classical perspective” assumes a neutral, homogenous space in which objects exist independently [...]. This model of spatial representation employs the same geometric principles as Newtonian space—it is also neutral, homogenous, and in all ways a suitable medium for Newton’s laws of motion, his mechanical worldview. The fundamental goal of the practitioners of linear perspective was the rendering of three-dimensional objects on a two-dimensional surface [...]. An underlying premise in linear perspective is that light travels in straight lines. This premise is combined with the premisses of Euclidean geometry to formulate rules for the geometric construction of a perspective rendering of a scene as if observed through a window. [...] This method of rendering perspective, premised on the validity of Euclidian geometry, may properly be termed “linear” [...].<sup>15</sup>

Einstein’s criticisms of Euclidian geometry and further developments in the field of quantum mechanics helped confirm the validity of the new artistic outlook. As Miller says:

Advances in atomic physics, dependent on methods Einstein pioneered for theory building as well as on his relativity theory, led to abstractions in visual imagery and a concomitant break with classical causality.<sup>16</sup>

He continues:

A hallmark of classicism in art and science is a visual imagery abstracted from phenomena and objects we have experienced in the daily world. There is no such visual imagery in quantum mechanics or in highly abstract art. Artists and scientist had to seek it anew rather than extrapolate it from the everyday world. Just as it is pointless to stand in front of a Mondrian or Pollock, for instance, and ask what the painting is *of*, so it’s pointless to ask what the electron under quantum mechanics looks like.<sup>17</sup>

We can find echoes of this in Vargish and Mook’s *Inside Modernism*:

Cubism does not pretend to represent the single possible visual conception from a given perspective. Instead each cubist painting proposes to engage the viewer in a specific conception of a contained visual reality—in what Herbert Read called ‘a construct of the visual *imagination*.’ A cubist work presents itself not as the only valid representation of a given reality, but as one legitimate representation of it. A cubist work of art does not say, ‘If you stood here where I specify at the moment I dictate you would see exactly what you see represented in this picture.’ Only Realism gets that dogmatic. Instead the cubist work says, ‘I represent this plastic reality, this visual conception. My representation is

imaginative. It has a right, a right not to demand your passive agreement but to invite your imaginative participation.’<sup>18</sup>

The transmission of these artistic ideas into poetry was almost certainly due to Picasso’s close friend, the poet Guillaume Apollinaire. Apollinaire, as Eduardo Kac says,

sought a Cubist approach to poetry. In certain poems he employed fragments of sounds and images among words scattered on the page to convey the perception of a given scene or moment from a variety of perspectives, paralleling the pictorial strategies of his friends Picasso and Braque. In other works he created compositions of concise visual rhythm and rarified semantical density.<sup>19</sup>

This practice also contributed to the narrative innovations that were being seen in modernist poetry.

This is articulated by Alan Soldofsky in ‘Bifurcated Narratives in the Poetry of Robinson Jeffers, C. K. Williams, and Denis Johnson’:

In the context of the defining narratives of high modernism—Hart Crane’s *The Bridge*, T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, Ezra Pound’s *Cantos*, and William Carlos Williams’s *Paterson*—poets experimented with narrative structure [...]. These experimental narratives tended to be disjointed and [...] influenced by cubism and other experimental forms of visual art, [...]. In the case of Pound and Eliot, the deployment of narrative fragmentation and disintegration works as an organizing strategy, a method of cubist assemblage, particularly in *The Cantos* and *The Waste Land*, that compels the reader to construct an emotional coherence out of the text’s manifold discontinuities.<sup>20</sup>

This is particularly apparent in the first two lines of *The Waste Land* (‘April is the cruellest month, breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land’), which combines the perspectives of Geoffrey Chaucer and Walt Whitman. As is well known, “April” alludes to the opening lines of the Prologue of Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*:

Whan that Aprill, with his shoures soote  
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote  
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,  
Of which vertu engendred is the flour<sup>21</sup>

(1-4)

“Lilacs” alludes to Whitman’s ‘When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d’—an elegy for Abraham Lincoln:

When lilacs last in the door-yard bloom’d,

And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the night,  
I mourn'd—and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring.

O ever-returning spring! trinity sure to me you bring;  
Lilac blooming perennial, and drooping star in the west,  
And thought of him I love.

(1-6)

Eliot has used merely two words, “April” and “Lilacs”, to present simultaneously the decay/renewal motifs that are held in tension in Chaucer and Whitman, two poets chronologically separated by centuries but here conjoined. This is only one example of many such that can be found in *The Waste Land*. Instead of subjecting thoughts to the logic of uninterrupted statement, Eliot’s “cubism” allows for a variety of perspectives that (as Kac is quoted above as saying in relation to Apollinaire) ‘convey the perception of a given scene or moment from a variety of perspectives’.

As the twentieth century progressed, this poetic cubism made redundant the need for poetry to describe phenomena the way it once did and marked a diminishment in the expression via poetry of subjective mental states based upon a stable authorial persona. Instead, poetry became verbally inventive and utilised shifts in spatial and temporal perspective, as well as incorporating the fragmented collage affects of cubist painting. The sum of these innovations was a hermeneutical plurality that had hitherto not been possible in poetry. This threw open a challenge to readers to become actively engaged in the interpretative process, rather than to be merely passive observers to a work’s perceived biographical, autobiographical or descriptive elements.

Nevertheless, these liberating developments in poetry have found themselves having to compete alongside a more critically approved poetry that looks back to an earlier world-view. This attitude, which stems from some of the central poetic ideas of William Wordsworth, seeks to diminish the autonomy of poetic language and to focus attention upon phenomena. It is based upon the idea that reality exists outside of perception, and that the main function of poetic language is merely the delineation of this reality. By doing this it has served to maintain a poetic aesthetic that is founded



entirely upon an appreciation of only one function of poetic language: that of denotation. Furthermore, this poetry is in principle incompatible with what we now know about the psychological mechanisms that underlie the process of reading, a process that recognises the reader's active participation in the interpretation of what is read.

The negative results of this have been critiques of individual poetic works based solely upon this criterion. We have a situation, today, in which the majority of celebrated poetry is being written because of, and for, this critical sensibility—and the publishing outlets that reflect it. Consequently, the majority of contemporary poetry is no longer about reader identification but about author communication. This poetry is written largely to convey the poet's thoughts and feelings about a specific event, situation or place he or she has experienced. The poet is not necessarily concerned with whether the reader is emotionally affected or not by the poem, as long as he or she understands clearly the "message" the poet is trying to convey. This message may consist of some "important" insight gained from an experience, or it could be (as is most often the case) a commonplace observation about contemporary life. Such poetry is, as I will seek to demonstrate, a legacy of Wordsworth's poetic aesthetic.

It is becoming increasingly recognized that one of the most dominant aspects of Wordsworth's influence is that which derives from the philosophical empiricism upon which part of his poetic aesthetic was based. Wordsworth used this empiricism mainly as a rationale to champion a more descriptive and discursive poetry than arguably had been formerly the case. It can be demonstrated that Wordsworth's poetry relies too consistently upon a descriptive realist aesthetic derived from empiricist beliefs about subject/object relationships. As a result of this, it can be observed that Wordsworth's poetic theory and practice are limiting both as a rationale for the creative impulse and as a critical methodology. This theory operates within the context of an assumed authorial persona, an individual consciousness, remarking upon an external reality. It assumes that the reader's role in the cognitive

process of poetic appreciation is essentially passive, a mere witnessing to the experiences and perceptions of the authorial persona. Consequently, readers are excluded from any participation in the creation of a meaning that has individual significance for them, and with which they can fully empathise. This lack of a plurality of meanings limits poetry's emotional effect, as well as greatly reducing the possibilities for varied exegetical analysis.

This thesis has two connected aims. Firstly, it claims that it is meaningful to describe Wordsworth's aesthetic, and his beliefs about the subject-object relationship, as substantially empiricist. However, it is not claimed that Wordsworth is consistently empiricist in the way that a philosopher might aspire to be: indeed, there is a place to be found within this argument for the recognition of his transcendentalism. While it is granted that the word "empiricist" is not always used in the most rigorous philosophical sense, the influence of philosophical empiricism on Wordsworth naturally figures in the argument. Secondly, the thesis demonstrates that the continued influence of Wordsworth in the twentieth century has to be understood primarily as the influence of his empiricist aesthetic. The thesis concludes by suggesting that there are wider possibilities for poetry than are encouraged by this aesthetic. The importance of undertaking this project does not lie only in objections to Wordsworth's theory or practice, but arises also from a consideration of his continuing influence.

Chapter One argues that on the basis of his poetry and criticism of the period 1787 to 1805, the description "The Empirical Wordsworth" is a meaningful one. This is established through an examination of Wordsworth's writings, his sister's journal entries, his correspondence, his poetry and contemporaneous literary reviews of *The Prelude*. Chapter Two, in order to demonstrate the antecedents of Wordsworth's empiricist beliefs, is a study of his philosophical development from the influences of Hartley, Burke and Berkeley. Chapter Three examines the influence of Coleridge on Wordsworth. This is predominantly an empiricist one contrary to received notions of it being transcendentalist. Chapter Four reviews the reading of Wordsworth in the twentieth century. This has to

be understood in terms of the reaction to Romanticism in the twentieth century. Finally, Chapter Five looks at twentieth-century poetry that largely avoids the empiricist influence of Wordsworth. It also introduces the concept of “Empirical Identifiers”: an analytic tool for literary criticism.

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<sup>1</sup> In a letter to John Taylor dated 27 February 1818 Keats writes: ‘I think Poetry should surprise by a fine excess and not by Singularity—it should strike the Reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts and appear almost as a remembrance’. See *Selected Letters of John Keats*, p.74.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur I. Miller, *Einstein, Picasso: Space, Time, and the Beauty That Causes Havoc* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p.23.

<sup>3</sup> Miller, p.23.

<sup>4</sup> Miller, p.3.

<sup>5</sup> Miller, p.3.

<sup>6</sup> Miller, p.3.

<sup>7</sup> Miller, p.3.

<sup>8</sup> Miller, p.3.

<sup>9</sup> Miller, p.2.

<sup>10</sup> Miller, pp.3-4.

<sup>11</sup> Miller, pp.174.

<sup>12</sup> Picasso was fascinated by the psychologist William James’s “folded visual card” experiment where a drawing of a half folded card appears to move back and forth while remaining in position with the light and shade unaltered. See *Einstein, Picasso: Space, Time, and the Beauty That Causes Havoc*, p.123.

<sup>13</sup> Miller, p.259.

<sup>14</sup> Miller, p.165.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Vargish and Delo Monk, *Inside Modernism: Relativity Theory, Cubism, Narrative* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), pp.25-26.

<sup>16</sup> Miller, p.253.

<sup>17</sup> Miller, p.259.

<sup>18</sup> Vargish and Monk, pp.35-36.

<sup>19</sup> Eduardo Kac, ‘Recent Experiments in Holopoetry and Computer Holopoetry’, *Display Holography*, Fourth International Symposium (1991), 229-236 (p.1).

<sup>20</sup> Alan Soldofsky, ‘Bifurcated Narratives in the Poetry of Robinson Jeffers, C. K. Williams, and Denis Johnson’, *Narrative*, 11 (2003), 1-19, (p.1)

<sup>21</sup> Translation: ‘When April with his showers sweet with fruit / The drought of March has pierced unto the root / And bathed each vein with liquor that has power / To generate therein and sire the flower’.

## Chapter One

### The Empirical Wordsworth

Through an examination of Wordsworth's writings, his sister's journal entries, his correspondence, his poetry and contemporaneous literary reviews of *The Prelude*, I will argue that the description "The Empirical Wordsworth" is a meaningful one. However, I will not argue that Wordsworth is consistently empirical in the way a philosopher might aspire to be. I acknowledge that there is room within this argument for the recognition of his transcendentalism. With regard to this, one of my main contentions is that Wordsworth wrote empirically partly because of his transcendentalism, rather than despite it. I will look at this seemingly paradoxical stance regarding his transcendentalism and show that the widely accepted view of his transcendentalism's influence on his poetry (namely, as being an influence that produced poetry that is distinctly non-empiricist merely because his transcendentalism is seen as being philosophically incompatible with his empiricism and, therefore, impossible to harmonise with it) is mistaken.

As will be observed several times in this thesis, the claim that Wordsworth is an "empiricist" poet depends on selecting certain features of his work, whether ideas or stylistic qualities, which co-exist with other features of a different tendency: features which, in their strongest form, merit the description "transcendentalist". Of course, Wordsworth is a poet, and although he may be a philosophical poet, he is not an academic philosopher; consequently, these two seemingly unrelated aspects in his work might be difficult to reduce to a cohesive conceptual system. In any case, the separation between the "empiricist" and the "transcendentalist" has long been recognised as by no means complete. W. J. Bate, in *From Classic to Romantic*, demonstrated the links between empiricist ideas and Romantic theories of imagination not only in Wordsworth, but also in Coleridge and Keats. What this thesis attempts to do, then, is to isolate a

tendency, rather than to make a claim about the essential character of Wordsworth's work. In fact, it is a tendency that is stronger in the 1790s, and which is reduced to some extent under the influence of Coleridge's later developed philosophy. However, it remains true to say that, even when "empiricism" ceases to have much relationship to Wordsworth's central purposes, he is still a poet who displays deference for things as they are, and who is relatively opposed to the fantastic.

Before I continue, I think it necessary to explain the way that the term "empiricism" will be used in this chapter. The term is to be understood in its relation to the philosophical empiricism of Berkeley, Locke and Hume: which can be stated as the doctrine that all knowledge derives from experience. Anthony Easthope defines empiricism as 'the epistemological belief that the real can be experienced and understood more or less directly by the unprejudiced observer'.<sup>1</sup> He identifies empiricism as functioning 'in a scenario with three terms, these governing the object, the means of representation and the subject'.<sup>2</sup> He then elaborates upon each of these terms:

(1) The object is assumed as existing in a real which is supposedly pre-given. All you have to do is observe the real 'objectively', that is, without pre-judgement or self-deception, and the real will yield knowledge of itself.

(2) The means of representation by which the object is represented to the subject is presumed not to interfere—or to intervene only minimally—with the subject's access to the real. In principle, discourse is transparent so that the only problem for knowledge is, as it were, to go and look and see what things are *there*.

(3) As always in an epistemological scenario, subject and object are joined reciprocally, so that the [...] subject and the [...] real correspond to each other. In that the [...] real is simply autonomous, given, the English subject is similarly not constructed but always already merely there as the subject of or for knowledge/experience.<sup>3</sup>

Although there are philosophical niceties in the work of Berkeley and Hume that might lead one to object to the use of the word "real", Easthope's description is fair to the practical affects of empiricism.

In *Reading Twentieth-Century Poetry: The Language of Gender and Objects*, Edward Larrissy identifies two modes of writing that encompass empiricist assumptions. He labels these the 'empiricist attitude' and the 'empiricist moment'. By the former, he means a writing procedure that is 'sceptical, discursive' and

‘rationalist with a small “r”’. By the latter, he is referring to a procedure ‘which cultivates the vivid rendering of moments of perception’.<sup>4</sup> As an instance of the ‘empiricist attitude’, he cites Tom Paulin’s poem ‘Desert-martin’:

A Jock squaddy glances down the street  
 And grins, happy and expendable,  
 Like a brass cartridge. He is a useful thing,  
 Almost at home, and yet not quite, not quite.

. . . I see a plain  
 Presbyterian grace sour, then harden,  
 As a free strenuous spirit changes  
 To a servile defiance that whines and shrieks  
 For the bondage of the letter.<sup>5</sup>

Of this Larrissy writes: ‘This blend of observation and verified generalization is perfectly acceptable to the “empiricist attitude”’.<sup>6</sup> To illustrate the “empiricist moment” Larrissy offers the following extract from Paulin’s poem ‘Yes, the Maternity Unit’:

Behind sealed windows  
 each tiny grub must yell  
 inside a plastic cell,  
 be topped and tailed  
 before its feed  
 and with a goldfish mouth  
 gnaw the embossed nibble  
 on a tender shield,  
 until, heavy-headed,  
 a clubbed frown,  
 it contemplates the wind  
 and blurps a verdict.<sup>7</sup>

Larrissy describes this as ‘the vivid capturing of things seen’<sup>8</sup> and writes:

Paulin’s version differs very little from that of the Metaphor Men. He dwells less gloatingly on the metaphors implicit in each of his unexpected epithets. It is more a matter of renewing individual words: a neo-Classicist’s Martianism.<sup>9</sup>

Another characteristic of empiricist poetry is its construction of a stable self. Peter Middleton says of this that it,

assumes that a poem is the record of an ‘I’ speaking its loves and losses. This self expresses its

feelings, narrates its history, and makes judgements as if its right and ability to do so were beyond question.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, Middleton quotes Burton Hatlen's definition of empiricist poetry to emphasise the point.

Hatlen says that empiricist poetry is,

a poetry almost entirely controlled by the first person pronoun, which claims to name the one fixed point in an unstable world—a poetry, therefore, of nostalgia, for in the end it turns out that in such poems the self is constituted largely by its longing for a lost homeland.<sup>11</sup>

From these various definitions, it is possible to construct a set of characteristics common to empiricist poetry:

(1) Phenomena are posited to exist independently of consciousness which places limits as to how individual perceptions of these phenomena can be dealt with using language. These limits define what is to be regarded as an “appropriate” rendering of “reality” via language, and what is to be regarded as an “inappropriate” rendering.

(2) Language is assumed to be a transparent and uncomplicated medium through which phenomena can be “correctly” represented.

(3) There is reliance upon the construction of a stable ego, or self, functioning as a confessional witness to a reality independent of perception. This ego is conscious of itself as the controlling mechanism of the poem's structure, and its effect upon the reader's response.

(4) Stylistically it consists of a combination of sense-data descriptions and simile, executed utilising conventional syntax in a tone that is conversational. It is structured using either free verse or regular metre, rhyme or other formal devices. But any formal artifice present functions merely as adornment, without interrupting the syntactical conventionality and logic.

Having described how empiricism manifests poetically, we can now examine Wordsworth in light of this.

That Wordsworth is a poet in whose work visual precision and description is of fundamental importance can no longer be held in doubt. In *Wordsworth: A Philosophical Approach*, Melvin Rader says of him:

His mind was distinguished by the combination of very sharp perception and very intense subjectivity. [...] But no less remarkable was the acuteness of his sensory perceptions. In his old age he remarked with justifiable pride: ‘I have hardly ever known anyone but myself who had a true eye for nature’. This minute accuracy of his visual and auditory impressions was preserved by a most retentive memory.<sup>12</sup>

This aspect of his writing procedure is promoted in the titles of many of his poems such as: ‘Suggested by the view of Lancaster Castle’; ‘Who fancied what a pretty sight’; ‘On seeing a Needlecase in the Form of a

Harp'; 'When looking at the present face of things' and *Descriptive Sketches*. Indeed, it was the visual precision and descriptiveness in Wordsworth's poetry that so enamoured Coleridge, in their early relationship. In *Coleridge's Philosophy of Nature*, J. A. Appleyard notes that while listening to Wordsworth's poetry a realisation that occurred to Coleridge was that, 'it was possible to describe nature with a fresh simplicity and exactness that surpassed anything he had thought possible'.<sup>13</sup> This fidelity to nature was important to Wordsworth because for him nature was the interface between the material world and the spiritual, and he believed that by describing it accurately in poetry two things would be possible. The first would be, as Robert Langbaum says in *The Modern Spirit*, to 'show the spiritual significance of the world, to show that we evolve a soul or identity through experience'.<sup>14</sup> The second, because the mind that perceives nature is 'itself part of the nature it perceives', it is possible for us to have confidence 'in the reality of ourselves and the external world'.<sup>15</sup> These two beliefs formed the main thrust of his poetic agenda, and the bulk of his writings and poetry can be seen as an apologia for them.

Wordsworth's writings and correspondence are replete with his advocacy of what has been called the 'static nominals of reason': his use of language in a nominal way.<sup>16</sup> David Pirie, in *William Wordsworth: The Poetry of Grandeur and of Tenderness*, comments that, 'instead of concocting imaginary worlds for our diversion', Wordsworth, 'directs us back to the one world which is real'.<sup>17</sup> In 'Techniques of Truth in the Poetry of William Wordsworth and Ezra Pound', Geoffrey Clifford Jaggs notes:

His interest is not in language for itself, but as a means to an end. That end is an irreducibly empiricist one: we are of the earth, our nature bound up in the larger nature that sustains us. Our engagement with the universe is prior to language, but language—or poetic language, at least—is in a constant state of reaching out to the universe.<sup>18</sup>

Elements of this can be seen in his poem 'The Influence of Natural Objects':

Wisdom and Spirit of the universe!  
 Thou Soul, that art the Eternity of thought!  
 And giv'st to forms and images a breath  
 And everlasting motion! not in vain,  
 By day or star-light, thus from my first dawn  
 Of childhood didst thou intertwine for me



The passions that build up our human soul;  
 Not with the mean and vulgar works of Man;  
 But with high objects, with enduring things,  
 With life and nature;<sup>19</sup>

(1-10)

With regard to Wordsworth's subtitle for Book VIII of *The Prelude* ('Love of Nature leading to Love of Man') Pirie writes:

This subtitle still misdirects many readers in their approach to *The Prelude* as a whole and to much of Wordsworth's other poetry as well. [...] 'Love of Nature' sounds soothingly abstract whereas the poetry itself is often defiantly concrete and insists upon the unqualified actuality of 'rocks, and stones and trees'.<sup>20</sup>

Of the poems in *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth writes, 'I have at all times endeavoured to look steadily at my subject, consequently, I hope that there is in these poems little falsehood of description'.<sup>21</sup> In a letter to his sister concerning Dryden he writes:

That his [Dryden's] cannot be the language of imagination must have necessarily followed from this. That there is not a single image from Nature in the whole body of his works; and in his translation from Vergil, whenever Vergil can be fairly said to have had his eye upon his subject, Dryden always spoils the passage.<sup>22</sup>

Here, Wordsworth reproaches Dryden for mishandling his translation of Virgil's accuracy of description as inferred from the phrase: 'to have had his eye upon his subject'. It seems not to have occurred to Wordsworth that translation, at its best, might well try to avoid literal interpretations in favour of evoking the mood and register of the poem. Similarly, in the dedication to Robert Jones at the beginning of *Descriptive Sketches* Wordsworth writes:

You will meet with few images without recollecting the spot where we observed them together; consequently, whatever is feeble in my design, or spiritless in my colouring, will be amply supplied by your memory.<sup>23</sup>

The two key words here are 'observed' and 'memory'. For Wordsworth memory is accurate observation replicated in the present. He calls upon Jones to overlook any faults in the poetic structure and evocation of feeling confident that the accurate description of the natural settings will rekindle his memory.

Consequently, an important aspect of a poem—its ability to move one emotionally—is under-played. Indeed, Wordsworth seems to undervalue many of the traditional tenets of poetic practice. For example, as Walter Raleigh points out, he pays little attention to the role of expression in poetry:

In the Preface to the later editions of the *Lyrical Ballads*, where he gives a careful analysis of the character of the poet, Wordsworth makes only the barest allusion to this essential gift of expression. Yet the delight in giving a resonant voice to feeling, the love of the exquisitely turned phrase and of the gorgeous trappings of imagery are found in many, if not all, of the best poets.<sup>24</sup>

The 1802 Preface and Appendix to *Lyrical Ballads*, and the 1798 ‘Advertisement’ for it are pregnant with instances of Wordsworth’s favouring of the capacity for describing things experienced. The Preface was already retrospective in its first version of 1800. The extended version, published in the second volume in 1802, retains this retrospective character, in that it is largely intended to explain the purpose of the poems published in 1798, as well as the more recent ones. In the Preface of 1802, Wordsworth writes:

The principle object, then, [...] was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or *describe* them, [...] in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect (Emphasis added).<sup>25</sup>

It is noticeable that he links the recording of sense-data with the act of “imagining” as if they existed in a natural syllogistic unity. This conception of the imagination is not what might seem to us the “common-sense” one: that imagination flourishes not because we have things (images, objects etc.) presented to us phenomenologically but, rather, because of their absence which forces us to imagine them in our mind’s eye.<sup>26</sup> Here, Wordsworth is advocating the use of imagination to shore up reality to make more explicit what has been seen.<sup>27</sup>

It was Wordsworth’s conviction that the imagination could not be separated from ‘incidents’, ‘situations’, or even objects which led him to devise the familiar formula in ‘Tintern Abbey’ about ‘the mighty world / Of eye and ear, —both what they half-create, / And what perceive’. However, by the time he came to write Book Eleven of *The Prelude* (1805) Wordsworth was able to change the relationship between

creation and perception so that some priority (albeit a problematical one) was given to the former: ‘but this I feel: / That from thyself it is that thou must give, / Else never canst receive’. This formulation is not quite as strong as the concept of imagination to be found in the *Intimations Ode* (the later stanzas of which date from 1804) where the primacy of imagination is seen as being figured in terms of Plato’s doctrine of pre-existence.

Further to the above quoted passage from the *Preface*, is its emphasis on the modifying power of the mind expressed as throwing over, ‘incidents and situations from common life’ a ‘certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect’. Later in this thesis, I will discuss at some length this modification process and argue that it should not be seen as necessarily being at odds with the passage’s equal emphasis on describing things. For Wordsworth, the two amount to almost the same thing—at least in practice if not (perhaps) in theory.

Perhaps the clearest illustration of the way in which Wordsworth sought to exhibit the ‘colouring of imagination’ thrown over ‘incidents and situations from common life’ is to be found in ‘*The Thorn*’, not only because of the insistent way in which this aim is pursued, but also because Wordsworth provides a “Note” to underline his purpose. The Note, famously, explains that the speaker might have been a man (‘a captain of a small trading vessel, for example’) who had retired ‘to some village or country town of which he was not native’. Men such as these, ‘having little to do, become credulous and talkative from indolence’ and are ‘prone to superstition’. Most importantly, ‘They have a reasonable share of imagination, by which word I mean the faculty which produces impressive effects out of simple elements’. Consequently, the speaker of ‘*The Thorn*’, contemplating a little ‘hill of moss’ is able not only to imagine that this is the grave of Martha Ray’s infant because it is ‘like an infant’s grave in size’, but also to think there is significance in the fact that the ‘mossy network’ looks as if it had been woven ‘by hand of lady fair’. From one point of view, even this psychological attribution can be related to Wordsworth’s empiricism, especially when one contrasts it with the genuinely Gothic ballad by Gottfried August Bürger to which it is indebted. From

another point of view, however, the emphasis on imagination cannot be overlooked entirely.

Imagination, for Wordsworth, functions additionally as a barometer for recognising one's self-consciousness within the phenomenal world. In this sense, he saw consciousness correlated with imagination. This is implicit in the following passage from Albert Wlecke's *Wordsworth and the Sublime*:

In Book VI of *The Prelude*, after Wordsworth describes his discovery of having crossed the Alps without realizing it, the poet is suddenly confronted directly by his imagination:

here the Power so called  
Through sad incompetence of human speech,  
That awful Power rose from the mind's abyss  
Like an unfathered vapour that enwraps,  
At once, some lonely traveller.

The imagery here is especially involved. Not only does the imagination rise from the by now familiar subjective abyss; but the mind itself, confronted suddenly by its immanent power, is enclosed (imagination "enwraps" the traveler) by the intensity of its reflexive awareness. Consciousness is both the container that in its depths contains imagination and, now that imagination has leapt forth from these depths, the contained.<sup>28</sup>

In *The Romantic Predicament*, Geoffrey Thurley says, 'In Romantic art the motifs (things, people, houses) themselves stand forth as content: they do not "mean" anything else, they are not in that sense symbolic or allegoric'.<sup>29</sup> Although Thurley is correct regarding the paucity of connotation in Romantic semantic usage, it should not be overlooked that Wordsworth, in particular, did indeed think of phenomena as symbolic, in the sense that they represent objectively what exists spiritually. Like Coleridge, he regards phenomena as a veil that enshrouds a superior reality normally imperceptible. In this sense, his poetry can be seen as a mimesis of the "unseen". Coleridge concedes as much in 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison':

On the wide landscape, gaze till all doth seem  
Less gross than bodily; and of such hues  
As veil the Almighty Spirit, when yet he makes  
Spirits perceive his presence.<sup>30</sup>

(40-43)

Wordsworth is advocating, not so much to obviate the need for symbolism altogether, but a new use for it. He wants to apply something equivalent to the old symbology: to travel in an indirect route to make objects

emblematic. However, to do this he has to increasingly depend upon the particular, as this is the only gateway to the spiritual.

In an effort to be able better to justify description in poetry, Wordsworth redefines poetry as recollected emotion. This recollected emotion, as R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones say in their Introduction to *Lyrical Ballads*, ‘needs some empirical event to have caused it, therefore, describing this event (or scene) recreates the emotion (or something like it) and, therefore, is poetic’.<sup>31</sup> According to this view, for poetry to exist it must be based upon a memory, which in turn is based upon an experience, which in turn is based upon the senses, which in turn are based upon phenomena. ‘Every poet has to work with the world of the senses’, Maurice Bowra says, ‘but for the Romantics it was *the* instrument which set their visionary powers in action’ (Emphasis added).<sup>32</sup> In light of this, the following statements made by Wordsworth become more meaningful:

But habits of meditation have, I trust, so prompted and regulated my feelings, that my *descriptions* of such objects as strongly excite those feelings, will be found to carry along with them a purpose (Emphasis added).<sup>33</sup>

[The poet considers man] as looking upon this complex scene of ideas and *sensations*, and finding every where *objects* that immediately excite in him sympathies which, from the necessities of his nature, are accompanied by an overbalance of enjoyment (Emphasis added).<sup>34</sup>

The objects of the Poet’s thoughts are every where; though the *eyes and the senses* of man are, it is true, his favourite guides, yet he will follow wheresoever he can find an atmosphere of *sensation* in which to move his wings (Emphasis added).<sup>35</sup>

[Of the general passions and feelings of man] And with what are they connected? Undoubtedly with our moral sentiments and animal *sensations*, and with the causes which excite these; with the operations of the elements, and the *appearances* of the *visible* universe; [...] These, and the like, are the *sensations and objects which the Poet describes*, as they are the sensations of other men, and the objects which interest them (Emphasis added).<sup>36</sup>

In these assertions, we see an extreme concentration upon the objects of the “real” world as catalysts for producing poetry. This marks a considerable departure from the operating procedures of seventeenth-century poets who ‘even at their most lucid, never allowed an interest in the actual nature of objects to prevail over the “profound sensuousness” of the meanings they intended to convey’.<sup>37</sup> The result of this is

that the poem becomes, as M. H. Abrams clearly recognises,

essentially the internal made external [...] embodying the combined product of the poet's perceptions, thoughts and feelings. [...] The paramount cause of poetry is not [...] the effect intended upon the audience; but instead an efficient cause—the impulse within the poet of feelings and desires seeking expression.<sup>38</sup>

Wordsworth is concerned with the idea of the poet as teacher whose sole function is to deliver “truth” to an unquestioning audience. The poet is someone who, by some mysterious and nebulous gift of insight, has access to the hidden world of truth that lies covered beneath the veil of language. Wordsworth unmistakably articulates this in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*:

He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endued with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them.<sup>39</sup>

Wordsworth felt himself equal to this calling and his developing theories on poetics were, ‘a clearing ground for his own work, [...] with what happens, or should happen, in the poet's mind in the act of composition’.<sup>40</sup> His main consideration was whether he, the poet, had sufficiently described his state of mind.<sup>41</sup>

Something that, perhaps, should not be overlooked in this discussion of his penchant for description is Wordsworth's favourable attitude towards his sister's heavily descriptive journal entries. Susan Levin observes that Dorothy's writing is,

characterized by refusal: refusal to generalise, refusal to reproduce standard literary forms, refusal to undertake the act of writing [...]. She often appears a mere cataloguer of irrelevant detail, a person strangely fixed on the minutiae around her.<sup>42</sup>

Adding that the journals ‘reveal a writer who insistently and coherently puts down what she sees’.<sup>43</sup> In this respect, she is similar to her brother in that she had an eye for detail. In her introduction to the *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth* Helen Darbishire writes:

It was not only minute observation that Dorothy gave to Nature [...]. As we follow her from day

to day we are never allowed to forget the season of the year, the time of day—and the weather!<sup>44</sup>

Darbishire adds that Dorothy, like Wordsworth, ‘saw things [...] which belongs to things seen by the painter or poet’.<sup>45</sup> It is significant that Darbishire (however tenuously) equates the painter’s art with that of the poet’s, the art of the former being based (as it was in Dorothy’s period) upon representation—that of the latter supposedly upon semantics. Wordsworth does as much when he says, ‘We are fond of tracing the resemblance between Poetry and Painting’.<sup>46</sup> Darbishire has unwittingly acknowledged the visual and descriptive emphasis that Dorothy has introduced into her writing and which Wordsworth so admired. This approbation was such that he would frequently duplicate sentences from her journals into his notebook for future use by himself.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, he,

drew sustenance for his poetry from Dorothy’s journal. He would make her read out a passage which could revive his memory, as he did with the record of the daffodils by Ullswater. His poem ‘I wandered lonely as a cloud’, owes much to Dorothy’s prose description.<sup>48</sup>

Indeed, she continued to write her journal partly to please him.<sup>49</sup> The fact that Wordsworth is pleased with the merely descriptive nature of Dorothy’s writing is at odds with his various statements in the Preface (and his other writings) that seek to justify description in terms of its “alchemic” transformation of objects into transcendental realisations. In his selection of fragments of her prose for insertion into his poetry he is certainly not appropriating anything from Dorothy in terms of the “metaphysical” or “mystical”, as she does not claim that her writing possesses these qualities—nor does she claim to have the special insight (as defined by her brother) requisite for a poet. In light of this, it is puzzling that his sister’s writing should hold him in such thrall if description was not largely his motivating force. It seems that sometimes he is motivated by transcendental imperatives and sometimes not, but he always temperamentally wishes to be descriptive.

Throughout her journals, Dorothy constantly refers to Wordsworth’s keen descriptive sense: ‘William wrote a description of the storm’,<sup>50</sup> and ‘William wrote some lines describing a stunted thorn’ (two

descriptions that later became ‘A whirl-blast from behind the hill’ and ‘The Thorn’).<sup>51</sup> She furthermore records that, ‘William observed some affecting little things in Borrowdale. A decayed house [...] in the church-yard, the tall silent rocks seen thro’ the broken windows’.<sup>52</sup> The significance of this is that the next day’s entry mentions that Wordsworth is writing the 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*—a preface that, as we have seen, advocates the use of observation-based descriptive writing. The temporal contiguity of these two events (his observation of things in Borrowdale one day, and then his writing the Preface the next) indicate that the Preface was written during a period when he was frequently immersed in nature; observing and describing the things seen in his notebooks, and thinking of these observations in an empirical way. In such circumstances, it is easy to see how the content and general direction of the Preface could become heavily weighted towards an empirical approach to writing. Confirmation of this comes from Dorothy who acknowledges that he ‘went into the wood to compose’.<sup>53</sup> Much of his writing was done in the physical presence of the things he is describing and it seems that he had to be physically present in nature to be able to write effectively. This reliance upon being present before objects fits perfectly with his stated poetical aims. Indeed, it would be unreasonable for a poet so heavily dependent upon physical vision and the rendering of it into words to be absent from the objects he is recording. It would be analogous to a portrait painter imagining his subject.

However, the descriptive elements in Wordsworth are not always the result of his observing of objects in their natural surroundings. He was impressed by the way in which Dorothy’s writing exemplified a directness he admired so much that he allowed it to stand in occasionally for his own presentness at the scene. Consequently, he sometimes appropriates descriptions (as in the case of the aforementioned ‘A whirl-blast from behind the hill’ and ‘The Thorn’) directly from his sister’s journals. This tendency is also acknowledged by Nicholas Roe in *The Politics of Nature*, particularly with respect to ‘Tintern Abbey’:

Some details of the scene at the beginning of Wordsworth’s poem are also to be found in Dorothy Wordsworth’s beautiful description of the view from the Quantock Hills above Alfoxden House, 24 February 1798.<sup>54</sup>



Adding:

The verbal similarities between Wordsworth's poem and this passage [Roe quotes part of the entry for 24 February] from Dorothy's Journal strongly suggest that in 'Tintern Abbey' (as of course in many other poems) Wordsworth's imagination responded to Dorothy's prose rather than to his own immediate observation.<sup>55</sup>

In addition, Geoffrey Hartman in *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* says:

When Wordsworth said of Dorothy, 'She gave me eyes, she gave me ears', it was no vain compliment. In her *Journals* we read, for example, of their meeting the poor old man who became the Leechgatherer of 'Resolution and Independence' or that description of the daffodils which Wordsworth transformed into 'I wandered lonely as a cloud'.<sup>56</sup>

However, unlike Coleridge (who famously used Dorothy's description of the moon and clouds from her journal entries for the 25th and 31st of January 1798 to inspire his treatment of the moon in Part I of 'Christabel') Wordsworth does not transform his sister's journal descriptions into poetry—he merely interpolates them into his poems, almost to the letter. His poem 'A Night-Piece' is a characteristic example of this. In her journal entry for 25 January 1798, Dorothy makes the following observation:

At once the clouds seemed to cleave asunder, and left her [the moon] in the centre of a black-blue vault. She sailed along, followed by multitudes of stars, small, and bright, and sharp.<sup>57</sup>

In 'A Night-Piece' Wordsworth writes:

There, in a black-blue vault she sails along,  
Followed by multitudes of stars, that, small  
And sharp, and bright, along the dark abyss

(14-16)

Here, Wordsworth has copied seventeen words from his sister's journal entry and interpolated them directly into his poem. These words are:

a black-blue vault. She sailed along, followed by multitudes of stars, small, and bright, and sharp.

His rendition of them is:

a black-blue vault she sails along,  
Followed by multitudes of stars, that, small

And sharp, and bright

All that Wordsworth does with them is to merely change the tense of the word ‘sailed’ from past to present, and reorder the wording (as well as adding the word ‘that’) in the phrase: ‘of stars, small, and bright, and sharp’ in order to render it: ‘of stars, that, small / And sharp, and bright’. The result is a poem that is not only descriptive but also based upon someone else's description. The poem attempts ‘to win assent to the delight by mere accumulation of circumstance and detail’.<sup>58</sup>

In examining Wordsworth's correspondence, we can see further examples of his empiricist attitude. In a letter to a Miss Taylor on 9 April 1801, he criticises his poem *The Female Vagrant* because ‘the descriptions are often false, giving proofs of a mind inattentive to the true nature of the subject on which it was employed’.<sup>59</sup> This criticism of a poem's lack of authenticity is echoed in a letter to Samuel Rogers:

I am happy to find that we coincide in opinion about Crabbe's *verses*; for *poetry* in no sense can they be called. [...] I remember that I mentioned in my last [letter] that there was nothing in the last publication [Crabbe's *The Parrish Register*] so good as the description of the Parrish workhouse, Apothecary, etc. This is true—and it is no less true that the passage which I commended is of no great merit, because the description, at the best of no high order, is in the instance of the Apothecary, inconsistent, that is, false.<sup>60</sup>

To Dorothy, on 6 September 1790, while on a walking tour through France and Switzerland, he writes:

My Spirits have been kept in a perpetual hurry of delights by the almost uninterrupted succession of sublime and beautiful *objects* which have passed before my *eyes* during the course of the last month (Emphasis added).<sup>61</sup>

In the same letter he enthuses on the natural world:

I am a perfect Enthusiast in my admiration of Nature in all her various forms; and I have *looked* upon and as it were conversed with the objects which this country has presented to my view so long, and with such encreasing pleasure, that the idea of parting from them oppresses me with a sadness similar to what I have always felt in quitting a beloved friend (Emphasis added).<sup>62</sup>

To the painter B. R. Haydon on 13 January 1816, praising the painting *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem*, he writes:

It is better that expression should give way to beauty than beauty be banished by expression. Happy is he who can hit the exact point, where grandeur is not lowered but heightened by *detail* (Emphasis added).<sup>63</sup>

Here, in relation to a different art form, he confirms Raleigh's observation of him (quoted earlier) concerning his devaluation of expressiveness in favour of detail.<sup>64</sup> In another letter to Haydon, he almost admits to a valuing of painting over poetry when he advises Haydon to 'paint and leave writing to the dunces and malignants'.<sup>65</sup> It is difficult to see any trace of irony or self-effacement here. That he should make such a comment in light of his ideal of the Poet as "seer" would make little sense were it not for the fact that the painting style of the period was operating more efficiently in the terms of his stated aims for poetry.

It is no secret that Wordsworth was an admirer of the Dutch painters principally because of their 'excellent use of Objects'.<sup>66</sup> The Dutch School, which included the painters Cuyp (1605-1691), van Ruysdael (1628-1682), Hobbema (1638-1701) and van der Velde (1663-1707), dispensed with Christian or classical subjects in favour of more contemplative works based on the observation of nature and landscapes.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, such poems as: 'On a Portrait of I.F. painted by Margaret Gillies'; 'Upon seeing a coloured Drawing of the Bird of Paradise in an Album'; 'To R. R. Hayden, on Seeing his Picture of Napoleon Bonaparte on the Island of St Helena'; and 'On a Portrait of the Duke of Wellington upon the Field of Waterloo, by Hayden', were inspired by paintings. Moreover, in 'Tintern Abbey' he refers to his writing procedure as "painting":

I cannot paint  
 What then I was. The sounding cataract  
 Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,  
 The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,  
 Their colours and their forms, were then to me  
 An appetite<sup>68</sup>

(75-80)

This is the background to the celebrated claim, in a letter to James Tobin on 6 March 1798, in which he says of his poem *The Recluse* that he has written 1300 lines which 'can contrive to convey most of the knowledge of which I am possessed. My object is to give pictures of nature'.<sup>69</sup> Notice how he says, 'give

pictures *of* nature’ rather than “give pictures *to* nature ”: the latter calling for more literary invention.

In light of this, it becomes clear why many of Wordsworth’s letters comment approvingly on certain paintings given over to the works of nature, landscapes, and non-classical subjects. It is possible to assume that such painting was, for him, the yardstick by which poetry was to be measured. The major emphases of his theory on poetry seem to converge at the point where painting begins. His ideas of the sublime and the picturesque seem also to coalesce at this point. In a letter to Jacob Fletcher, he says that the Dutch painters’ use of objects is quite proper and that the criticism of its use is more to do with the nature of these objects than their status as objects per se. Noting the revulsion evoked by paintings dealing with ‘the insides of stables—dung carts—dunghills and foul and loathsome situations’, Wordsworth adds that if more pleasing objects were portrayed ‘then I think it may be safely said, that the qualities which constitute the picturesque, are eminently inherent in such objects’. He concludes:

Our business is not so much with objects as with the law under which they are contemplated. [...] We hear people perpetually disputing whether this or that thing be beautiful or not—sublime or otherwise, without being aware that the same object may be both beautiful and sublime, but it cannot be felt to be such at the same moment.<sup>70</sup>

Wordsworth’s empirical predisposition appears throughout his poetic works but it is most clearly expressed in *The Prelude*, where he records how he is able to make use of objects to better remember the physicality of environments:

the earth

And common face of Nature spake to me  
Rememberable things; sometimes, ‘tis true,  
By chance collisions and quaint accidents  
(Like those ill-sorted unions, work supposed  
Of evil-minded fairies), yet not vain  
Nor profitless, if haply they impressed  
Collateral objects and appearances,  
Albeit lifeless then, and doomed to sleep  
Until maturer seasons called them forth  
To impregnate and to elevate the mind.  
—And if the vulgar joy by its own weight  
Wearied itself out of the memory,  
The scenes which were a witness of that joy

Remained in their substantial lineaments  
 Depicted on the brain, and to the eye  
 Were visible, a daily sight; and thus  
 By the impressive discipline of fear,  
 By pleasure and repeated happiness,  
 So frequently repeated, and by force  
 Of obscure feelings representative  
 Of things forgotten, these same scenes so bright,  
 So beautiful, so majestic in themselves,  
 Though yet the day was distant, did become  
 Habitually dear, and all their forms  
 And changeful colours by invisible links  
 Were fastened to the affections.<sup>71</sup>

(1850, I, 586-612)

Here the sheer physicality of the process and its significance is expressed with the words: ‘collisions’, ‘impressed’, ‘impregnate’, ‘vulgar’, ‘weight’, ‘force’, and ‘fastened’. This passage leaves us in no doubt as to the intrusiveness of the process. Yet, for Wordsworth, this was not something he finds unpleasant. He finds joy in merely perceiving objects, as can be seen in the following:

The sands of Westmoreland, the creeks and bays  
 Of Cumbria’s rocky limits, they can tell  
 How, when the Sea threw off his evening shade  
 And to the shepherd’s hut on distant hills  
 Sent welcome notice of the rising moon,  
 How I have stood, to fancies such as these  
 A stranger, linking with the spectacle  
 No conscious memory of a kindred sight,  
 And bringing with me no peculiar sense  
 Of quietness or peace; yet have I stood,  
 Even while mine eye hath moved o’er many a league  
 Of shining water, gathering as it seemed,  
 Through every hair-breadth in that field of light,  
 New pleasure like a bee among the flowers.<sup>72</sup>

(1805, I, 567-80)

Turning to Wordsworth’s other poems, we can clearly see how his empirical ideas manifest in them. In Book I of *The Excursion*, the traveller tells us the following about his friend:

Nor did he fail,  
 While yet a child, with a child’s eagerness  
 Incessantly to turn his ear and eye



comes in useful when he recounts the tale of Margaret:

He had rehearsed  
Her homely tale with such familiar power,  
With such an active countenance, an eye  
So busy, that the things of which he spake  
Seemed present<sup>78</sup>

(I, 614-18)

Another poem that demonstrates Wordsworth's application of empiricism to verse is 'The Thorn', which despite certain uses of poetic artifice such as inversion ('woven been', 'thing forlorn'), archaism ('As if by hand of lady fair') and the fictive element of the subject matter is essentially descriptive. This can be seen in the opening stanza:

There is a thorn; it looks so old,  
In truth you'd find it hard to say,  
How it could ever have been young,  
It looks so old and grey  
Not higher than a two-years' child,  
It stands erect this aged thorn;  
No leaves it has, no thorny points;  
It is a mass of knotted joints,  
A wretched thing forlorn.  
It stands erect, and like a stone  
With lichens it is overgrown.<sup>79</sup>

(1-11)

Here we find references to the act of visual perception: 'There is a thorn; it looks so old' and 'It looks so old and grey'. The addition of the words 'and grey' in line four is intended to further establish the objectivity and materiality of the thing perceived to render it more accurate. Similarly, the preceding repetition of 'It looks' emphasises the spatial separation between the thing perceived and the perceiver—lest we forget. The same affect is achieved with the phrase: 'It stands erect', which again is repeated in line ten. It is as if Wordsworth, by this use of repetition, is trying to convince us that the speaker of the poem has sensible perceptions that are sufficiently capable of perceiving accurately; in addition to a mastery of language that is equal to the painter's use of brush and palette in rendering those perceptions lucidly. Yet, it

also seems as if the speaker's constant need to reaffirm the capabilities of language to achieve this clarity suggests a lack of assurance that this is, in fact, what is being achieved.

In stanza three we see the fruits of his sensible perceptions after they have been extrapolated into the spatial dimension:

High on a mountain's highest ridge,  
Where oft the stormy winter gale  
Cuts like a scythe, while through the clouds  
It sweeps from vale to vale;  
Not five yards from the mountain-path,  
This thorn you on your left espy;  
And to the left, three yards beyond,  
You see a little muddy pond  
Of water, never dry;  
I've measured it from side to side:  
'Tis three feet long, and two feet wide.<sup>80</sup>

(23-33)

Putting aside the ubiquitous reference to visual perception in line 28 ('on your left espy'), the stanza is curious in that it introduces into the realm of tragic verse observations more appropriate to land surveying. Phrases such as: 'not five yards from'; 'to the left'; 'three yards beyond'; 'three feet long, and 'two feet wide', again, seem to be attempts by the poet to reassure himself of the ability of language to render perception reliably. It also attempts to make increasingly accurate what the poet is seeing, in an effort to leave little room for doubt as to the objective status of the things perceived. In this instance, the use of geometrical accuracy principally acts as an empirical verification for the objectivity of the spatial relationships between the observer/perceiver and the objects sensed (and these objects' relationship to each other). That this is of urgent importance to the speaker is indicated by his anxiousness to emphasise that he has taken great pains to be thorough having 'measured it from side to side'.

In stanza four, we see more use of visual references:

And close beside this aged thorn,  
There is a fresh and lovely sight,  
A beauteous heap, a hill of moss,



Just half a foot in height.  
 All lovely colours there you see,  
 All colours that were ever seen,  
 And mossy network too is there,  
 As if by hand of lady fair  
 The work had woven been,  
 And cups, the darlings of the eye,  
 So deep in their vermilion dye.<sup>81</sup>

(34-44)

The references to visual perception are: ‘lovely sight’, ‘there you see’, ‘ever seen’, and ‘darlings of the eye’. As well as these, we have an indication that supports my earlier suggestion that Wordsworth viewed poetry as doing something similar to painting. In lines 40 to 42, the speaker compares the hill of moss to a work of embroidery woven by ‘hand of lady fair’. This conversion of mundane phenomena into art is driven home in line 44 with: ‘So deep is their vermilion dye’— ‘dye’ being a man-made substance used in artwork, and ‘vermilion’ being a colour available to most painters’ palettes. Of this poem Jaggs says:

The narrator, for all his limitations, is trying to tell us about his way of seeing the world—and he is not altogether unsuccessful.<sup>82</sup>

This way of ‘seeing the world’ is empirical. As John F. Danby says in *William Wordsworth: The Prelude and Other Poems*:

[For Wordsworth] mountains, lakes, winds, clouds, the sky, the sea, flowers, birds [...]. None of them is a single counter of allegorical significance [which refers] to things other than themselves.<sup>83</sup>

Here, Danby is reiterating what Thurley is quoted as saying earlier in this chapter regarding the romantic symbol.

Wordsworth’s use of language in ‘The Thorn’ to re-engage with itself to get closer to the object (or as Jaggs’s phrases it: ‘range-finding’) demonstrates his desire to get to the “truth” behind phenomena.<sup>84</sup> The poem, for Jaggs, ‘presents a range of seductive and interesting alternatives to the attempt to see the truth’.<sup>85</sup> Nevertheless, these ‘seductive and interesting alternatives’ are, as Jaggs acknowledges, still subordinate to sense experience and should not be taken as a sign that Wordsworth was in favour of artifice for its own

sake. Larrissy observes that, ‘the empiricist is not expected to renounce imagination, merely to base it on facts’.<sup>86</sup> Jaggs agrees:

[...] the transcendent moments in Wordsworth’s poetry [...] derange and subvert not in accordance with individual fictions, but with the aim of moving us towards a closer engagement with an underlying objective reality. [...] For a closer insight into the objective order.<sup>87</sup>

For Wordsworth this ‘underlying objective reality’ is held together divinely. Larrissy writes:

The world of Nature has the task, in Wordsworth and Coleridge, of evincing the divinity of things. Yet this divinity remains, as far as the poem is concerned, a *fiat* of consciousness.<sup>88</sup>

Larrissy has reservations about the reliability of such an approach. In relation to his reading of Coleridge’s ‘This Lime-tree Bower my Prison’, he makes the following comment that is equally applicable to Wordsworth:

And the fact that he [Coleridge] is able to imagine the pleasure of his absent friends may prove his capacity for “sympathy”. But the evident sub-text about the reconciliation of contraries as a fundamental structure of things, maintained by the Almighty Spirit, is not proved by anything except his own faith in it. One is left with a large residue of relatively pure description: the irreducibly “hard” world of Nature. And yet without the world there would be no poem.<sup>89</sup>

The metaphysical assumptions, at least as they operate within this poem, are groundless because they are unable to be verified by scientific investigation. In the absence of any such verification, we are left with a poetry that is incomplete and unable to achieve its intended affects—able only to rely upon a language assumed to be transparent.

In light of this, it is revealing that Wordsworth should have made the following statement concerning the use of words:

Words are too awful an instrument for good and evil to be trifled with; they hold above all other external powers a dominion over thoughts. If words be not [...] an incarnation of the thought but only a clothing for it, then surely will they prove an ill gift [...]. Language, if it do not uphold, and feed, and leave in quiet, like the power of gravitation or the air we breathe, is a counter spirit, unremittingly and noiselessly at work to derange, to subvert, to lay waste, to vitiate, and to dissolve.<sup>90</sup>

By saying that words should have ‘a dominion over thoughts’, he is accepting a connection between thought and linguistic expression. This obviously rules out the possibility for a disjunction between

signifier and referent. This means that any use of language operating independently of referents is, to Wordsworth, a language drawing attention to itself because it does not ‘leave in quiet’ and is, therefore, a ‘counter spirit’ which is out of control, the result of which is ‘to derange, to subvert, to lay waste, to vitiate, and to dissolve’ denotation. The empirical basis behind these statements seems clear: Wordsworth is advocating a language that can convey directly the poet’s experience of phenomena. Regarding this passage, Albert Wlecke says:

Wordsworth observes that words are to be ideally ‘an incarnation of the thought’. This metaphor rejects the curious distinction between word and thought implied in the popular eighteenth-century metaphor of words being the “clothing” of thought. The metaphor also intimates, I believe, that a sequence of words in a poem by Wordsworth can be taken as an enactment of a certain sequence of thought, or better, of thinking. The word is not an overt statement of an already conceived thought, somehow separable from that thought as clothing is from the body. Rather, the relationship between word and thought is analogous to the relationship between body and soul: words “body forth” an otherwise hidden activity of the mind, they are one with that activity, and their progression is expressive of a certain progression in consciousness.<sup>91</sup>

That, for Wordsworth, ‘a certain progression in consciousness’ can be expressed with words indicates that he views poetic language as a means to make possible the mimesis of consciousness based upon an experience of phenomena.

Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned that Wordsworth’s frequent use of repetition pertaining to visual perception in ‘The Thorn’ seemed to suggest insecurity about the competency of language to convey, lucidly, the nature of reality. A letter he wrote to Isabella Fenwick in 1843 may point to the psychological roots for his over-reliance upon a non-connotative use of language, and his interest in empiricism in general. In it he says:

I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence, and I consumed with all that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own immaterial nature. Many times while going to school I have grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality. At that time I was afraid of such processes.<sup>92</sup>

Of this Robert Rehder says, ‘This is an extraordinary confession: that often the world existed for him only when he made an effort and that without this effort he could not escape from his phantasies’.<sup>93</sup> He also says

that for Wordsworth, ‘writing poetry was like reaching out a hand to steady himself’.<sup>94</sup> Pirie offers a possible reason behind this:

One diagnoses sees Wordsworth as feeling so betrayed in childhood by the early deaths of both his parents that, finding himself still surrounded by a landscape as evocatively permanent as the Lake District, he unconsciously invested his strongest emotional commitments in those mountainous images which had proved so much more reliable than mankind.<sup>95</sup>

Dorothy Wordsworth was, perhaps, similarly motivated. Levin says, ‘One way of explaining Dorothy’s faithfulness to objects, her continual cataloguing, is as a kind of perpetual reality testing’.<sup>96</sup> And that ‘her insistence on detail, on naming and minutely describing what goes on around her, may indicate a fear of being absorbed and thus annihilated’.<sup>97</sup> Given this, Pirie’s explanation may equally apply to Dorothy, seeing that she shared Wordsworth’s parentage. It certainly offers plausible grounds for Wordsworth excessive descriptiveness. It is almost as if the noting of details in his poetry is the equivalent to the “grasping” mentioned in the Fenwick letter.

Wordsworth’s dependence on immediate experience indicates that he favours this to intellectual activity. For him, nature is a better teacher for humanity than is formal learning. The intellect is held to be unequal to the task as is recourse to books and rational discussion. Instead, he advocates an attitude of passivity towards nature; an attitude in which one’s senses are left to experience the objects of the natural world unmediated by the operations of the mind. This passivity forms the main poetic aesthetic for his literary output. In ‘Expostulation and Reply’, the poet is reproached by his friend for day-dreaming. He responds by saying:

The eye, it cannot choose but see;  
We cannot bid the ear be still<sup>98</sup>

(17-18)

Notice how experience via the senses is unavoidable: the eyes ‘cannot choose but see’ and we ‘cannot bid the ear be still’. In this poem, Wordsworth is railing against the intellect. Only the sensations of seeing and hearing, which are beyond human control (and by implication under the control of nature), are capable of

conveying pure knowledge. This is because these senses represent a direct unmediated channel to (for want of a better term to describe Wordsworth's belief in an intelligence behind nature) "the Absolute". All that is needed to access this Absolute is a passive attitude towards experience:

That we can feed this mind of ours  
In a wise passiveness.<sup>99</sup>

(23-24)

This passivity is the key to understanding Wordsworth's writing. For it is in this approach to experience that one can become aware of the "divinity" in material objects. One has to pay heed to the placement of the word 'wise' alongside 'passiveness'. Clearly, this qualifies the degree to which the experience is passive. The usage is consonant with formulations such as "emotion recollected in tranquillity", and the insistence that the poet not only possesses "sensibility", but has also 'thought long and deeply'.<sup>100</sup> However, "thought" for Wordsworth does not always refer to rational thinking, as I will look at shortly in relation to 'Old Man Travelling, Animal Tranquillity and Decay, a Sketch'. Wordsworth still has a strong investment in objectivity.

The "mind" of which Wordsworth speaks is similar to (and possibly influenced) Emerson's concept of the Oversoul—variously called the "higher self" or "universal mind" in eastern mystic tradition. This mind informs and controls the senses to the extent that the human body functions as a conduit, or host, whereby this transcendental mind can enter into relationship with the world of objects. Human beings are no more or no less than expressions of this transcendental "consciousness", unaware of themselves as such until poets (such as Wordsworth), who are able to recognise this fact through intense observation of nature, tell them so. Coleridge shares a similar view of "mind":

The subject of eye, ear, touch and taste, in contact with external nature, is in danger of believing that his mind is compounded out of his senses, as if mind were simply a function or by product of (the sensory experience of) nature. Coleridge counters this erroneous assumption with a transcendental insistence on the autonomy of an already existent mind: the mind will inform the senses and not be their compound.<sup>101</sup>

For Wordsworth and Coleridge nature is Mind, and what we call our individual “minds” are simply localized manifestations of it. Our perceptual faculties are merely receptors for the ongoing experiences of Nature/Mind. This passivity is further evidenced in ‘The Tables Turned’ where the poet tells his friend to leave his books and come out into the open because books are a,

dull and endless strife:  
Come, hear the woodland linnet,  
How sweet his music! on my life,  
There’s more of wisdom in it.<sup>102</sup>

(9-12)

and that,

One impulse from a vernal wood  
May teach you more of man,  
Of moral evil and of good,  
Than all the sages can.<sup>103</sup>

(21-24)

Wordsworth then restates his position with regard to the intellect:

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;  
Our meddling intellect  
Mis-shapes the beauteous form of things:-  
We murder to dissect.<sup>104</sup>

(25-28)

In ‘Tintern Abbey’, the superiority of unmediated experience is again shown in Wordsworth’s subordination of “thought” to visual sensation:

An appetite; a feeling and a love  
That had no need of a remoter charm,  
By thought supplied, nor any interest  
Unborrowed from the eye<sup>105</sup>

(80-83)

The result of this is that nature is able to “instruct” us:

she can so inform  
The mind that is within us, so impress

With quietness and beauty, and so feel  
 With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,  
 Rash judgements, nor the sneers of selfish men,  
 Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all  
 The dreary intercourse of daily life,  
 Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb  
 Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold  
 Is full of blessings.<sup>106</sup>

(125-34)

Without the subordination of intellectual activity to experience by means of the visual senses, human beings would be unable to commune with the Absolute. Consequently, the world of natural objects would not hold any special divinity within it. By advocating intellectual passivity as a poetic aesthetic, Wordsworth aims to “enlighten” us to the presence of the Absolute in phenomena. Such “enlightenment”, he hopes, would reward us with a sense of “peace” or “serenity”.

Such a reward is evident in the old man described in ‘Old Man Travelling, Animal Tranquillity and Decay, a Sketch’. In this poem, the old man conforms to the dictates of nature. Indeed, it is unequivocally stated that he is ‘by nature led’ (11). Wordsworth paints an unsettling picture of a human being who is as much under the control of nature as are the birds that instinctively ‘peck along the road’ (1) and are blind to his presence. Like the birds he also is blind, but to his bodily sensations. He is ‘insensibly subdued’ (7), and ‘all effort’ (9) is irretrievable. The only indication that he is indeed human is that he ‘moves / With thought’. But for Wordsworth, the word “thought” does not refer to the complex abstract rational thinking processes of the human brain but rather to the controlling power of the Absolute which, as mentioned in ‘Tintern Abbey’,

impels  
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
 And rolls through things<sup>107</sup>

(100-102)

In this sense, then, the old man is being controlled by the Absolute and as such functions as an extension of

it. For the casual observer the positive benefits of this are many. Not the least being that he is devoid of human suffering. It is easily overlooked that the old man is travelling to see his dying son in hospital, and, given this, it is remarkable that he ‘has such mild composure’ (10). It is true that this has been the result of ‘long patience’ (10) on his part, but now this is no longer the case as nature has taken control even of that and, in doing so, given him an enviable serenity which leads,

To peace so perfect, that the young behold  
With envy, what the old man hardly feels.<sup>108</sup>

(12-13)

The idea of the body under the direction of the Absolute via the senses is further seen in ‘Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood’. Here the Child is envisaged as the physical conduit of ‘the eternal mind’ (113) in that he has access to knowledge that others do not have. As Larrissy has said, the Child ‘possesses resources of inner vision’.<sup>109</sup> This vision is connected to the divine in such a way that the Child is ‘haunted for ever by the eternal mind’ (113), a mind that informs the body via the senses, the latter of which the poet connects to ‘outward things’ (145). And the ‘radiance which was once so bright’ has now been taken from the poet’s sight (178-79). Here radiance is discerned by sight, and Wordsworth uses the word “sight” instead of “intuition” to emphasise the notion that the senses have supplanted rational methods of acquiring spiritual knowledge. The idea that mystical experience can be accessed by withdrawing the senses from the objects of perception, as practised by the Christian contemplatives and others, is here inverted. The consequence of this is that the senses rather than reason control the process by which ultimate truth can be known. As children, we had the ability to “see” what the Child sees because our reason had not developed sufficiently to hinder the senses. Philosophical empiricism enabled Wordsworth to construct a seemingly plausible rationale to make this poetic aesthetic credible. Without this rationale, it is doubtful whether his poetry would be regarded as much more than a development of what we understand as seventeenth-century nature poetry. Certainly, its justification on philosophical grounds is insufficient



when placed next to artistic imperatives.

It should be noted at this point, that some Wordsworth criticism<sup>110</sup> has suggested that ‘Tintern Abbey’ is less an example of Wordsworth’s more usual approach of recording his sensations both physical and mental, than it is of an attempt to investigate the boundaries of meaning in language.<sup>111</sup> Of ‘Tintern Abbey’ Marjorie Levinson says:

Most readers observe that an object does not materialize in the poem before it is effaced or smudged; a thought does not find full articulation before it is qualified or deconstructed; a point of view is not established before it dissolves into a series of impressions.<sup>112</sup>

In illustration of this, the following lines are often cited to demonstrate a semantic slippage around the words ‘hardly hedge-rows’ in ‘Tintern Abbey’:

Once again I see  
These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines  
Of sportive wood run wild<sup>113</sup>

(14-16)

It is difficult to see the presence of slippage here. If anything there is a more determined call to accuracy with Wordsworth attempting to define even further what he has seen visually as ‘hedge-rows’. Far from the acceptance of any ambiguity in the line he seems to be determined to nullify it, and in so doing ‘making the words of the poem more satisfactorily referential’.<sup>114</sup>

Indeed, if there is any slippage in certain words of the poem (and given the nature of language it would be improbable for some not be found) the main point to consider is whether it is intentional or not. The whole focus of the discussion turns upon this point. Even if there is slippage and it could be found to be intentional, the accumulative affect of the language of the poem is still towards a descriptive rendering of the activity of consciousness. This is achieved by the use of abstract nouns in such a way that their collocation becomes referential to the extent that any supposed intention towards the ambiguous is undermined. For example, the accumulative effect of the repeated use of the demonstrative adjective “these” along with other present tense affirmations places the subject (Wordsworth) within a specific

spatial, temporal and experiential relationship to the object (nature). Affirmations of the present such as ‘I hear’ (1); ‘these waters’ (2); ‘these steep and lofty cliffs’ (5); ‘here under this dark sycamore’ (10); ‘these plots of cottage-ground’ (11); ‘these orchard tufts’ (11); ‘at this season’ (12); ‘lose themselves’ (13); ‘I see’ (14); ‘these hedge-rows’ (15); ‘while here I stand’ (63); ‘of present pleasure’ (64); and ‘that in this moment’ (65) serve to concretise the language of the poem. Neither should the lack of attention by Wordsworth to the abbey itself suggest that his emphasis is not upon the corporeal environment he is experiencing. When one recognises that the full title of the poem is ‘Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the banks of the Wyre during a tour, July 13th, 1798’ it becomes clear that the real subject of the poem is the prospect from above the abbey. Larrissy has pointed out that,

the abbey makes no appearance whatsoever in the poem. This is indeed a nature poem, offering a striking re-interpretation of the picturesque and its union with the sublime, in relation to a secluded spot.<sup>115</sup>

It may seem in this discussion of Wordsworth’s empiricism that I am giving undue importance to his visual acuity in my demonstration of his empiricism, and leaving out of account those aspects of his work which suggest that, whilst he was, indeed, aware of vision’s dominance, he, nevertheless, sought to reduce its importance. His awareness of this dominance is evident in Book XII of *The Prelude*:

I speak in recollection of a time  
When the bodily eye, in every stage of life  
The most despotic of the senses, gained  
Such strength in *me* as often held my mind  
In absolute dominion.<sup>116</sup>

(1850, XII, 127-31)

Although this makes it clear that he does view vision as despotic, it remains unclear as to why he would think this necessarily a bad thing given his posture on passivity with regard to the senses discussed above. It could be that although visual acuity is highly regarded by him, it becomes suspect if valued for its own sake. That when he says that the eye is the most despotic of the senses what he means is that visual acuity has its limitations, because it cannot enable natural objects to provoke him into reasoned thinking.

However, why he would want this given, again, his position on passivity is not altogether clear. Nevertheless, these speculations aside, Wordsworth does seem to seek a solution to vision's dominance. Vision's control can be emasculated by working out the means that Nature,

studiously employs to thwart  
 This tyranny, summons all the senses each  
 To counteract the other, and themselves,  
 And makes them all, and the objects with which all  
 Are conversant, subservient in their turn  
 To the great ends of Liberty and Power.<sup>117</sup>

(1850, XII, 134-39)

In this way, then, the visual sense is made equal to the other senses. However, this is an unsatisfactory solution as it is not clear how this has sufficiently undermined the visual sense in its role as an empirical marker between the world of objects and the thinking mind. The fact that *all* the senses become valued merely emphasizes Wordsworth's empiricism all the more.

Moreover, in his attempt to demonstrate the value of profound thoughts over mere perception Wordsworth falls into contradiction. On the one hand, he places a premium on complex thought admitting that his former penchant for the merely visual was 'vivid though not profound' (142). Yet, on the other hand, he dismisses the complexity associated with profound thought because it makes the slavery of the visual sense 'hard to shun' (151). In the former position expressed, complexity is regrettably absent from the visual; in the latter position, complexity is regrettably the cause of visual dominance. Similarly, there are contradictions in his treatment of the maid's state of mind in the following passage:

Her eye was not the mistress of her heart;  
 Far less did rules prescribed by passive taste,  
 Or barren intermeddling subtleties,  
 Perplex her mind; but, wise as women are  
 When genial circumstance hath favoured them,  
 She welcomed what was given, and craved no more;  
 Whate'er the scene presented to her view  
 That was the best, to that she was attuned  
 By her benign simplicity of life,  
 And through a perfect happiness of soul,

Whose variegated feelings were in this  
 Sisters, that they were each some new delight.  
 Birds in the bower, and lambs in the green field,  
 Could they have known her, would have loved; methought  
 Her very presence such a sweetness breathed,  
 That flowers, and trees, and even the silent hills,  
 And everything she looked on, should have had  
 An intimation how she bore herself  
 Towards them and to all creatures. God delights  
 In such a being; for, her common thoughts  
 Are piety, her life is gratitude.<sup>118</sup>

(1850, XII, 153-73)

Wordsworth firstly says that ‘her eye was not the mistress of her heart’ (153), leading us to believe that she has overcome visual domination and is free of the attendant passivity. However, he then makes obvious her passivity: ‘she welcomed what was given, and craved no more; / Whate’er the scene presented to her view / That was the best’ (158-60). It was her ‘benign simplicity of life’ (161) that enabled her to view nature in this way, and which produced in her ‘common thoughts’ (172) that Wordsworth (earlier so vigorous in defence of profundity) now admires. Either Wordsworth’s solution is ineffective or his contradictory positions indicate that he is not seriously seeking one. If he were, then his explanation as to its remedy (and lines 153-73 above) would be consistently expressed.

Geoffrey Hartman, in relation to *Descriptive Sketches*, mentions Wordsworth’s failed attempt to gain control of this despotic sense:

The eye, the most despotic of the bodily senses in Wordsworth, is thwarted in a peculiar manner. It seeks to localize in nature the mind’s intuition of ‘powers and presences’, yet nature itself seems opposed to this process, and leads the eye restlessly from scene to scene.<sup>119</sup>

In this view of Wordsworth, it is nature, or sense data, which is the controlling factor in vision. Similarly, in Book II of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth recognizes nature’s unremitting controlling influence over his senses:

My soul was unsubdued. A plastic power  
 Abode with me; a forming hand, at times  
 Rebellious, acting in a devious mood;  
 A local spirit of his own, at war  
 With general tendency, but, for the most,

Subservient strictly to external things  
With which it communed.<sup>120</sup>

(1805, II, 362-68)

Wordsworth's recognition of the despotic nature of vision and his subsequent "solution" should not lead us to the conclusion that his passivity in the presense of nature was undesirable to him.

Before concluding, I would like to mention some of the literary reviews *The Prelude* received upon publication. The review from *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* says:

As 'The Prelude' is not, nor pretends to be, a tale of stirring interest, and as it is also of very considerable length, it necessarily requires all legitimate aids of poetic art to sustain the continued attention of the reader. Unfortunately, Wordsworth *never attributed to these their due importance*; and, accordingly, in 'The Prelude', as in all his longer pieces, we cannot conceal from ourselves that the bard is sometimes prolix, and sometimes careless, in the selection of his phrase, and still more often we find his humbler themes become almost trivial (Emphasis added).<sup>121</sup>

The reviewer is aware of two of Wordsworth's most frequent practices: undervaluing poetic artifice and concentrating on the quotidian aspects of nature:

From multiplicity he shrinks as from confusion; and in no instance does he summon thoughts and feelings from various regions to converge like troops in a campaign [...]. His is the ripple of the brook in one huge billow on the shore.<sup>122</sup>

The *British Quarterly Review* echoes this, and compares Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit* with *The Prelude*:

One sees the difference between the two poets. Goethe, the larger and more complex nature, writes an autobiography full of facts, incidents, sketches, episodes; but *artistically* evoking out of his past life the most beautiful and sweet of its multitudinous recollections. Wordsworth, a poet too, but of a mind more meagre and *didactic*, first sketches as it were a line of bare autobiographic theory along the period he means to traverse, and then hangs upon it a few reminiscences that shall be ornamental and illustrative. [...] That Wordsworth should have made such an attempt in verse at all, is to be regarded as a consequence of his peculiar theory of poetic diction [...]. According to that theory, large portions of the poem which, from another point of view, would appear decidedly cold and prosaic, are strictly and sufficiently poetical (Emphasis added).<sup>123</sup>

This aloofness and insipidness is also acknowledged in the review from the *Gentleman's Magazine*:

In Wordsworth's most excited mood we have rather the reflexion of the flame than the authentic or derivative fire itself. Its heat and glare pass to us through some less pervious and

colder lens.<sup>124</sup>

There are many more reviews reflecting the criticisms of these but space will not allow a full examination of them.

In this chapter, we have seen how Wordsworth's poetic ideas are motivated by philosophical considerations to the significant detriment of artistic and aesthetic ones. Moreover, in various of his statements he is seen as valuing content over expressiveness and accuracy of observation over poetic artifice. We have seen how his theoretical writings place undue emphasis on descriptive accuracy, and how they advocate a quest for "authentic" experience. We have seen how his high regard for his sister's descriptive journal entries resulted in his appropriating (without first modifying or editing them) segments of these entries and incorporating them directly into his poetry. In addition, we have seen that she is aware of his practice of being constantly in the presence of nature in order to write poetry that is more accurately descriptive. From his correspondence, we saw that he admires painting because it represented objects accurately and in such a manner that lessons from it could perhaps be learned for poetry. We saw how his poetry is overly descriptive and advocates a subordination of the intellect to experience, primarily by means of the visual sense. We have also seen how contemporary reviews of *The Prelude* viewed it as largely unremarkable and lacking in poetic imagination. All of these aspects, I believe, demonstrate that the term "The Empirical Wordsworth" is an accurate and fair one.

It is not a term without, however, a slight qualification. Certain aspects of Wordsworth's poetry do not fit comfortably into this denomination. There would seem to be an anomaly between his "theory of objects" and the application of such in verse. Indeed, in some instances he appears to stride both the objectivist and non-objectivist camps.<sup>125</sup> This is to be expected given the hermeneutic possibilities inherent in language. My contention is that their presence in his poetry (intentional or otherwise) is irrelevant to my larger argument, which is to claim that it is Wordsworth's empiricism that most influenced twentieth-century poetry.

- <sup>1</sup> Anthony Easthope, 'How Good is Seamus Heaney?', *English*, 46. 184, (1997), 21-36 (p.21).
- <sup>2</sup> Easthope, p.21.
- <sup>3</sup> Easthope, p.21.
- <sup>4</sup> Edward Larrissy, *Reading Twentieth-Century Poetry: The Language of Gender and Objects* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p.7.
- <sup>5</sup> Larrissy, p.7.
- <sup>6</sup> Larrissy, p.7.
- <sup>7</sup> Larrissy, p.8.
- <sup>8</sup> Larrissy, p.8.
- <sup>9</sup> Larrissy, p.8.
- <sup>10</sup> Peter Middleton, "'Who Am I to Speak?': The Politics of Subjectivity in Recent British Poetry", in *New British Poetries: The Scope of the Possible*, ed. by R. Hampson and P. Barry (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp.107-33 (p.119).
- <sup>11</sup> Middleton, p.119.
- <sup>12</sup> Melvin Rader, *Wordsworth: A Philosophical Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p.115.
- <sup>13</sup> J. A. Appleyard, *Coleridge's Philosophy of Literature: The Development of a Concept of Poetry* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), p.67.
- <sup>14</sup> Robert Langbaum, *The Modern Spirit: Essays on the Continuity of Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Literature* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1970), p.18.
- <sup>15</sup> Langbaum, p.20. See also Wordsworth's 1843 letter to Isobella Fenwick where he mentions his obsessive childhood doubts about his own existence. See *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, I, p.329.
- <sup>16</sup> J. P. Ward, *Wordsworth's Language of Men* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1984), p.19.
- <sup>17</sup> David B. Pirie, *William Wordsworth: The Poetry of Grandeur and Tenderness* (London: Methuen, 1982), p.1.
- <sup>18</sup> Geoffrey Clifford Jaggs, 'Techniques of Truth in the Poetry of William Wordsworth and Ezra Pound' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, 2002), p.121.
- <sup>19</sup> *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by T. Hutchinson and E. de Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), Wordsworth Editions 1994, p.89.
- <sup>20</sup> Pirie, p.5.
- <sup>21</sup> Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. by R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones (London: Methuen, 1963), p. 245. See chapter 4 for my discussion of this statement with regard to M. H. Abrams's reading of it in his *The Mirror and the Lamp*.
- <sup>22</sup> *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. by E. de Selincourt, 2nd edn, rev. by C. L. Shaver, 6 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935-1939), p.641.
- <sup>23</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.10.
- <sup>24</sup> Walter Raleigh, *Wordsworth* (London: Edward Arnold, 1903), p.156.
- <sup>25</sup> *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), I, p.123. Interestingly, Paul Hamilton notes that 'Wordsworth parts company from Coleridge where he can be interpreted as believing the language of a particular class of people in a particular emotional state to be most expressive of human nature, for then all that is left for the poet to do is transcribe most faithfully and literally this specific use of language. Any self-advertisement on the part of poetry could only distract from this task: the literary component should be kept to a minimum'. See *Coleridge's Poetics*, p.141.
- <sup>26</sup> W. J. Bate notes that the term "imagination" was traditionally connected 'with direct sensory experience' and was applicable by many romantic critics 'to almost the entire associational capacity of the mind, when it is employed in any non-abstract endeavour'. See *From Classic to Romantic*, pp.112-13.

<sup>27</sup> This is a form of defamiliarisation, which is indicative of descriptive poetry. In modern times it is most notable in the work of Craig Raine.

<sup>28</sup> Albert O. Wlecke, *Wordsworth and the Sublime* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), pp.27-28.

<sup>29</sup> Geoffrey Thurley, *The Romantic Predicament* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p.69.

<sup>30</sup> *The Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by J. D. Campbell (London: Macmillan, 1938), p.93.

<sup>31</sup> Introduction, *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. by R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones (London: Methuen, 1963), p.xlviii.

<sup>32</sup> M. Bowra, *The Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p.12.

<sup>33</sup> *Prose Works*, eds. Owen and Smyser, I, p.126.

<sup>34</sup> *Prose Works*, eds. Owen and Smyser, I, p.140.

<sup>35</sup> *Prose Works*, eds. Owen and Smyser, I, p.141.

<sup>36</sup> *Prose Works*, eds. Owen and Smyser, I, p.142.

<sup>37</sup> Thurley, p.51.

<sup>38</sup> M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), p.22.

<sup>39</sup> Preface, ed. Brett and Jones, pp.249-50. Interestingly, Frank Kermode says of this belief that it 'puts as much distance between poet and peasant as between peasant and amoeba'. See *Romantic Image*, p.10.

<sup>40</sup> Graham Hough, *The Romantic Poets*, 3rd edn (London: Hutchinson, 1953), p.68.

<sup>41</sup> John Casey notes the influence of this on later critical theory: 'It would be true to say that most English criticism since Wordsworth, including what has been called the New Criticism, has been, in its basic assumptions, expressionistic. Works of art have been thought of as conveying, or expressing, or evoking an emotion experienced by the artist. See *The Language of Criticism*, p.25.

<sup>42</sup> Susan Levin, *Dorothy Wordsworth and Romanticism*, (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers, The State University, 1987), p.4.

<sup>43</sup> Levin, p.21.

<sup>44</sup> *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. by Mary Moorman, (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. xiv. Indeed, for Coleridge, as Moorman notes, Dorothy's eyes are 'watchful in minutest observation of Nature'. See *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, p.xiii.

<sup>45</sup> *Journals*, ed. Moorman, p.xv.

<sup>46</sup> *Prose Works*, eds. Owen and Smyser, I, p. 134. Jean Hagstrum has written about this concept in *The Sister Arts*. On the other hand, the idea was being undermined in this period by the accounts of the sublime offered by Burke and others. This gave importance to the affect of words.

<sup>47</sup> *Journals*, ed. Moorman, p.xii.

<sup>48</sup> *Journals*, ed. Moorman, p.xv.

<sup>49</sup> *Journals*, ed. Moorman, p.xii.

<sup>50</sup> Journal entry dated 18 March 1798. *Journals*, ed. Moorman, p.10.

<sup>51</sup> Journal entry dated 19 March 1798. *Journals*, ed. Moorman, p.10.

<sup>52</sup> Journal entry dated 12 September 1800. *Journals*, ed. Moorman, p.40.

<sup>53</sup> Journal entry dated 12 October 1800. *Journals*, ed. Moorman, p.45.

<sup>54</sup> Nicholas Roe, *The Politics of Nature: Wordsworth and Some Contemporaries* (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp.119-20.

<sup>55</sup> Roe, p.120.

<sup>56</sup> Geoffrey Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* (London: Methuen, 1987), p.12.

<sup>57</sup> Journal entry dated 25 January 1798. *Journals*, ed. Moorman, p. 2.

<sup>58</sup> Humphrey House, *Coleridge: The Clark Lectures 1951-52* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1953), p.124. It may be noted that the phrase, 'She sailed along' uses metaphor to convey the moon as a boat, however this does not indicate a non-empirical approach that Dorothy had to her writing. As I show in Chapter Five,



metaphor is contingent upon a recognition of comparisons, albeit implied. These comparisons are dependent upon vision and the rendering of the objects of vision into language. My point in including this instance from her Journals is to demonstrate the extent to which her brother copied from them. I am not claiming her writing is devoid of metaphor.

<sup>59</sup> Introduction, ed. Brett and Jones, p.xxx.

<sup>60</sup> *Letters of William Wordsworth: A New Selection*, ed. by A. G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p.115.

<sup>61</sup> *Letters*, ed. Hill, p.1.

<sup>62</sup> *Letters*, ed. Hill, p.4.

<sup>63</sup> *Letters*, ed. Hill, p.118. In this context, ‘grandeur’ is a synonym for “sublimity”. Wordsworth is one of those who insist that the sublime can encompass particularity.

<sup>64</sup> Raleigh, p.156. It is also worth noting Geoffrey Hartman’s observation that for Wordsworth, ‘the novelty seemed to lie in the quality of thought rather than the quality of its expression’. See *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*, p.8.

<sup>65</sup> Letter dated 16 January 1820. *Letters*, ed. Hill, p.207.

<sup>66</sup> Letter to Jacob Fletcher dated 25 February 1825. *Letters*, ed. Hill, p.225.

<sup>67</sup> Robert Rehder, *Wordsworth and the Beginnings of Modern Poetry* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), p.218.

<sup>68</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.206.

<sup>69</sup> Juliet Barker, *Wordsworth: A life in Letters* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p.46.

<sup>70</sup> *Letters*, ed. Hill, p.226.

<sup>71</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, pp.640-41.

<sup>72</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.640.

<sup>73</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.758.

<sup>74</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.758.

<sup>75</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.758.

<sup>76</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.757.

<sup>77</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.758.

<sup>78</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.765.

<sup>79</sup> *Lyrical Ballads*, Penguin Poetry First Editions (London: Penguin, 1999), p.63.

<sup>80</sup> *Lyrical Ballads*, pp.63-64.

<sup>81</sup> *Lyrical Ballads*, p.64.

<sup>82</sup> Jaggs, p.32.

<sup>83</sup> John F. Danby, *William Wordsworth: The Prelude and Other Poems* (London: Edward Arnold, 1963; repr. 1964), p.45.

<sup>84</sup> Jaggs, p.30.

<sup>85</sup> Jaggs, p.35.

<sup>86</sup> Larrissy, p.10.

<sup>87</sup> Jaggs, p.53.

<sup>88</sup> Larrissy, p.18.

<sup>89</sup> Larrissy, p.18.

<sup>90</sup> *Prose Works*, eds. Owen and Smyser, III, pp.84-85.

<sup>91</sup> Wlecke, pp.13-14.

<sup>92</sup> *Prose Works*, eds. Owen and Smyser, I, p.329.

<sup>93</sup> Rehder, p.146.

<sup>94</sup> Rehder, p. 47.

<sup>95</sup> Pirie, p.3.

<sup>96</sup> Levin, p.4.

<sup>97</sup> Levin, p.5.

<sup>98</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.481.

<sup>99</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.481.

<sup>100</sup> However, this qualification should not lead us to assume that Wordsworth (or Coleridge, for that matter) had, up to this point, developed a theory of mind that would allow it more control than is implied here. Also, Wordsworth is in effect trying to show the transcendent in benevolent operation by means of a system that is essentially materialist.

<sup>101</sup> Keith G. Thomas, *Wordsworth and Philosophy: Transcendentalism in Poetry* (Ann Arbor and London: UMI Research Press, 1989), p.14.

<sup>102</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.481.

<sup>103</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.481.

<sup>104</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.481.

<sup>105</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.206.

<sup>106</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.207.

<sup>107</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.207.

<sup>108</sup> *Lyrical Ballads*, p.103.

<sup>109</sup> Edward Larrissy, (From an unpublished book called *The Blind and Blindness in Literature of the Romantic Period*).

<sup>110</sup> Notably Marjorie Levinson and David B. Pirie. See *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems*, pp.14-15, and *The Poetry of Grandeur and of Tenderness*, pp.269-72.

<sup>111</sup> Donald Davie, *Articulate Energy* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1955), pp.106-7.

<sup>112</sup> Margorie Levinson, *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1986), pp.14-15.

<sup>113</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.207.

<sup>114</sup> John Barrell, 'The Uses of Dorothy: The Language of the Sense in Tintern Abbey', in *Poetry, Language and Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp.137-67 (p.149).

<sup>115</sup> Edward Larrissy (From an unpublished book called *The Blind and Blindness in Literature of the Romantic Period*).

<sup>116</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.736.

<sup>117</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.736.

<sup>118</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.736.

<sup>119</sup> Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1964), p.107.

<sup>120</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.647.

<sup>121</sup> 'The Prelude' from *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, XVII (1850), 521-27. Included in *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Steven Gill (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1979), p.551.

<sup>122</sup> 'The Prelude' from *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, XVII (1850), 521-27. Included in *The Prelude*, ed. Wordsworth, p.551.

<sup>123</sup> 'The Prelude' from the *British Quarterly Review*, XII (1850), 549-79. Included in *The Prelude*, ed. Wordsworth, pp.555-56.

<sup>124</sup> 'Wordsworth's Autobiographical Poem' from the *Gentleman's Magazine*, XXXIV (1850), 459-68. Included in *The Prelude*, ed. Wordsworth, p.552.

<sup>125</sup> In relation to Coleridge's criticism of Wordsworth's literalism Paul Hamilton says, 'There is always present in Wordsworth's thought the alternative theory of poetry as symbol; and Coleridge frequently calls literal what he is ideologically unwilling to accept as symbolic'. See *Coleridge's Poetics*, p.144.

## Chapter Two

### The Philosophical Influences on Wordsworth

Before dealing with the philosophical influences that bear directly on Wordsworth's poetic aesthetic, I would like to take a brief historical overview of the development of empiricism as a philosophical principle applied to language.<sup>1</sup> This is relevant because it formed the linguistic paradigm from which Wordsworth established his assumptions regarding the empirical use of language. Indeed, it could be supposed that Wordsworth's importance is in his developing the premises of empiricism in ways that are natural, but which had not yet been worked through in the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, empiricism as a linguistic barometer for poetic precision grew out of the prevalent philosophical climate: one that put an emphasis on the verifiable as opposed to the intuitive. Isaiah Berlin in *The Age of Enlightenment* offers the reasons behind this shift towards accuracy:

Despite advances in science the ancient disciplines of metaphysics, logic, ethics, and all that related to the social life of man, still lay in chaos, governed by the confusions of thought and language of an earlier and unregenerate age. It was natural, and indeed almost inevitable, that those who had been liberated by the new sciences should seek to apply their methods and principles to a subject [philosophy] which was clearly in even more desperate need of order than the facts of the external world. Indeed this task was of critical importance; for without a true and clear picture of the principal of "faculties" and operations of the human mind, one could not be certain how much credence to give to various types of thought or reasoning, nor how to determine the sources and limits of human knowledge, nor the relationship between its varieties.<sup>2</sup>

Because of this philosophers such as Hobbes, Berkeley and Locke (and indeed Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz) sought to give their reasoning a structure of a mathematical kind. Language must be able to be stated in quasi-mathematical terms, for,

language less precise may turn out to conceal the fallacies and obscurities, the confused mass of superstitions and prejudices, which characterised the discredited theological or other forms of dogmatic doctrine about the universe, which the new science had come to sweep away and supersede.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most voluble advocates of this "school" was Thomas Hobbes who rejected the Aristotelian

structures of knowledge and sought a new system of philosophic reasoning based upon an empirical perception of nature. In doing so, he condemned connotative words in favour of precision and clarity and rejected metaphors, which he considered, ‘untrue’.<sup>4</sup> Of Hobbes’s four “abuses” of language the first two are:

(1) When men register their thoughts wrong, by the inconstancy of the signification of their words; by which they register for their conceptions, that which they never conceived; and so deceive themselves. (2) When they use words metaphorically; that is, in other sense than that they are ordained for; and thereby deceive others.<sup>5</sup>

Hobbes continues by cautioning the use of words that can be linked to the psychological and personality idiosyncrasies of the speaker:

And therefore in reasoning, a man must take heed of words; which besides the signification of what we imagine of their nature, have a signification also of the nature, disposition, and interest of the speaker; such are the names of Virtues and Vices; for one man calleth “wisdom”, what another calleth “fear”; and one “cruelty”, what another “justice”; one “prodigality”, what another “magnanimity”; and one “gravity”, what another “stupidity”. And therefore such names can never be true grounds of any ratiocination. No more can metaphors, and tropes of speech: but these are less dangerous, because they profess their inconstancy; which the other do not.<sup>6</sup>

George Berkeley, who also advocated a more precise use of language,

believed that knowledge would be advanced by the admission that abstract generalities do not exist because such an admission redirects mental energy away from trying to probe the fantastic and reorients it toward trying to disclose what can be known.<sup>7</sup>

What can be known was also a concern of Locke who, in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, wrote:

Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any Ideas; How comes it to be furnished? [...] To this I answer, in one word, from *experience*: In that, all our knowledge is founded; and from that it ultimately derives itself.<sup>8</sup>

What we experience is derived from our senses:

The foundation of all our knowledge of corporeal things, lies in our senses [...]. The whole extent of our knowledge, or imagination, reaches not beyond our own ideas, limited to our ways of perception.<sup>9</sup>

These various philosophical ideas resulted in a paradigm shift in the way language was used. Consequently,

there was a shift away from a suggestive use of language towards a more representational and utilitarian approach based upon the growing scientific and rationalist ethos of the period. It would be unusual if this universal trend did not have an indirect influence upon the shaping of Wordsworth's poetry.

In *Wordsworth and Philosophy: Transcendentalism in Poetry*, Keith G. Thomas writes:

Although Wordsworth makes few references to the philosophy of his time, there is no reason to believe that his knowledge of it was not, in many cases, firsthand. His library (at the time of his death, at any rate) contained many books of philosophy that one might expect to see on an intellectual's shelves: for example, Plato, Aristotle, Bacon, Descartes, Leibniz, Newton, Locke, Berkeley, Hartley, Paley, Rousseau and Burke.<sup>10</sup>

Melvin Rader in *Wordsworth: A Philosophical Approach* says that Wordsworth's library at his death comprised nearly three thousand books 'including many on philosophy or religion'.<sup>11</sup> However, Rader notes that there were only two major works by the English empiricists: Francis Bacon's *Two Books of the Proficiency and Advancement of Learning*, and George Berkeley's *Alciphron*.<sup>12</sup> Rader says that there were no philosophical works by Hobbes, Hume, Hartley, Godwin, or Priestley but there were,

two of Locke's minor works—*A letter to the Right Reverend Lord Bishop of Worcester* [...] and *Mr. Locke's Reply to the Right Reverend The Lord Bishop of Worcester's Answer to His Letter*. But these works are of more significance as contributions to the deistic controversy than as repositories of Locke's own philosophy.<sup>13</sup>

According to H. W. Piper in *The Active Universe*, there is scant evidence that he was familiar with seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophy before he became acquainted with Coleridge and others:

Studies of the early development of Wordsworth's philosophy give most of their attention to his supposed reading of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century metaphysics [...]. Little reason for reading of this kind is offered by his other interests and friendships of the time.<sup>14</sup>

It is certainly possible that Piper is nearer the truth of the matter than Thomas is. Having a well-stocked library is not necessarily proof of having read its contents. However, at least as regards the relevant phase of Wordsworth's life, Thomas is aware of this possibility but thinks that if true it is inconsequential because of other sources of philosophical knowledge available to Wordsworth at the time. After noting that Coleridge lent Wordsworth, 'one book popularising German philosophy for an English audience, Willich's *Elements*

of the *Critical Philosophy* (1798), which gives an accurate, succinct account of Kant's philosophy and major works',<sup>15</sup> Thomas says:

While we cannot know for certain whether or when he read this or other works of philosophy, we can be sure of some texts he did read—or else assimilated through general cultural osmosis.<sup>16</sup>

Thomas thinks this was possibly done whilst Wordsworth was an undergraduate at Cambridge where Newton's *Principia* and Locke's *Essay on the Human Understanding* were part of the curriculum.<sup>17</sup>

Yet, according to Book III of *The Prelude* it seems doubtful whether Wordsworth had a natural aptitude or interest for scholarly pursuits at all while studying at Cambridge: 'Such glory was but little sought by me, / And little won'.<sup>18</sup> Nor did he see himself as destined for such a life:

And more than all, a strangeness in my  
mind,  
A feeling that I was not for that hour,  
Nor for that place.<sup>19</sup>

(1850, III, 80-82)

In *The Prelude* (which is supposed to be a comprehensive account of the growth of a poet's mind) there is, as Graham Hough observes, 'little mention of intellectual influences'.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, in the entire poem the only books mentioned are *Don Quixote* and *The Arabian Nights*.<sup>21</sup> It becomes plain that inward pursuits of the mind are not pressing concerns for Wordsworth during this period. He seems to have been more attracted to outdoor activities such as a walking tour of France, Switzerland and Germany in the summer and autumn of 1790, and which is recorded in *Descriptive Sketches* (1792).

After his graduation in 1791, he spent time in London and North Wales before visiting France again.<sup>22</sup> It was while he was in France during the revolutionary period that it could be said that he became politicised. Through his friendship with Michel de Beaupuy, an aristocratic supporter of the Revolution, Wordsworth similarly became committed to the cause. However, according to Piper, though Beaupuy did influence Wordsworth's political ideas there is no indication that Wordsworth was familiar with any of the

philosophical ideas that Coleridge would later introduce to him.<sup>23</sup> He was, however, familiar with the ideas of William Godwin (whom he started reading in 1794, a year before he met Coleridge); though once he met Coleridge, his philosophical education would have been broadened.<sup>24</sup>

Coleridge introduced to Wordsworth David Hartley's theory of association from which Wordsworth gleaned his sense of nature as having some sort of moral purpose.<sup>25</sup> There were many theories of association in circulation before Hartley formulated his, and in doing so, he borrowed heavily from Isaac Newton, John Locke and from John Gay who, in his *A Dissertation*, had applied it to explain the relationship between morality and private happiness. What gave Hartley's theory some originality was 'his attempt to explain it physiologically' (that physical impressions are made on the brain by means of vibrations passing along the fibres).<sup>26</sup> His main proposition was that the sense organs, when in contact with external objects, trigger movements, or vibrations, which travel, via the nervous system, to the brain causing ideas or thoughts. These ideas remain in the brain even when the objects that cause them are no longer present; but the longer the objects are absent the fainter the ideas become.<sup>27</sup> The brain receives these sense impressions passively and constructs from them mental processes. Whatever changes are made in the brain substance itself due to this process, equivalent changes are made in our mental state also, and vice versa. Consequently, for Hartley, there are no innate ideas: mental states are derived entirely from sensations that in turn are derived from direct contact with external objects. Through the "mechanism" of association, these sensations are transformed into complex mental patterns that we call "thought", "thinking", and "consciousness".<sup>28</sup> Each mental state was contingent upon 'simple, discrete components in the form of sensations or ideas'.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, man was a prisoner to the necessities of associational processes. As Melvin Rader writes:

The whole of mental life, he [Hartley] believed, is explicable by the combination and recombination of these elementary states in conformity with the necessary laws of association. These laws explain not only the mechanism of our mental life but the growth of our moral and religious traits.<sup>30</sup>

The theory that impressions are associated in the brain in mechanical fashion assumes a materialist model of mental operations and development. Given the reference to the ‘association of ideas’ in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, and recognising the influence of Coleridge, we can see that this model is the source of the interest in bodily sensation evident in certain passages in Wordsworth such as: ‘our bodies feel, where’er they be / Against or with our will’ (‘Expostulation and Reply’); ‘sensations sweet, / Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart; / And passing even into my purer mind’ (‘Tintern Abbey’).

The importance of Isaac Newton’s concept of “aether” should not be overlooked in an examination of Hartley’s theory of the physiological basis underlying vibrations because it draws some of its substance from Newton’s theory of nervous transmission:

In later editions of his two major works, Isaac Newton proposed an electrical hypothesis of nervous transmission. According to this hypothesis, an electrical “aether” permeates the nerve and transmits vibrations along it.<sup>31</sup>

The similarity of operation between Newton’s “aether” and Hartley’s is striking. For Hartley, ‘when external objects are impressed on the sensory Nerves, they excite Vibrations in the Aether residing in the Pores of these Nerves’.<sup>32</sup> These vibrations then ‘agitate the small particles of the medullary Substance of the sensory Nerves with synchronous Vibrations’.<sup>33</sup> Both the vibrations in the aether and in the medullary particles then travel to the brain. In this model, we see how Newton’s concept of aether has been appropriated by Hartley to construct a theoretical basis in support of his physiological explanation for the process of association. The difference being, as Ian Wylie notes in *Young Coleridge and the Philosophers of Nature*, that for Newton aether was ‘an agent of divine action which transmitted God’s energy into each part of nature’.<sup>34</sup> In the Newtonian model, aether is a manifestation of God. In a letter written on 7 December 1695, Newton hypothesises that the structure of nature is made up of the aether reduced to basic forms,

at first by the immediate hand of the Creator, and ever since by the power of Nature, who [...] became a complete imitator of the copies set by her by the Protoplast [Protoplast being a biological unit consisting of a nucleus and the body of cytoplasm with which it interacts].<sup>35</sup>



Of this, Wylie says, ‘the order of nature is maintained by aether, and the phenomena generated are physical copies of divine Ideas’.<sup>36</sup> However, in Hartley’s theory, also, there is room for the concept of deity and a “soul”. From the first and most basic of sense impressions that we receive there is, Hartley surmises, an action of the human soul which changes these crude experiences into their relevant moral equivalents which, according to Hartley, are classified under such terms as “pleasure” and “pain”.

There is little space here to elaborate on each of the senses he deals with but it will be interesting to look briefly at two of them: “sensation” and “imagination”. For Hartley sensation forms a continuum running through to the idea that by the associating of pleasure through contact with sense-objects a sort of monistic unity can ultimately be achieved:

Since God is the source of all Good, and consequently must at last appear to be so, i.e. be associated with all our Pleasures, it seems to follow [...] that the idea of God, and of the Ways by which his Goodness and Happiness are made manifest, must, at last, take the place of and absorb other Ideas, and He Himself become, according to the Language of the Scriptures, All in All.<sup>37</sup>

The second sense he deals with is imagination:

The Recurrence [sic] of Ideas, especially visible and audible ones, in a vivid manner, but without any regard to the Order observed in past Facts, is ascribed to the Power of Imagination or Fancy.<sup>38</sup>

The pleasures of the imagination are pleasures that are not “original”, but inferred from sensible ones by association. These pleasures of the imagination are,

the next remove above the sensible ones, and have, in their proper Place and Degree, a great Efficacy in improving and protecting Natures. They are to Men in the early part of their adult Age, what Playthings are to Children; they teach them a love for Regularity, Exactness, Truth, Simplicity; they lead them to the knowledge of many important Truths relating to themselves, the external world, and its Author; they habituate to invent, and reason by Analogy and induction; and when the social, moral, and religious Affections begin to be generated in us, we may make a much quicker progress towards the perfection of our natures by having a due Stock, and no more than a due Stock, of knowledge in natural and artificial Things, of a relish for natural and artificial Beauty.<sup>39</sup>

Brett and Jones in their Introduction to *Lyrical Ballads* say the reason that Wordsworth found Hartley’s theory so appealing was because his,

temperament had always caused him to rely more on sensory observation than rational principles, and his character had been influenced more by natural surroundings than formal education.<sup>40</sup>

Hartley was also influential in Wordsworth's view of nature as a moral tutor:

Hartley had stressed the importance of sensation as the basis of all our knowledge, including our moral principles. Morality, on such a view, was the product of experience, built up from the effects of environment upon one's personal development.<sup>41</sup>

Rader illustrates this:

The trick, if one wants to rear a child aright, is to surround him with the right stimuli, and then he will form associations leading inevitably to correct ideas in morality and religion. Thus "science" can be devoted to the glory of God and the salvation of man.<sup>42</sup>

Graham Hough in *The Romantic Poets* similarly recognises the importance of Hartley in informing

Wordsworth's ideas concerning nature and morality:

It is Hartley's contention that since our minds are built up entirely by "association", it is extremely important to make the right impressions and associations in early life. This provides the philosophical background for Wordsworth's belief in the influence of natural objects in the formation of character, and perhaps too goes far to account for his sturdy reliance on immediate sensuous experience, his abstention from the fanciful and arbitrary, his feeling that his verse must 'deal substantially with bodily things'.<sup>43</sup>

Wordsworth expresses this in Book III of *The Prelude*:

To every natural form, rock, fruits, or flower,  
Even the loose stones that cover the highway,  
I gave a moral life<sup>44</sup>

(1850, III, 127-29)

And in Book I of *The Excursion*:

Thus informed,  
He had small need of books; for many a tale  
Traditionary, round the mountains hung,  
And many a legend, peopling the dark woods,  
Nourished Imagination in her growth,  
And gave the Mind that apprehensive power  
By which she is made quick to recognise  
The moral properties and scope of things.<sup>45</sup>

(I, 162-69)

We can see further examples in *The Prelude* where the application of the Hartleian principle of the educative benefits of nature has led to moral recognition via feelings of guilt or sorrow. The most recognised instance is in Book I where the young Wordsworth projects his feelings of guilt onto the enlargement of the mountain as it “grows” larger due to the shifting spatial perspective caused by the progress of the boat through the water. The mountain becomes alive with retributive intent:

with purpose of its own  
And measured motion like a living thing,  
Strode after me.<sup>46</sup>

(1850, I, 383-85)

The resultant lesson/punishment is described in the following manner:

for many days, my brain  
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense  
Of unknown modes of being; o’er my thoughts  
There hung a darkness, call it solitude  
Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes  
Remained, no pleasant images of trees,  
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;  
But huge and mighty forms, that do not live  
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind  
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams.<sup>47</sup>

(1850, I, 391-400)

Another instance of this is evident while he is trapping birds. After stealing a bird from someone else’s trap, nature again becomes infused with retributive purpose:

I heard among the solitary hills  
Low breathings coming after me, and sounds  
Of undistinguishable motion, steps  
Almost as silent as the turf they trod.<sup>48</sup>

(1850, I, 322-25)

An interesting feature of this verse paragraph is that it would seem that Wordsworth has turned to his imagination (rather than to experience) to invent the various ominous sounds detailed herein. In actuality, the natural surroundings he inhabits display no obvious auditory output—the turf is silent. The ‘low

breathings' and 'sounds / Of undistinguishable motion' are projections onto natural objects of his fearful mental state. This projection, however, is contingent upon the actual objects being present to his senses; without this proximity, such projection would be impossible. Wordsworth is actually "hearing" nature's rebuke—and to him it is very real. In this stanza, then, he is merely recording that experience and in doing so is demonstrating his empiricist attitude. In this, and the preceding verse paragraphs quoted, we can clearly see how Wordsworth has taken Hartley's idea of sensation as being the basis of moral principles, and morality being the result of experience, and expressed it in terms that accentuate the importance (as Wordsworth saw it) of nature's instructive qualities.<sup>49</sup> Matter and morality have become entwined.

This emphasis on nature and morality was influenced not only by Hartley but also by Edmund Burke's concept of "the Sublime" as a fearful manifestation of an ultimate power. In *Romanticism and Gender*, Anne Mellor says:

Burke identified the experience of the sublime with the idea of pain or the annihilation of the self, at a time when one also knows that one's life is not genuinely threatened'.<sup>50</sup>

She quotes him as saying:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger; that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.<sup>51</sup>

For Burke, this sort of emotion is only produced, Mellor says, 'by a power greater than oneself'.<sup>52</sup> Burke writes: '[...] pain is always inflicted by a power in some way superior, because we never submit to pain willingly'.<sup>53</sup> Mellor concludes:

Confronted with such overwhelming natural phenomena as the Alps, huge dark caves, a blinding sunset, or a towering gloomy ruin, the human mind first experiences terror or fear and then—as our instinct for self-preservation is gradually relaxed—astonishment, admiration, reverence and respect. Thus, Burke concluded, from the contemplation of a sublime landscape, one is led to a sensible impression of the Deity by whose power such magnificent scenes are created.<sup>54</sup>

According to Mellor, Wordsworth (and Coleridge) 'radically transformed' this notion of the sublime, 'by

insisting that the experience of infinite power is attended, not by fear and trembling, but rather by deep awe and profound joy'.<sup>55</sup>

However, the Burkean concept of the sublime can still be discerned in Wordsworth's poems, such as 'There was a Boy', 'The Simplon Pass' and the stanzas I discussed above relating to nature's morality. In 'There was a Boy', Wordsworth reveals a natural world that is filled with menace and threat. It is a world with 'all its solemn imagery' (23). Far from negating Burke's "terrible sublime", the poem's mood and imagery gives good reason to confirm it. Nature is personified and addressed by the poet in a manner that indicates a threatening stance:

There was a Boy; ye knew him well, ye cliffs  
And islands of Winander!<sup>56</sup>

(1-2)

The stars move along the 'edges of the hills' (4) furtively—almost fearfully. The boy is depicted as being alone in this setting, yet we sense that he is being observed from every quarter by the unseen eyes of nature. Such is the intrusiveness of the observation that the cliffs and islands of Winander 'knew him well'. His hand gesture as he prepares to mimic the owls is redolent of the hand gesture when praying solemnly. Moreover, the owls' responses to his call are portrayed as fearful and uncertain—'quivering peals' (13), 'screams, and echoes' (14)—despite the assurance of a 'jocund din' (16). The poem concludes with the death of the boy, thus, reinforcing the idea that a Burkean sublime has informed Wordsworth's composition of this poem.

Similarly, images of fear, menace, and foreboding are evident in 'The Simplon Pass'<sup>57</sup>. The Pass is described as 'gloomy' (2), and the travellers' journey is 'several hours / At a slow step' (3-4). The trees are 'decaying' (5); waterfalls produce 'blasts' (6); winds are 'bewildered and forlorn' (8); rocks are 'black drizzling crags' (11) that 'muttered close upon our ears' (9); the stream is 'raving' (13) and produces a 'sick sight' (12); and the clouds seem wild because 'unfettered' (14). Furthermore, the poem ends with visions of

‘the great Apocalypse’ (18). This imagery places the poem, also, within the area of Burkean sublime.

Returning to Hartley’s influence on Wordsworth, a further example of this is drawn to our attention by Brett and Jones who suggest that the framework for ‘Tintern Abbey’ ‘derives from Hartley and presupposes an empiricist philosophy’.<sup>58</sup> For them the poem is analogous with Hartley’s associationist psychology:

Hartley’s account of how the mind moves from sensation through perception to thought, is turned into an analogy of how the individual passes from childhood through youth to maturity.<sup>59</sup>

And they illustrate these transitions in terms of the poem’s structure by first citing the following lines:

had no need of a remoter charm,  
By thought supplied, or any interest,  
Unborrowed from the eye<sup>60</sup>

These lines represent,

a time when sensory pleasures were all important [before the move to] a more mature wisdom when [quoting from the poem] ‘these wild ecstasies’ have given way to ‘a sober pleasure’.<sup>61</sup>

The influence of Hartley is clearly apparent in Wordsworth’s Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. This can be seen from the following passage:

For our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings; and, as by contemplating the relation of these general representatives to each other, we discover what is really important to men, so by the repetition and continuance of this act feelings connected with important subjects, will be nourished, till at length, if we be originally possessed of much organic sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced that by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits we shall describe objects and utter sentiments of such a nature and in such connection with each other, that the understanding of the being to whom we address ourselves, if he be in a healthful state of association, must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, his taste exalted, and his affections ameliorated.<sup>62</sup>

We can see here (as well as a strong connection to Hartley’s associationism) a further confirmation of the importance to Wordsworth of a passive attitude with regard to the perceiving of phenomena by the poet. The poet is advised to obey ‘blindly and mechanically’ the dictates of his thoughts that are derived from sense impressions or as Wordsworth terms it ‘influxes of feeling’. That these influxes of feeling are

‘modified and directed by our thoughts’ does not necessarily indicate a negation of passivity in favour of a pro-active stance.

Throughout Wordsworth’s theoretical writings, there are copious examples of inconsistencies and contradictions.<sup>63</sup> For example, elsewhere in the Preface he writes, ‘What then does the Poet? He considers man and the objects that surround him as acting and reacting upon each other’.<sup>64</sup> This would appear to support the pro-active stance if the matter were not confused by a later statement where he says that the poet considers, ‘man and nature as essentially adapted to each other, and the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting qualities of nature’.<sup>65</sup> Here the mind is seen as a mirror—a mere reflector of unchangeable reality, rather than as something capable of modifying it. Given such a confusion of intent, my view (based on the evidence of his poetry, correspondence, theoretical writings and his expressed philosophical concerns) is that passivity would seem to be the main tendency in operation in his poetic practice.

This would appear to jar with the obvious fact that the passage (quoted above beginning: ‘For our continued influxes of feeling ...’) does advocate a model of the mind that is non-passive. However, it would be incorrect to assume that this “activity” operates in an actively creative capacity. While it is true that Wordsworth uses the word “create” in *The Prelude* to describe this activity (i.e. the modification of incoming sense impressions), his use of it should not be confused with the commonly understood sense the word evokes: to make or cause to be or to become. In *The Prelude*, he is arguing for something more modest. According to Wordsworth, this creative activity is present in early infancy. He expresses this in the “child in its mother’s arms passage” of Book II of *The Prelude* where the child, frail as he is, is nevertheless,

An inmate of this active universe:  
For feeling has to him imparted power  
That through the growing faculties of sense  
Doth, like an agent of the one great Mind  
Create, creator and receiver both,

Working but in alliance with the works  
Which it beholds.<sup>66</sup>

(1850, II, 254-60)

Because of the creative power of the ‘one great Mind’ of the universe in operation in every living thing (including the child), the child is able to share in this Mind’s creativity. Accordingly, rather than passively perceiving the world around him, the child is able to “create” or make more sensual what would otherwise be indistinct and unregulated incoming sense data. In other words, this creative activity’s function is simply to enable a more accurate perception of inert matter: reality is not falsified, and no new thing is created. As Wordsworth writes in ‘Tintern Abbey’:

of all the mighty world  
Of eye and ear,—both what they half create,  
And what perceive<sup>67</sup>

(105-7)

The salient phrase here being ‘half create’. This accurately expresses the balance whereby perception and “imagination” are held in tension. It is this regulation of sense data to render it more tangible that Wordsworth sees as the poet’s main duty. However, all that this duty allows is for a greater accuracy of description in Wordsworth’s poetry.

Wordsworth’s view that influxes of feeling are modified by thought derives from Coleridge who later in a letter to Thomas Poole in 1801 wrote that the mind was not ‘a lazy Looker-on on an external world [...] any system built on the passiveness of the mind must be false, as a system’.<sup>68</sup> Coleridge was perhaps alluding to Hartley’s theory, for which he had lost his enthusiasm. Moreover, as Melvin Rader points out, Coleridge attacked Hobbes, Locke and Hume by saying he could prove, ‘that the Reputation of these three men has been wholly unmerited, and I have in what I have already written traced the whole history of the causes that effected this reputation entirely to Wordsworth’s satisfaction’.<sup>69</sup> Rader also quotes from an early version of Coleridge’s poem *Dejection* that is directed to Wordsworth expressing Coleridge’s view



that the mind is far from passive:

O Wordsworth! we receive but we give,  
 And in our Life alone does Nature live:  
 Our's is her Wedding-garment, our's her Shroud!  
 And would we aught behold of higher Worth  
 Than that inanimate cold World *allow'd*  
 To the poor loveless ever-anxious Crowd,  
 Ah! from the Soul itself must issue forth  
 A Light, a Glory, a fair luminous cloud  
 Enveloping the Earth!  
 And from the Soul itself must there be sent  
 A sweet and pow'rful Voice, of its own Birth,  
 Of all sweet Sounds the Life and Element!<sup>70</sup>

Rader concludes that, 'Coleridge and Wordsworth must have reached substantial agreement in converse with each other, not entirely rejecting associationism, but modifying and subordinating it.'<sup>71</sup>

Nevertheless, in those parts of Wordsworth's works that seem to be operating non-empirically if one looks deeply enough one can usually find an empiricist origin. In his essay, 'Emotion and Cognition in *The Prelude*' Joel Pace says that for Wordsworth 'imagination functions as a faculty which is both emotional and cognitive'.<sup>72</sup> He then demonstrates this concept in action by citing lines 398-403 of Book V of *The Prelude*:

Even now appears before the mind's clear eye  
 That self-same village church; I see her sit  
 (The throned Lady whom erewhile we hailed)  
 On her green hill, forgetful of this Boy  
 Who slumbers at her feet,—forgetful, too,  
 Of all her silent neighbourhood of graves

(1850, V, 398-403)

He says of these lines:

Let us suppose that in his travels Wordsworth sees a village church. Empirically speaking, he has received an object and it has entered into his mind through his eyes. However, in his mind's eye he transforms the church [...]. He is now creator and receiver both, for (through his senses) he has received or perceived the church; and (through his imagination) he has created the 'throned lady' [...] from the church.<sup>73</sup>

Adding:

The imaginative transformation which the church undergoes is due partially to cognition. If he has long passed from the actual sight of the church yet he can still see it with his mind's eye (memory) then he has abstracted the church, and in doing so he has used a cognitive function. [...] He has processed the church and its neighborhood of graves and likened them to a mother and family of children. He has made this association (or analogy) through the cognitive process of comparison, which is part of the imaginative faculty that creates a lady or mother from a church. Thus, he unites imagination, cognition, and reflection in his creative process; insofar as imagination comes to be seen as 'amplitude of mind, / And reason in her most exalted mood' (1805, XIII, 169-70).<sup>74</sup>

An essential aspect to Wordsworth's empiricism (as I explore more fully in chapter three) is his desire to invest poetry with humanistic concerns. In *The Politics of Nature*, Nicholas Roe says that, 'an important precedent for 'Tintern Abbey', [...] was William Crowe's loco-descriptive poem *Lewesdon Hill*, published in 1788'.<sup>75</sup> Coleridge's 'Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement' similarly alludes to this poem.<sup>76</sup>

Both Wordsworth and Coleridge had been impressed with the poem's prospect introduced in the following lines:

Up to thy summit, LEWESDON, to the brow  
Of yon proud rising, where the lonely thorn  
Bends from the rude South-east, with top cut sheer  
By his keen breath, along the narrow track  
By which the scanty-pastured sheep ascend  
Up to thy furze-clad summit, let me climb;  
My morning exercise; and thence look round  
Upon the variegated scene, of hills,  
And woods, and fruitful vales, and villages  
Half-hid in tufted orchards, and the sea  
Boundless, and studded thick with many a sail.<sup>77</sup>

Roe says of these lines that,

Crowe looks around on a landscape that resembles the pleasing aspects and 'tufted trees' of Milton's 'L'Allegro', rather than the meadows of West Dorset. His 'variegated scene' is also a recollection of the garden of Eden in *Paradise Lost*, 'A happy rural seat of various view'.<sup>78</sup>

However, the poem has, according to Roe, 'a third, very different Miltonic precedent: the hilltop vision of post-lapsarian history granted to Adam by the Archangel Michael'.<sup>79</sup> He cites the following lines in illustration:

it was a hill  
 Of paradise the highest, from whose top  
 The hemisphere of earth in clearest ken  
 Stretched out to the amplest reach of prospect lay.<sup>80</sup>

Of this, he says:

This ample prospect revealed no “sweet variety” but the future history of a ‘world perverse’, subject to time, change, and the ‘many shapes / Of death’ (xi. 466-7). So Adam is brought to contemplate ‘miserable mankind’ as the historic consequences of the fall.<sup>81</sup>

Roe concludes that for Crowe ‘the prospect from Lewesdon comprehended an ideal landscape, but also embraced the realities of history, politics and human society’.<sup>82</sup>

Roe’s reading of *Lewesdon Hill* is pertinent to our discussion of Wordsworth’s empiricism as it indicates a tension between the transcendental and the material in the poem. This is expressed by the transcendental being represented by the Edenic prospect and the material represented by the post-lapsarian view of humanity after the Fall. Roe says that,

the view of ‘fruitful vales, and villages / Half-hid in tufted orchards’ is a picturesque image of man’s Edenic home, but also a reminder of ‘the fruit / Of that forbidden tree’ and the ‘effects which [man’s] original crime has wrought’ (xi. 424)<sup>83</sup>

He also adds that the poem’s ‘specific visual and verbal details worked in a contrary direction as reminders of man’s fall and the realities of the present world’.<sup>84</sup> Roe also notes the similarity between *Lewesdon Hill* and ‘Tintern Abbey’ with regard to humanity’s fall:

The ‘tufted orchards’, like the ‘orchard-tufts’ in ‘Tintern Abbey’, punningly signify more than picturesque ‘richness and beauty’. In both poems the orchard is a token of man’s fallen nature, and of his post-lapsarian existence as a mortal being subject to history.<sup>85</sup>

This ‘being subject to history’ ultimately demythologises both poems and aligns them to an empiricist aesthetic that sees importance in representations of the actual within a humanistic context.

Another influence on Wordsworth was that of Berkeley. In my view, he is indebted to Berkeley more than he is to Locke because his views on language are in conflict with certain statements made by Locke concerning the nature of language.<sup>86</sup> Locke, stresses the generalities inherent in language:

All things that exist being particulars, it may perhaps be thought reasonable that words, which ought to be conformed to things, should be so too, I mean in their signification: but yet we find quite the contrary. The far greatest part of words that make all languages are general terms; which has not been the effect of neglect or chance, but of reason and necessity.<sup>87</sup>

In *Wordsworth and the Empirical Dilemma*, Regina Hewitt says that, ‘Berkeley believed that Locke was mistaken in construing words as representative of abstract general ideas [...]’.<sup>88</sup> She continues:

To Berkeley, Locke’s theory implied that abstract words and ideas exist independently of the particulars from which they have been derived. They became barriers between the perceiver and his perceptions of particular things.<sup>89</sup>

Wordsworth demonstrates this Berkeleyan influence in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* when he says that there should be ‘no object standing between the Poet and the image of things’.<sup>90</sup> Confusingly, he uses the word “object” differently from his customary use of it to denote material phenomena. In this instance it is used to denote language while the word “things” is used to denote phenomena. Therefore, from this it is clear that Wordsworth tends towards Berkeley than he does to Locke.

In *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, Berkeley denies abstract words:

Suppose a geometrician is demonstrating the method of cutting a line in two equal parts. He draws, for instance, a black line of an inch in length: this, which in itself is a particular line, is nevertheless with regard to its signification general, since, as it is there used, it represents all particular lines whatsoever, for that which is demonstrated of it is demonstrated of all lines [...]. And, as that *particular* line becomes general by being made a sign, so the *name* “line”, which taken absolutely is particular, by being a sign is made general. And as the former owes its generality not to its being the sign of an abstract or general line, but of all particular right lines that may possibly exist, so the latter must be thought to derive its generality from the same cause, namely, the various particular lines which it indifferently denotes.<sup>91</sup>

Of this passage Hewitt says, ‘By bringing general words and ideas closer to their particular origins, Berkeley took a step towards reintegrating the perceiver with his environment’.<sup>92</sup> This is precisely what Wordsworth was attempting to do with his poetry. Moreover, Berkeley, according to Rader,

maintained that the vivid qualitative features of the natural world are genuinely real—much more real than Newton’s atoms. One of the Berkelian doctrines that inspired Coleridge and that may have impressed Wordsworth was the notion that we “*see* God” in the same way that we “*see* man”; that is to say, by means of sense data (misleadingly called “ideas” in Berkeley’s terminology).<sup>93</sup>

Rader quotes the following from Berkeley's *Principles of Human Knowledge*:

It is plain that we do not see a man—if by *man* is meant that which lives, moves, perceives, and thinks as we do—but only such a certain collocation of ideas as directs us to think there is a distinct principle of thought and motion, like to ourselves, accompanying and represented by it. And after the same manner we see God: all the difference is that, whereas some one finite and narrow assemblage of ideas denotes a particular human mind, whithersoever we direct our view, we do at all times see manifest tokens of the Divinity: everything we can see, hear, feel, or otherwise perceive by Sense; being a sign or effect of the power of God; as in our perception of those very motions which are produced by men.<sup>94</sup>

Rader says, ‘This conception of sense data as “the divine visual language” was elaborated in Berkeley’s *Alciphron*, a copy of which Wordsworth owned’.<sup>95</sup> He links this concept to a similar conception in a passage from Coleridge’s ‘Frost at Midnight’, saying that ‘the sense of sacredness, which had traditionally been associated with the supernatural, has become attached to Nature itself’.<sup>96</sup> Adding pertinently, and with a quotation from Book XI of *The Prelude*, Rader says:

The essence of the Wordsworthian revolution is precisely this transfer of the “numinous” from the remote heavenly sphere to ‘The very world / Of all of us—the place where, in the end, / We find our happiness, or not at all!’<sup>97</sup>

Rader sees Berkeley as ‘combing a sensationalist theory of knowledge with imminent theism’ that may have ‘contributed substantially to Wordsworth’s religion of nature’.<sup>98</sup>

In summary, we have seen how Wordsworth’s main poetic aesthetic was influenced by Hartley’s associationist theory, and that this theory appealed to Wordsworth because of his being temperamentally more inclined towards sensory perception than to rational principles. We learned how Hartley’s ideas converged with Wordsworth’s belief in nature as a moral tutor, and how this is manifested in *The Prelude* and *The Excursion*. We described how Burke’s concept of “the Sublime” was influential on Wordsworth’s conceptualisation of the “character” of nature’s morality. We considered how Wordsworth is inconsistent in his views regarding the passivity of the human mind. Additionally, we looked at how he uses his empiricism to invest his poetry with humanistic concerns. Finally, we saw how Berkeley was more of an influence to him than Locke was.

<sup>1</sup> Melvin Rader sees the range of philosophers influential to Wordsworth as comprising of Newton, Locke, Berkeley, Hartley, Shaftsbury, Rousseau, Spinoza, Kant, and Plato. See *Wordsworth: A Philosophical Approach*, pp.39-71.

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *The Age of Enlightenment* (New York: The New American Library, 1956), p.15.

<sup>3</sup> Berlin, p.15.

<sup>4</sup> J. P. Ward, *Wordsworth's Language of Men* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1984), p.20.

<sup>5</sup> *Leviathan* by Thomas Hobbes, ed. by C. B. Macpherson (London: Penguin, 1980), p.102.

<sup>6</sup> *Leviathan*, ed. Macpherson, p.110.

<sup>7</sup> Regina Hewitt, *Wordsworth and the Empirical Dilemma* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), p.9.

<sup>8</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by A. C. Fraser, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891), pp.121-22, II, i, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Locke, p.160, III, xi, 23.

<sup>10</sup> Keith G. Thomas, *Wordsworth and Philosophy: Transcendentalism in Poetry* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989), p.15.

<sup>11</sup> Melvin Rader, *Wordsworth: A Philosophical Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p.40.

<sup>12</sup> Rader, p.40.

<sup>13</sup> Rader, p.40.

<sup>14</sup> H. W. Piper, *The Active Universe* (London: The Althone Press, 1962), p.60.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas, p.15.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas, p.15.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas, p.15.

<sup>18</sup> *The Prelude*, Book III, lines 74-75 in *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by T. Hutchinson and E. de Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), Wordsworth Editions 1994, p.650.

<sup>19</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.650.

<sup>20</sup> Graham Hough, *The Romantic Poets*, 3rd edn (London: Hutchinson, 1953), p.31.

<sup>21</sup> Hough, p.31.

<sup>22</sup> Nicholas Roe lists Wordsworth's London circle at this time as including: William Godwin, Thomas Holcroft, William Friend, George Dyer, John Tweddell, and Felix Vaughan. See *The Politics of Nature: Wordsworth and Some Contemporaries*, p.106.

<sup>23</sup> Piper, p.60.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas, p.16.

<sup>25</sup> A concise formulation of Hartley's theory of association is given by Arthur Beatty which is quoted by Rader: 'The Hartleian psychology had noted that the mind is a developing organism marked by three principal stages of progress: (1) sensations derived directly from objects; (2) simple ideas, derived from sensations; and (3) complex ideas, or intellectual ideas, derived from simpler ideas, under the power of association'. See *Wordsworth: A philosophical Approach*, p.81.

<sup>26</sup> Introduction, *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. by R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones (London: Methuin, 1963), p.xxxiii.

<sup>27</sup> Introduction, ed. Brett and Jones, pp.xxxiii-xxxiv.

<sup>28</sup> Locke would call these complex mental patterns, "complex ideas". For Locke, complex ideas are produced by combining "simple ideas" (these latter being derived entirely from sense impressions). Locke does allow knowledge to be acquired through reasoning but the mental operations that enable this are ultimately derived from experience.

<sup>29</sup> Rader, p.10.

<sup>30</sup> Rader, p.10.

<sup>31</sup> W. Wallace, 'The Vibrating Nerve Impulse in Newton, Willis and Gassendi: First Steps in a Mechanical Theory of Communication', *Brain and Cognition*, 51 (2003), 66-94 (p.66).

<sup>32</sup> David Hartley, *Observations of Man: His Frame, His Duty, His Expectations*, 2 vols (New York:

Delmar, 1976), I, p.21.

<sup>33</sup> Hartley, I, pp.21-22.

<sup>34</sup> Ian Wylie, *Young Coleridge and the Philosophers of Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p.29.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Wylie, p.30.

<sup>36</sup> Wylie, p.30.

<sup>37</sup> Hartley, I, p.114.

<sup>38</sup> Hartley, I, p.383.

<sup>39</sup> Hartley, II, p.244

<sup>40</sup> Introduction, ed. Brett and Jones, p.xxxv.

<sup>41</sup> Introduction, ed. Brett and Jones, p.xxxiv. Roe observes a Hartleian influence on Coleridge's and his friend George Dyer. In 1795, both were coming to a belief in the "one life" of the universe, 'the beneficent power of which was mediated through nature to the human mind as a cause of moral good'. In a letter to Dyer Coleridge writes: 'The pleasures, which we receive from rural beauties are of little Consequence compared with the Moral Effect of these pleasures—beholding constantly the Best possible we at last become ourselves the best possible. In the country, all around us smile Good and Beauty'. See *The Politics of Nature: Wordsworth and Some Contemporaries*, p.30.

<sup>42</sup> Rader, p.10.

<sup>43</sup> Hough, p.48.

<sup>44</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.651.

<sup>45</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.758.

<sup>46</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.638.

<sup>47</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.650.

<sup>48</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.637.

<sup>49</sup> In a deleted line from *The Prelude* Wordsworth says, 'Two notions also have we from the first: / Of grandeur and of tenderness'. These are gendered characteristics (father/mother) and may already have been rooted by the "family". It could be argued here that he is reading prior associations established by the family (his father and mother) into Nature.

<sup>50</sup> Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), p.85.

<sup>51</sup> Mellor, pp. 85-86.

<sup>52</sup> Mellor, p. 86.

<sup>53</sup> Mellor, p. 86.

<sup>54</sup> Mellor, p. 86.

<sup>55</sup> Mellor, p. 89.

<sup>56</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.183.

<sup>57</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.186.

<sup>58</sup> Introduction, ed. Brett and Jones, p.xxxv.

<sup>59</sup> Introduction, ed. Brett and Jones, pp.xxxv-xxxvi.

<sup>60</sup> Introduction, ed. Brett and Jones, p.xxxv.

<sup>61</sup> Introduction, ed. Brett and Jones, p.xxxv.

<sup>62</sup> The Preface, *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. by R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones (London: Methuin, 1963), pp. 240-41.

<sup>63</sup> Paul Hamilton says, 'The "Prefaces" do contain outright contradictions and competing arguments'. See *Coleridge's Poetics*, p.146.

<sup>64</sup> Preface, ed. Brett and Jones, p.252.

<sup>65</sup> Preface, ed. Brett and Jones, p.253.

<sup>66</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.646.

<sup>67</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.207.

<sup>68</sup> Quoted in Rader, p.27.

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Rader, p.27.

<sup>70</sup> Quoted in Rader, p.27.

<sup>71</sup> Rader, pp.28-29.

<sup>72</sup> Joel Pace, 'Emotion and Cognition in *The Prelude*', *Romanticism On the Net*, 1 (February 1996) <<http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/1996/v/n1/005707ar.html>>[accessed 22 March 2005] (para. 3 of 13).

<sup>73</sup> Joel Pace, 'Emotion and Cognition in *The Prelude*', *Romanticism On the Net*, 1 (February 1996) <<http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/1996/v/n1/005707ar.html>>[accessed 22 March 2005] (para. 3 of 13).

<sup>74</sup> Joel Pace, 'Emotion and Cognition in *The Prelude*', *Romanticism On the Net*, 1 (February 1996) <<http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/1996/v/n1/005707ar.html>>[accessed 22 March 2005] (para. 4 of 13).

<sup>75</sup> Nicholas Roe, *The Politics of Nature: Wordsworth and Some Contemporaries* (London: Macmillan, 1992), p.120.

<sup>76</sup> Roe, p.120.

<sup>77</sup> Roe, pp.120-21.

<sup>78</sup> Roe, p.121.

<sup>79</sup> Roe, p.121.

<sup>80</sup> Roe, p.121.

<sup>81</sup> Roe, p.121.

<sup>82</sup> Roe, p.122.

<sup>83</sup> Roe, p.122.

<sup>84</sup> Roe, p.123.

<sup>85</sup> Roe, p.122.

<sup>86</sup> However, I acknowledge Rader's observation of the influence of Locke in Wordsworth's 'The Vale of Esthwaite' and 'An Evening Walk' where Wordsworth 'uses Locke's famous metaphor of the *tabula rasa*, or mental tablet, on which sensation writes impressions'. See *Wordsworth: A Philosophical Approach*, p.48.

<sup>87</sup> Locke, II, 14.

<sup>88</sup> Hewitt, p.7.

<sup>89</sup> Hewitt, pp.7-8.

<sup>90</sup> Preface, ed. Brett and Jones, p.252. Rader says that whether Wordsworth 'ever carefully studied Berkeley's works at first hand is immaterial since Coleridge must have conveyed their import to him in conversation'. See *Wordsworth: A Philosophical Approach*, p.47.

<sup>91</sup> *The Works of George Berkeley*, ed. by A. C. Fraser, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901) p. 245

<sup>92</sup> Hewitt, p.8.

<sup>93</sup> Rader, p.46.

<sup>94</sup> Quoted in Rader, p.46.

<sup>95</sup> Rader, p.46.

<sup>96</sup> Rader, p.47.

<sup>97</sup> Rader, p.47.

<sup>98</sup> Rader, p.47.



## Chapter Three

### The Influence of Coleridge on Wordsworth

It is generally accepted that the chief intellectual influence on Wordsworth was that of Coleridge.<sup>1</sup> The case with Coleridge, though, is at least as complicated as that with Wordsworth in terms of the relationship between “empiricism” and “transcendentalism”. Indeed, it is scarcely acceptable to describe Wordsworth’s transcendentalism as influenced by Coleridge’s without conceding the obvious fact that Coleridge himself became a transcendentalist poet and thinker, whose *Biographia Literaria* was partly intended to demonstrate the malign effect of the Locke tradition on poetry. Even so, that book is partly a work of self-correction. There is ample evidence of Coleridge’s immersion in empiricist philosophy in the 1790s, as well as in the kind of scientific enquiry that was thought to be congenial to that philosophy. The sway of Hartley, in particular, over his thoughts is prominently demonstrated by the choice of a name for his son.

However, even though he was reading Hartley (or attending lectures on science), he was also reading the Neoplatonists. Scholars such as Kathleen Wheeler emphasise the fact that the latter kind of influence was operative throughout the 1790s. From one point of view, it is not entirely clear how much of a separation between these apparently different influences Coleridge would have perceived at that time. One form of “natural supernaturalism” to be found in the Romantic period is that which makes it uncertain whether contemporary discoveries about electricity and magnetism are not really just the identification of what the Neoplatonists and other ancient thinkers had conceived in terms of the subtle materiality comprised in phrases such as “animal spirits”. Indeed, it could be claimed that Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* exploits just such an uncertainty. Certainly, Kelvin Everest, by contrast with Kathleen Wheeler, is able to claim that there is nothing in the ‘conversation poems’ that does not fit firmly with the Locke tradition.

However, the fact that there is disagreement about such questions is partly due to the ambiguity of the poems of the 1790s themselves, where, just as in Wordsworth, one finds a strong emphasis on the

modifying power of the mind. Consequently, the progress of the speaker's consciousness in 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison' is from a kind of egotistical blindness to his surroundings, caused by self-pity because he has not been able to go for a walk with his friends, to the pleased perception that the lime-tree bower in which he is trapped is itself beautiful. At the same time, the pleasant descriptions that convey the beauty of the natural world offer a kind of detailed word-painting that one can relate to the "empiricist" Coleridge. Nevertheless, the forms of Nature are of 'such hues / As clothe the Almighty Spirit'. In addition, while the formulation is consistent with Deism, it is also obviously Berkeleyan, and the implications of Berkeley's idealist development of empiricism are capable of being developed towards transcendentalism. This is indeed the direction in which Coleridge himself traveled, and in retrospect this is not surprising, since the poems of the 1790s are so expressive not only of the transforming power of the imagination, but also of its fundamental role in human experience. Coleridge was prepared for Kant and German philosophy before he came to them, and it is well known that he also mediates this influence to Wordsworth. Coleridge's empiricism is therefore as complex and perhaps in need of qualification as Wordsworth's is.

As is well known Coleridge introduced Wordsworth to the associationist psychology of David Hartley, and was partly responsible for the formulation of ideas presented in the 1798-1802 prefaces for *Lyrical Ballads*. Coleridge's vast reading had given him a mind capable of more range and philosophical eclecticism than that of Wordsworth. In addition, this eclecticism enabled Wordsworth to see that there was more to intellectual thought than the Godwinianism to which he was then rooted. Furthermore, because Coleridge's philosophy was 'infinitely richer in poetic suggestion than the rationalism of the revolutionary thinkers', it enabled Wordsworth to relinquish, to some extent, the stress of the moral crisis he was experiencing as a result of his time in France.<sup>2</sup> Of Coleridge's influence, I. A. Richards has said:

It is arguable that as to many modes of excellence—by finding the style which Wordsworth was to advocate in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, by uttering a good half of the thoughts in that and in Wordsworth's later prose, by designing Wordsworth's major poems for him, and by discovering the philosophic seas on which they float—Coleridge was Wordsworth's creator; or, since that is clearly too strong a word, that he first truly showed Wordsworth how to become

his own poetic self.<sup>3</sup>

Wordsworth's penchant for the philosophic as applied to poetry is almost certainly a legacy of Coleridge who said, 'No man was ever yet a great poet, without being at the same time a profound philosopher'.<sup>4</sup>

René Wellek has also acknowledged Coleridge's influence on Wordsworth:

We could easily match all the fundamental concepts of Wordsworth in Coleridge; probably their phrasing is due to the influence of Coleridge, who early was a student of the Cambridge Platonists and Berkeley.<sup>5</sup>

And so has Melvin Rader:

Coleridge abandoned necessitarianism, revised associationism and subordinated it to an intuitional psychology, embraced ideas of an idealistic and transcendentalist import, and changed from pantheism to immanent theism. Wordsworth attained, with Coleridge's assistance, to like convictions.<sup>6</sup>

Before his German visit Coleridge's exposure to philosophy had comprised mainly studies of Plato and the Neoplatonists; Christian mystics such as William Law; and the English divines; all mixed in with the philosophical ideas of Locke, Hume, Voltaire, Condillac and Hartley.<sup>7</sup> Much has been made of the Neoplatonist significance in *Religious Musings* to argue that Coleridge was mainly an idealist during the 1790s. But we must not forget that his main philosophical reading at the time the poem was written were works by Newton, Locke, Berkeley and Priestley.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, all of his substantial poems were written while he was under the influence of the empiricists.<sup>9</sup> These included 'The Eolian Harp', 'Kubla Khan', 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' and 'Christabel': all written before he deserted empiricist philosophy in 1801.<sup>10</sup> As *Religious Musings* was written before 1801 we, therefore, have to discount a significant Neoplatonist influence.

In *Coleridge's Secret Ministry* Kelvin Everest says of *Religious Musings* that,

Coleridge shared the Unitarian wariness of mysticism and *Religious Musings* itself offers a good example of the rational, scientific 'proof' that a Hartley or Priestley provided of the millennium's ultimate inevitability.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, he goes on to say that,

Coleridge describes early in the poem the process by which the soul develops into a selfless

identity with God. [...] The account itself seems to derive in part from a neo-platonic source, but Coleridge was anxious to correct this impression in 1797.<sup>12</sup>

He then quotes the following extract from the 1797 text of the poem:

Lovely was the death  
Of Him whose life was love! Holy with power  
He on the thought-benighted Sceptic beamed  
Manifest Godhead, melting into day  
What floating mists of dark idolatry  
Broke and misshaped the omnipresent Sire:  
And first by Fear uncharmed the drowsed Soul.  
Till of its nobler nature it 'gan feel  
Dim recollections; and thence soared to Hope,  
Strong to believe whate'er of mystic good  
The Eternal dooms for His immortal sons.  
From Hope and firmer Faith to perfect Love  
Attracted and absorbed: and cantered there  
God only to behold, and know, and feel,  
Till by exclusive consciousness of God  
All self-annihilated it shall make  
God its Identity: God all in all!  
We and our Father one!<sup>13</sup>

(28-45)

He then quotes Coleridge's footnote to line 43 of the poem in support of the idea that Coleridge was reluctant to be associated with mystical beliefs:

See this *demonstrated* by Hartley, vol. I, p.114, and vol. 2. p.329. See it likewise proved, and freed from the charge of Mysticism, by Pistorius in his Notes and Additions to part second of Hartley on Man, Addition the 18th, the 653rd page of the third volume of Hartley, Octavo Edition.<sup>14</sup>

On his return in 1799 after ten months of study in Germany, Coleridge's aim was to 'make poetry an instrument of metaphysical research'.<sup>15</sup> However, his mystical idealism is more prominent in theories that he formulated after 1800. As Norman Fruman says in his biography of Coleridge, *The Damaged Archangel*:

In 1796 the 'illustrious sage' was still 'the most unintelligible Emanuel Kant'. It was not until at least 1801, well after his return from Germany, that Coleridge began a thorough study of Kant.<sup>16</sup>

What primarily motivated and informed his poetic ideas during the 1790s was the empiricism of Hartley.<sup>17</sup>

Coleridge's introduction of Hartley's theory of associationism to Wordsworth can be considered as Coleridge's main influence upon Wordsworth's approach to poetry. Rader acknowledges this:

In his Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) he spoke of the effect of the association of ideas in establishing firm habits of mind: 'By obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits' the poet is bound to 'describe objects, and utter sentiments, of such a nature, and in such connection with each other, that the understanding of the reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections strengthened and purified.'<sup>18</sup>

Coleridge, himself, was deeply influenced by Hartley. Dorothy M. Emmet in her essay 'Coleridge on the Growth of the Mind' says that, 'There was a stage in Coleridge's development when Hartley was his mentor, suggesting a way of trying to understand the working of the mind'.<sup>19</sup> She quotes the following lines dedicated to Hartley from *Religious Musings*:

he of mortal kind  
Wisest, he first who marked the ideal tribes  
Up the fine fibres through the sentient brain.<sup>20</sup>

(368-70)

She then points out that these lines refer to Hartley's notion of a physiological process causally linking mind and matter: 'Note "ideal tribes" for nervous currents conveying sensations; "ideas" were held to be somehow derivative of these'.<sup>21</sup> She then explains why Coleridge was so enthralled with this aspect of Hartley:

Coleridge had an active interest all through his life in physiology and chemistry; he was fascinated as a schoolboy in his brother Luke's medical studies; he kept this interest at Cambridge, and followed it more thoroughly when he went to Göttingen; he kept up a friendship and correspondence with Sir Humphrey Davy, and took interest in his experiments on respiration and gases. So it is quite untrue to think that he swam off into speculative philosophy, and had no interest in the scientific and experimental study of mind and body.<sup>22</sup>

Any reservations Coleridge had about Hartley's ideas were not to do with their being too empiricist but, as Emmet says, their being not empiricist *enough*: 'His quarrel with the Hartleian sensationalist theory of the compounding of ideas was not that it was empirical but that it was untrue to experience'.<sup>23</sup> She quotes him as saying in *Anima Poetae*:

How opposite to nature, and to the fact to talk of the ‘one moment’ of Hume, of our whole being an aggregate of successive single sensations! Who ever felt a single sensation? Is not every one at the same moment conscious that there co-exist a thousand others, a darker shade or less light, even as when I fix my attention on a white house or a grey bare hill or rather long ridge that runs out of sight each way.<sup>24</sup>

Coleridge is saying that the associationist idea that the incremental accumulation of sensations affects conscious apprehension of the physical world is not, in fact, the true way that this apprehension occurs. Rather the objects of sensation are simultaneously apparent to the organs of perception as a gestalt. Therefore, to Coleridge, the weakness in Hartley’s associationism is that it is not based on an accurate observation of the perceptual process. Emmet notes that,

Coleridge was seeing the limitations of this [Hartley’s theory] when it was the fashionable philosophy in this country. And he was doing so not because he had imbibed speculative notions from Germany, but because it was untrue to what he discovered in his own experience.<sup>25</sup>

The misconception that Coleridge was indifferent to the physical world is partly the result of projecting backwards onto his 1790s incarnation his later Kantian influenced theories. Because of this assumption, it is considered reasonable that Coleridge’s influence upon Wordsworth (since they were both close collaborators on *Lyrical Ballads*) must necessarily be of a Kantian nature.

Of Coleridge’s eagerness to engage with the physical world Trevor Levere, in *Poetry Realized in Nature*, writes:

Coleridge was a brilliant observer of the minutiae of nature. He perceived and recorded details, while seeking to comprehend their significance through their interrelations within the web of nature.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, in *Coleridge*, Humphrey House says that by under emphasising Coleridge’s regard for the external world,

we run the risk of diverting attention from some of his most characteristic strengths as a writer—from his power of detailed poetic description of objects in nature; from his power of attuning moods of emotion to landscape and movements of weather; of using the shapes and shifts and colours of nature as symbols of emotional and mental states. Even his critical idealism, whether expressed in poems or in his more technical philosophy, is grounded in a minute analysis of the phenomena of sense.<sup>27</sup>

He then says that ‘one is surprised over and over again by the combination of delicacy and strength with which Coleridge can handle visual detail in his poems’.<sup>28</sup> House then mentions how this attention to detail in ‘Frost at Midnight’ achieves an expressionistic affect:

In the poem ‘Frost at Midnight’ [...] several different kinds of experience are given outwardly in detail and are then drawn in to a centre, first in the room and then in the consciousness. And by this means we are given an extraordinary living impression of the whole personality, together with its context; of the mind projected outwards into the detail and then contracting onto itself so that the context is back-coloured by the prevailing emotion.<sup>29</sup>

Although firmly grounded upon empiricist principles, this ability of Coleridge to transform basic sensual data into something more than their crude significance is a skill that Coleridge may have failed to impress upon Wordsworth. Via an examination of two of Dorothy Wordsworth’s descriptive journal entries and their influence upon Coleridge’s poem ‘Christabel’ (written three months after the entries were made), House further demonstrates the transformative power that Coleridge frequently utilised.<sup>30</sup> He quotes the following entry from Dorothy’s Journal dated 25 January 1798: ‘The sky spread over with one continuous cloud, whitened by the light of the moon [...]’.<sup>31</sup> Then the entry for 31 January 1798: ‘When we left home the moon immensely large, the sky scattered over with clouds. These soon closed in, contracting the dimensions of the moon without concealing her’.<sup>32</sup> Then he quotes the following lines from the Gutch Memorandum Book:

Behind the thin  
Grey cloud that covered but not hid the sky  
The round full moon looked small.<sup>33</sup>

Then these lines from Part I of ‘Christabel’:

Is the night chilly and dark?  
The night is chilly, but not dark.  
The thin grey cloud is spread on high,  
It covers but not hides the sky.  
The moon is behind, and at the full;  
And yet she looks both small and dull.<sup>34</sup>

(I, 14-19)

House points out that although Coleridge has appropriated Dorothy's observation and transferred it into his poem he has in the process,

very much modified his own first verse draft in the Gutch book. Especially by adding the moon's dullness [...] he has increased the mysteriousness and vagueness of the midnight light.<sup>35</sup>

This element in Coleridge's treatment of sensual data should not allow us to forget that this transformative power stands ultimately upon a firm conviction in the importance of physical objects in nature; the perception of which Coleridge still regards as valuable. Without such an empiricist conviction, it would be difficult for him to have utilised the raw materials of experience to achieve the affect that he has in these lines from 'Christabel'.

That he was as much an empiricist as Wordsworth during this period is indicated by his flattering regard for Wordsworth's "greatness" in letters to friends. In a letter to Robert Southey dated 17 July 1797 he writes: 'Wordsworth is a very great man—the only man, to whom *at all times & in all modes of excellence* I feel myself inferior'.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, after knowing Wordsworth just over a year he says in a letter to John Prior Estlin on 18 May 1798: 'My admiration, I might say, my awe of his intellectual powers has increased even to this hour'.<sup>37</sup> In addition, on December 19 1800 he writes to Francis Wrangham, saying of Wordsworth: 'He is a great, a true Poet—I am only a kind of a Metaphysician'.<sup>38</sup> It is unlikely that Coleridge would have enthusiastically praised Wordsworth in this way if he seriously disagreed with Wordsworth's empiricist poetic aesthetic. Of Coleridge's empiricism House writes: 'He is far more alert and sensitive to the modes in which sense-experience conditions the life of the mind than most technical philosophers',<sup>39</sup> and: 'The more one reads Coleridge's descriptions and dwells on them, the less easy it is to be convinced that he ever needed Dorothy Wordsworth as his tutor in seeing'.<sup>40</sup> Along with:

The selections from the Note-Books given in *Anima Poetae*, and even in *Inquiring Spirit*, do not fairly represent the frequency of such entries as this:

Black round Ink-spots from 5 to 18 in the decaying Leaf of the Sycamore.<sup>41</sup>

This empiricism seems somewhat remote from the more customary idea we have of Coleridge as a



“visionary mystic”. Furthermore, his interest in science was also of some importance to his poetry. In *Religious Musings*, he mentions approvingly such notable scientific figures as Newton, Hartley and Priestly.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, his social circle consisted of either scientists or those interested in it such as Thomas Beddoes who made his library of scientific books available to Coleridge.<sup>43</sup> In addition, Levere quotes him as saying: ‘Without natural philosophy and without the sciences which led to the knowledge of objects without us, man himself would not be man’,<sup>44</sup> adding that for Coleridge,

science, through its foundation in facts and its informing structure of ideas and laws, related mind to nature, the ideal of the real [...]. Science, in short, was fundamental in Coleridge’s thought.<sup>45</sup>

Given these particulars his empiricism should therefore not surprise us. Nor should it be surprising that he may have held a biological conception of mind.

In support of this possibility, Alan Richardson cites cognitive psychologist Allan Paivo’s observation that Coleridge’s narrative of ‘Kubla Khan’ reveals, ‘its intuitive glimpse into the fundamental “duality” that empirical research would later establish between the visual systems, supporting two distinct “modes of thought”’.<sup>46</sup> For Richardson,

what Coleridge describes in the introductory notice to *Kubla Khan* might be seen as the most spectacular psychophysiological experiment of his career, [...] And when read against the background of Coleridge’s fraught relation to contemporary biological accounts of mind, the introductory note becomes a still more remarkable document than before. [...] Moreover [it gives] aid and comfort to the materialist adversary. [And] all but guaranteed that *Kubla Khan* would become an object lesson for the biological study of psychology and an irresistible subject for the psychological study of literature.<sup>47</sup>

Kenneth Burke in *Language of Symbols* comes close to suggesting that ‘Kubla Khan’ is a mimesis of the thinking process in that it is,

in effect a poeticized psychology detailing not what the reader is to see [as in Wordsworth] but what *mental* states he is thus empathically and sympathetically *imitating* as he reads.<sup>48</sup>

Because of this, the thinking process itself has become objectified in an attempt to render it as tangible to sense experience as are the other objects in nature.

The “biological” aspect of Coleridge’s poetry (i.e. its formal structure mirroring the biological rhythms of the body) is articulated by Albert Gérard in his essay, ‘The Systolic Rhythm: The Structure of Coleridge’s Conversation Poems’. Gérard notes that ‘The Eolian Harp’, ‘Frost at Midnight’, ‘Fears in Solitude’ and ‘Reflections of having left a Place of Retirement’ express a systolic rhythm: a process of contraction and expansion.<sup>49</sup> Of ‘The Eolian Harp’ he says:

We can observe a heartbeat rhythm of systole and diastole, contraction and expansion, in which the poet’s attention is wandering to and fro between his concrete, immediate experience and the wide and many-faceted world of the non-self [nature, God, etc] [...] the self to which the poet finally turns back is not the same self from which he had started: it has been enriched, heightened and uplifted by the various inner and outer experiences to which it has submitted and from which it now emerges with what the poet considers to be a deeper and more accurate knowledge of the universe and of his place in it.<sup>50</sup>

The most obvious instance of this is in ‘This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison’ where we see the poet’s self-consciousness directed outwards to contemplate his friends and their present activities. We can see this in action in the opening lines that could be seen as the first expansion:

Well, they are gone, and here must I remain,  
 This lime-tree bower my prison! I have lost  
 Beauties and feelings, such as would have been  
 Most sweet to my remembrance even when age  
 Had dimm’d mine eyes to blindness! They, meanwhile,  
 Friends, whom I never more may meet again,  
 On springy heath, along the hill-top edge,  
 Wander in gladness, and wind down, perchance,  
 To that still roaring dell, of which I told<sup>51</sup>

(1-9)

From this overview, there is a contraction as the poet returns his focus to the landscape where he over describes it in the following manner:

The roaring dell, o’erwooded, narrow, deep,  
 And only speckled by the mid-day sun;  
 Where its slim trunk the ash from rock to rock  
 Flings arching like a bridge;—that branchless ash,  
 Unsun’d and damp, whose few poor yellow leaves  
 Ne’er tremble in the gale, yet tremble still,  
 Fann’d by the water-fall!<sup>52</sup>

(10-16)

Again, we have an expansion:

Now, my friends emerge  
 Beneath the wide wide Heaven—and view again  
 The many-steepled tract magnificent  
 Of hilly fields and meadows, and the sea,  
 With some fair bark, perhaps, whose sails light up  
 The slip of smooth clear blue betwixt two Isles  
 Of purple shadow!<sup>53</sup>

(20-26)

In a letter to Thomas Poole on 16 October 1797, Coleridge made the following comment that is often brought into play to argue against Coleridge being an empiricist:

My mind had been habituated *to the vast* [and] I never regarded *my senses* in any way as the criteria of my belief. I regulated all my creeds by my conceptions not by my *sight*.<sup>54</sup>

This statement seems at odds with what Coleridge has written elsewhere—and especially from the evidence for his empiricism that we find in his conversation poems. In ‘The Blossoming of the Solitary Date-Tree’ we can see that Coleridge, far from being ‘habituated to the vast’, is immersed in the commonplace panorama of nature with its: ‘Fields, forests, ancient mountains, ocean, sky’. Moreover, the importance of sensual impression is emphasised with: ‘The finer the sense for the beautiful and the lovely, and the fairer and lovelier the object presented to the sense; the more exquisite the individual’s capacity of joy’. This pleasure with sensual impression is further expressed in a letter to his brother, George, dated 10 March 1798 he writes:

I love fields & woods & mounta[ins] with almost a visionary fondness—and because I have found benevolence & quietness growing within me as that fondness [has] increased, therefore I should wish to be the means of implanting it in others.<sup>55</sup>

We see, then, that Coleridge’s remark: ‘I never regarded my senses in any way as the criteria of my belief’ does not sit too comfortably with his attitude in this poem. Of the sentence quoted above from the letter to Poole, House (quoting from ‘Solitary Date-Tree’) says:

That sentence has been quoted over and over again as if it were the most fitting and almost adequate introduction to the study of Coleridge's mind and habits of vision; but it leads people to forget that he also wrote that one of his greatest qualities was 'delight in little things', the kind of delight which belonged to 'the buoyant child surviving in the man'.<sup>56</sup>

Delighting in 'little things' is certainly something that was not on Coleridge's mind when he wrote the following, also from the letter to Poole:

Those who have been led to the same truths step by step thro' the constant testimony of the senses, seem to me to want a sense which I possess—They contemplate nothing but *parts*—and all *parts* are necessarily little—and the Universe to them is but a mass of *little things*.<sup>57</sup>

Richardson notes further ambivalences in Coleridge's thinking, this time concerning his attitude towards the mechanistic model of mind as opposed to the more "organic" conception: 'Materialist, naturalistic, and embodied notions of the psyche would continue to play an ambiguous role in Coleridge's thinking throughout his career'.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, this tension is evident, as Richardson further notes, in Coleridge's attitude, in 1796, towards Erasmus Darwin, whom he mocks for his atheism; while, as John Beer argues, Coleridge drew heavily on Darwin's *Zoonomia*, during this same period, for insights into the active conception of mind.<sup>59</sup>

How can these various divergent elements in our reading of Coleridge be reconciled? With regard to Coleridge appearing enthralled with material phenomena on the one hand, and almost shunning them on the other, one suggestion by J. A. Appleyard is interesting. He begins by acknowledging that Coleridge's earliest philosophical theories were derived from associationist psychology and that even after he rejected it, 'the clarification of the relationship of external nature to mind and imagination was one of the central problems of his philosophy'.<sup>60</sup> He suggests that the 'notion of objectivity involved here' may depend upon the understanding of the word "empirical" as it applies to Coleridge.<sup>61</sup> He regards Coleridge as probably rejecting its positivist implications but sees no reason why his experiences (mental, spiritual and physical) could not similarly be labelled "empirical"—and, therefore, "objective".<sup>62</sup> This approach does harmonise the various empiricist and idealist strands co-existing in Coleridge's thought. As Appleyard says:

This gap between an insight capable of grasping a “vast” truth or an ineffable feeling and, on the other hand, the sense knowledge of the “rationally educated” which contemplates only parts or little things is basic to Coleridge’s thought.<sup>63</sup>

However, a more comprehensive explanation for the contradictions in Coleridge’s thought has been posited by Seamus Perry in *Coleridge and the Uses of Division*. Perry’s thesis is that,

Coleridge’s thought is best understood, not as the solution to a *problem*, but as the experience and exploration of a *muddle*. That sounds derogatory, but I don’t mean it to be: in fact, I mean to be quite laudatory. For it is arguable that certain kinds of muddle are entirely respectable; and the proper task of criticism, in that case, would not be an attempt at the *solution* of the muddle (for that would be to mistake it for a problem), but rather a description of the particular brand of indecision that constitutes it.<sup>64</sup>

He says Coleridge’s practice of collecting incongruent fragments of truth scattered through systems,

means that philosophical positions ostensibly passed through are not, in practice, discarded (as someone learning the truth about oxidation would properly jettison the phlogiston theory); typically they are kept current in his thinking, running in incongruous, if notionally inferior, parallel to the new line. But the attractions of the old theory, which were, after all, perfectly genuine, are always liable to reassert themselves; and so comes about the kind of muddlesome doubleness I am taking about.<sup>65</sup>

Consequently, in much of Coleridge’s writing ‘you find not simply a concept at work, but a concept and its alternative or counter-concept.’<sup>66</sup> Perry sees this pluralism as an expression of Coleridge’s belief that humans have a spiritual instinct to seek unity.<sup>67</sup> Perry notes that,

Coleridge’s thinking habitually seeks to correct into oneness the apparently incorrigible plurality continually rediscovered in the sharpness of his senses; while [...] in the teeth of his commitment to universality and oneness, diversity and particularity continue to exert their interest—so that, in practice, the unity which he proclaims so vociferously is typically submerged by the protracted exhibition of the contradictory elements he is meant to be bringing together. This is not just an oblique way of embracing heterogeneity after all; it is trying to have things both ways.<sup>68</sup>

For Perry, this is not as negative as it may appear:

‘Coleridge keeps hold, so to speak, of both handles,’ as Wellek notices with irritation, but which I notice to appreciate: ‘the unity and the things unified, the whole and the parts.’ [...] To compare small things with great, my attitude towards Wellek on Coleridge is like Lewis’s towards Leavis on Milton: ‘He sees and hates the very same I see and love.’<sup>69</sup>

Perry’s analysis plausibly accounts for Coleridge’s philosophical inconsistencies.

Having looked at Coleridge's empiricism I would now like to look at his poetry in terms of its empirical elements. Everest observes that there is a continuation of the empiricism of nature poetry evident in Coleridge's verse:

We can turn back again to the preceding tradition of English nature poetry to place Coleridge's poetry as continuous with its past; for his achievement in the conversation poems gathers part of its impetus from the emerging direction of English nature poetry.<sup>70</sup>

Everest sees the conversation poems as articulating 'a certain form of consciousness' that evolved out of the "retirement tradition" present in late seventeenth-century verse.<sup>71</sup> Coleridge merely appropriated forms and conventions and then adapted them to his own poetic language.<sup>72</sup> This is evident in the conversation poems that are replete with 'the values he found in nature'.<sup>73</sup> Everest notes that a feature common to all the conversation poems is,

their constant readiness to marry a high pitch of feeling in response to nature, with an impulse to explain or account for the experience, or to articulate it in terms that appear philosophical.<sup>74</sup>

In addition, he notes that Coleridge is, 'at his best when he can test and measure the developing and always relative judgments of consciousness against its relationship with nature'.<sup>75</sup> Everest then points out the typical features of the conversation poems. These are their: 'private mode of address, the opposition of town and country, their heightening response to nature that culminates in philosophical generalisation'.<sup>76</sup> He says that these are also present in English poetry after the Civil War.<sup>77</sup>

House similarly acknowledges Coleridge's debt to the past, especially to Cowper:

In the conversation poems Coleridge is carrying on where Cowper left off. The autobiographical element is given a deeper psychological analysis and the thought about it carries into what is properly metaphysical poetry [...] everything has greater import; the imagery leaves Cowper's direct statement; the descriptive passages are more intricately and closely knit to their psychological affects; the description is more minute.<sup>78</sup>

In *Coleridge's Philosophy of Language*, James McKusick includes Bowles along with Cowper as contributing to Coleridge's "realism" where he (McKusick) cites the following from *Biographia Literaria*: 'Bowles and Cowper were, to the best of my knowledge, the first who combined natural thoughts with

natural diction'.<sup>79</sup> In addition, he notes Coleridge as saying with regard to the poetry of Pope that it was written in 'language the most fantastic and arbitrary'.<sup>80</sup> Of this McKusick says:

All of Coleridge's subsequent career, according to the account given in the *Biographia*, was conditioned by his initial preference for the "natural" language of Bowles over the "arbitrary" language of Pope.<sup>81</sup>

Furthermore, concerning Coleridge's expressed disapproval (in a 1796 article for the *Watchman*) of the linguistic inventiveness of a passage in Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, when compared to the writing style of Thomas Beddoes in *The History of Isaac Jenkins*, McKusick writes: 'Coleridge has no use for the artificial sensibility of a writer like Sterne; only the unstudied descriptive style of a writer like Beddoes or Bowles meets his approval'.<sup>82</sup> In the same article Coleridge says that the perfect poetic style is that 'in which we think always of the *matter*, never the *manner*'.<sup>83</sup> In other words, he advocates content over form.

The influence of nature poetry could have been the result of an attempt by Coleridge to correct what he considered as stylistic faults in his own early poetry. One of these "faults" was the frequent use of personification that is in evidence in his poetry from 1786 to 1796. The following are some of the poems written during this period along with the personifications they contain:

- 'Genevieve' (1786)—Beauty.
- 'Dura Navis' (1787)—Fancy, Sorrow, Bliss, Terror, Wave, Vengeance.
- 'Sonnet to the Autumnal Moon' (1788)—Splendour, Night, Hope, Despair.
- 'Life' (1789)—Death.
- 'Monody on the Death of Chatterton' (1790)—Fame, Neglect, Rage, Woe, Liberty, Bliss.
- 'Sonnet on quitting School for College' (1791)—Fancy, Joy, Hope.
- 'On seeing a Youth affectionately welcomed by his Sister' (1792)—Death, Knowledge, Wit.
- 'Lines on an Autumnal Evening' (1793)—Fancy, Hope, Learning, Love, Peace, Quiet.
- 'The Sigh' (1794)—Hope.
- 'Lines Written at Shurton Bars' (1795)—Mirth, Fancy, Dread, Evening.
- 'To a Young Friend' (1796)—Pensiveness, Knowledge, Inspiration.

In *Coleridge: Early Visions*, Richard Holmes says that during this period,

there was a long struggle between the 'florid diction' and epigrammatic polish and personifications of many of his longer and more formal Odes, Effusions and Monodies; and the Bowles-like plain style, expressing emotion in run-on lines, musical alliteration, and bold monosyllabic statements of personal feeling.<sup>84</sup>

Holmes sees the Bowles-like plain style represented in those poems written between 1789 and 1794 as a ‘profound attack on eighteenth-century conventions’.<sup>85</sup> Of such poems, he cites ‘Sonnet to the Autumnal Moon’ and ‘Sonnet on quitting School for College’ as examples. While he is correct in noting that these poems primarily deal with Coleridge’s personal response to the universality of change and loss, thereby distinguishing them from the more impersonal aspects of eighteenth-century verse, it seems an overstatement to label them as constituting a ‘profound attack’ on those conventions. Thematic considerations aside, ‘Sonnet to the Autumnal Moon’ is almost weighed down with eighteenth-century hyperbole and personification such as: ‘Mild Splendour of the various-vested Night!’ and ‘Ah such is Hope! as changeful and as fair!’ Hardly anything better can be said for ‘Sonnet on quitting School for College’ with its: ‘FAREWELL parental scenes! A sad farewell!’ and ‘Adieu, adieu! Ye much-loved cloisters pale!’. After 1796, Coleridge used few, if any, personifications.

An additional “fault” was his lush poetic diction, which, during this period, is noticeably lacking in descriptive terms, as can be seen in ‘To the Evening Star’:

O first and fairest of the starry Choir,  
 O loveliest ‘mid the daughters of the night,  
 Must not the mind I love like thee inspire  
 Pure joy and calm Delight?<sup>86</sup>

(5-8)

The presence of these non-realistic and artificial devices, among others, is referred to in *Biographia Literaria* where he tells us that his first volume of poetry, *Poems on Various Subjects* (published in 1796), was criticised for its ‘obscurity, a general turgidness of diction, and a profusion of new coined double epithets’.<sup>87</sup> These aspects were criticised because they represented aesthetic values opposite to those favoured by the arbiters of poetic taste of the day. This aesthetic, as I have demonstrated, called for poetic language to be treated as transparent. Consequently, any attempted innovation such as the use of “new coined” double epithets or, for that matter, a turgid and obscure lexis, was bound to cause consternation. Because of such criticism, Coleridge was forced radically to modify his poetic approach: ‘In the after



editions, I pruned the double epithets with no sparing hand, and used my best efforts to tame the swell and glitter both of thought and diction'.<sup>88</sup> That his first volume of poems was published in 1796 and that his poetry from 1797 onwards contains none of the perceived faults I have mentioned, indicates that it was this critical reaction that was responsible for the sea change in his poetic style after 1796. If it were not for this transformation in Coleridge's poetry, he would have had little connection with nature poetry. Consequently, the modifications Coleridge made because of these criticisms brought him firmly into line with the predominant empiricist aesthetic of the period. This resulted in his poetry being not such a marked departure from that which preceded it after all.

He extended this criticism to his advice to friends who offered him samples of their own poetry for his comment. For instance, when giving Robert Southey advice on a sonnet Southey had written, Coleridge says that the phrase 'wild wind' should be changed to: 'That rustle to the sad wind moaning by' because "wild wind" is not a true description of 'the Autumnal Breeze that makes the trees rustle mournfully'. 'Wild wind', Coleridge says, 'applies to a storm'.<sup>89</sup> This newly found confidence in his poetic judgement is even brought into play when, upon receiving a batch of poetic works he requested—including poems by Bowles and Shakespeare—Coleridge comments favourably on Bowles's poems saying they are 'descriptive, tender, sublime' adding that the Shakespeare is 'sadly unequal to the rest'—presumably because Shakespeare's descriptive powers are wanting.<sup>90</sup>

Coleridge's empiricism, as worked out in his poetry and critical thought, is expressed well by William Empson in *Coleridge's Verse*, where he says that for Coleridge poetry had to be, 'spontaneous, interesting, and profound; an unexpected general truth, of universal concern [...] illustrated by a direct and urgent experience of the author'.<sup>91</sup> The formal aspects of the poem were to be similarly transparent leading to a prose-like register:

In my defence of the lines [of a poem] running into each other, instead of closing at the couplet, and of natural language, neither bookish, nor vulgar, neither redolent of the lamp, nor of the Kennel, such as *I will remember thee*; instead of the same thought tricked up in the rag-fair

finery of ‘Thy image on her wing / Before my Fancy’s eye shall MEMORY bring’.<sup>92</sup>

The phrase: ‘I will remember thee’ allows for a closure of meaning that is well suited to the imperative inherent in prose communication for transparency, whereas: ‘Thy image on her wing / Before my Fancy’s eye shall MEMORY bring’ inhibits hermeneutic closure and is therefore incompatible with prose communication. Such was Coleridge’s desire for clear and precise communication that, like Wordsworth, he argued for a direct causal connection between thought and language. In response to John Thelwall’s criticism that ‘Sonnet, Composed on a journey homeward; the author having received intelligence of the birth of a Son’ was obscure, he writes:

My first *Sonnet is obscure*; but you ought to distinguish between obscurity residing in the uncommonness of the thought, and that which proceeds from *thoughts unconnected & language not adapted to the experience of them*. When you *do* find out the meaning of my poetry, can you (in general, I mean) alter the language so as to make it more perspicacious—the thought remaining the same?<sup>93</sup>

Here language is offered as a tool to mimic thought. It cannot be independent of thought. The lexis must follow the thought. However, as I said in chapter two in relation to various ambiguities present in Wordsworth’s poetry, language is slippery despite the best attempts by a writer to accomplish concision to limit meaning. The following lines are from Coleridge’s unfinished poem ‘The Destiny of Nations’:

When love rose glittering, and his gorgeous wings  
Over the abyss fluttered with such glad noise,  
As what time after long and pestful claims,  
With slimy shapes and miscreated life  
Poisoning the vast Pacific, the fresh breeze  
Wakens the merchant-sail uprising<sup>94</sup>

We can infer from what Coleridge says of them that he, too, would not altogether disagree: ‘These are very fine lines, tho’ I say it [...]. But hang me, if I know or ever did know the meaning of them, tho’ my own composition’.<sup>95</sup> Holmes’s says of this statement: ‘For the first time he is suggesting that poetry may be written from somewhere outside conscious control’.<sup>96</sup> In terms of Coleridge’s poetic ideals, this would indicate something of a failure. Nevertheless, this is not a rare occurrence for him: ‘As to my own poetry I

do confess that it frequently both in thought & language deviates from “nature & simplicity”<sup>97</sup> From this it would seem that Coleridge’s poetic ideas have some sort of quantifiable criteria to inform them. However, as this brief discussion indicates, this is not so. Sometimes he is for clarity of expression, at others he is not. Holmes offers a possible reason for this confusion that sits well with the one Perry suggested above. Holmes says that Coleridge held the concept of ‘power in poetry arising from a combination of clarity and obscurity’.<sup>98</sup> In addition, he quotes the following entry from Coleridge’s Notebook kept when he was studying in Germany:

The elder Languages fitter for Poetry because they expressed only prominent ideas with clearness, others but darkly ... i.e. Feelings created by obscure ideas associate themselves with the one *clear* idea. When no criticism is pretended to, & the Mind in its simplicity gives itself up to a Poem as to a work of nature, Poetry gives most pleasure when only generally & not perfectly understood.<sup>99</sup>

Commenting on this Holmes says:

Coleridge was here reaching towards a complex idea of poetry that was more than mere youthful “intoxication”; it had to be both intelligible and mysterious, the proper subject of a critical, adult mind playing over it in detail.<sup>100</sup>

Being ‘intelligible and mysterious’ was also something Coleridge emphasised to Thelwell when discussing the ability of philosophical mysticism to produce intelligent poetry.<sup>101</sup> However, in practice Coleridge’s poetry for the most part demonstrates clarity over ambiguity.

I would like now to look at some of the ways in which Coleridge influenced Wordsworth. This is not an easy matter as they both influenced each other to such an extent that it is difficult to see where Wordsworth begins and Coleridge ends.<sup>102</sup> Certainly, it was to his friendship with Wordsworth that he ‘attributed his insight into the nature of imagination’.<sup>103</sup> By the summer of 1797 Wordsworth, ‘seems to have provided the example of self-possession and a sureness both in his philosophical principles and in his poetic craft that Coleridge [...], badly lacked’.<sup>104</sup> However there are certain areas where it is possible to discern strands of influence from Coleridge to Wordsworth. Gérard says that the following passage from Coleridge’s preface to his *Poems on Various Subjects* anticipate certain considerations that Wordsworth would elaborate on in

his preface to *Lyrical Ballads*:

The communicativeness of our nature leads us to describe our own sorrows; in the endeavour to describe them, intellectual activity is exerted; and by a benevolent law of our nature, from intellectual activity a pleasure results which is gradually associated and mingles as a corrective with the painful subject of the description.<sup>105</sup>

Gérard fails to mention what these “considerations” are, but one of them may have been Wordsworth’s “emotion recollected in tranquility”, as this passage seems to be navigating similar terrain.

That Coleridge had a considerable input in the formulation of the poetic ideas contained in the Preface of 1800 is clear in a letter he wrote to Robert Southey on the 29 July 1802:

Wordsworth’s Preface is half a child of my own Brain [...] & so arose out of Conversations, so frequent, that with few exceptions we could scarcely either of us perhaps positively say, which first started any particular Thought.<sup>106</sup>

And in an earlier letter to William Sotheby on the 13 July 1802 he writes:

I must set you right with regard to my perfect coincidence with his [Wordsworth’s] poetic Creed. It is most certain, that that Preface arose from the heads of our mutual Conversations [...] the first passages were indeed partly taken from notes of mine [...] for it was at first intended, that the Preface should be written by me.<sup>107</sup>

This is a striking claim to equal authorship of the ideas contained in the Preface. A further indication that Coleridge helped write the Preface is the setting of a precedent by Wordsworth for outside assistance in its composition. In her journal entry for 5 October 1800, Dorothy Wordsworth writes: ‘A delicious morning. Wm [William] and I were employed all the morning in writing an addition to the preface’.<sup>108</sup> In a letter (enclosed with a first draft of the Preface) to Joseph Cottle on 20 September of the same year Wordsworth writes: ‘I have again requested the assistance of a friend [Coleridge] who contributed largely to the first volume [of *Lyrical Ballads*]’.<sup>109</sup> It is strange that Wordsworth regards Coleridge’s contribution to the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads* as worthy of mention, as Coleridge contributed only four of the twenty-three poems to that edition. Could Wordsworth, when he says, ‘contributed largely’, be referring to some other sort of contribution other than poems? If so, it could only be that of inspiration or advice of some sort.

Herbert Read in *The True Voice of Feeling* supports this possibility:

It must always remain uncertain to what extent Wordsworth derived his ideas about the form of poetry from Coleridge. The moral force that Wordsworth exhibits in the Preface is obviously his own; his, too, is the historical criticism embodied in them—the references to classical and to Elizabethan poets. But when Wordsworth begins to write about ‘the primary laws of nature’, then he is either interpreting Hartley’s psychology, or expounding Coleridge’s. Phrases like ‘the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings’, ‘organic sensibility’, ‘influxes of feeling’, ‘passions and volitions’, are at any rate common to Coleridge and Wordsworth, and I cannot conceive that their origin was other than those German writings to which Coleridge alone had direct access.<sup>110</sup>

Holmes partially echoes this with an example of Coleridge’s participation with Wordsworth in the production of the Preface:

They had discussed a new, critical preface, and Coleridge’s Notebooks suggest he may have initiated Wordsworth’s famous line of argument concerning “emotion recollected in tranquility”.<sup>111</sup>

Holmes also gives us a glimpse of Wordsworth’s dependence upon Coleridge:

Wordsworth, from a position of apparent weakness, had ruthlessly come to dominate the terms of the collaboration. Having used Coleridge—even, one might think, having exploited him—as advisor and editor, drawing him up to the Lakes for that very purpose.<sup>112</sup>

That Wordsworth was willing to go to such circuitous lengths in order to gain Coleridge’s assistance indicates a need that is devoid of pride to such an extent that it leads one to suspect a poverty of fresh ideas. Pride was certainly missing when, as we have seen, he copied entries from his sister’s Journals to furnish his poetry with descriptive phrases. Furthermore, little creativity was required in his need to be physically present in nature to better describe what was before his eyes. Therefore, given such precedents, it is plausible that he related to Coleridge similarly.

Brett and Jones refer to Coleridge’s letter to his brother dated 10 March 1798 to show how close Coleridge and Wordsworth were in their thinking. In the letter, Coleridge describes his poetic purpose, which is, ‘to elevate the imagination & set the affections in right tune by the beauty of the inanimate impregnated, as with a living soul, by the presence of Life’.<sup>113</sup> In addition, Brett and Jones say of the following passage (quoted earlier),

I love fields & woods & mounta[ins] with almost a visionary fondness—and because I have

found benevolence & quietness growing within me as that fondness [has] increased, therefore I should wish to be the means of implanting it in others.<sup>114</sup>

that it reads ‘like a commentary upon, and, in places, is almost a paraphrase of *Tintern Abbey*’.<sup>115</sup>

Signs of another possible Coleridgean influence can also be gleaned from a letter Coleridge wrote to Thomas Poole on 19 January 1801 saying that promotional copies of *Lyrical Ballads* had been sent with covering letters to various dignitaries; adding that he had dictated all of them except for one addressed to Charles James Fox—which Wordsworth had written.<sup>116</sup> Enclosed with this letter to Poole was a copy of a letter to William Wilberforce composed by Coleridge as if he (Coleridge) were Wordsworth and signed in his (Wordsworth’s) name. In it Coleridge says:

When the material forms or intellectual ideas which should be employed to represent the internal state of feeling, are made to claim attention for their own sake, then commences [in literature] bombast and vicious refinements, an aversion to the common conversational language of our Countrymen.<sup>117</sup>

The letter then goes on essentially to rehearse the arguments set out in the Preface concerning poetic diction. What is striking is the letter’s similarity in tone and register to the Preface.<sup>118</sup>

When we look at Coleridge’s ideas concerning “philosophical language” and its importance to poetic composition we can see in even sharper relief his influence upon Wordsworth’s aesthetic. Wylie suggests that Coleridge’s interest in the relationship of nature and language may have its origin in Hartley’s theory of the origins of language.<sup>119</sup> Hartley thought that since speech was a necessary requirement for Adam and Eve to name the animals in Eden, God granted it them and from it language developed.<sup>120</sup> Initially, this language was monosyllabic and its usage was limited to referring to ‘visible Things’.<sup>121</sup> After the Fall, Hartley supposes that Adam and Eve ‘extended their Language to new Objects and Ideas’ and principally to those associated with pain.<sup>122</sup> For this the invention of new words was required.<sup>123</sup> Eventually, this language became corrupted as humans, according to Hartley, acquired names for evil things, which led to a greater propagation of self-interest. In response to this, God disrupted the construction of the Tower of Babel and in doing caused the confusion of tongues in order to halt the progress of further corruption to this

language and thereby preventing its dominance over mankind by it being the cause of false perceptions.<sup>124</sup>

These false perceptions were the result of the corrupted language having acquired the means to become ambiguous—a major departure from Adam’s original language, which was unequivocal.<sup>125</sup> By the eighteenth century, the expansion of knowledge had resulted, as Hartley saw it, in humanity having moved closer to an original state of pure knowledge. This being the case, it was necessary to go back to the original language of Adam, integrating the languages of the world in the process, to reinstate the purity of the original language.<sup>126</sup> This language would be a “philosophical one” ‘without any Deficiency, Superfluity, or Equivocation’.<sup>127</sup> McKusick notes that this “Adamic” language is analogous to Plato’s idea that an object’s name represents the object’s essence.<sup>128</sup> The idea that objects had essences was familiar to Coleridge from his reading of Plato’s *Cratylus*.<sup>129</sup> The dialogue between Hermogenes and Cratylus demonstrates the tension between words being envisioned as expressing the ‘inner nature of the things they designate’ and their being merely arbitrary signs.<sup>130</sup> In this dialogue the character of Cratylus,

represents the extreme naturalist position, according to which all names bear an intimate, though perhaps mystically obscure, connection with the things they designate.<sup>131</sup>

Coleridge and Wordsworth would most probably agree with this position.

A further aspect of Hartley’s theory that bears a relevance to Coleridge is that Hartley thought it possible that mental images if sufficiently vivid could be erroneously taken for sense impressions if the clarity was of a significant concentration.<sup>132</sup> Coleridge was undoubtedly taken by this possibility for he writes:

Ideas may become vivid & distinct, & the feelings accompanying them as vivid, as original Impressions—and this may finally make a man independent of his Senses. —one use of poetry.<sup>133</sup>

In addition, in *Biographia Literaria* he says that one of the two cardinal points of poetry is ‘a faithful adherence to the truth of nature’.<sup>134</sup> Moreover, driving home the point, Wylie says:

Poetry might create such powerful images inside the mind of the reader that ideas could replace sense impressions completely. Hence people would be led away from the false perceptions of nature [due to the Fall] to the true picture created by the poet’s words.<sup>135</sup>

Despite the underlying idealism intrinsic to this position, Coleridge is not gainsaying empiricism merely because it engages with phenomena and *ipso facto* is invalid, but rather because it is insufficient as a means to gaining a true description of reality.<sup>136</sup> Although this reality is beyond perception, and is a more perfect and purer facsimile of the one we are aware of, Coleridge nevertheless conceives it as having some visual and auditory frames of reference. Although Hartley was a significant influence on Coleridge, it was Berkeley's conception of reality as being a perception 'originating in the divine mind or as, in effect, the language of God' that motivated Coleridge into finding ways to best understand this language via poetry, and in doing so to forge a closer bond with God.<sup>137</sup> By turning the objects of nature into symbols 'designed to impress man's mind with the presence of God', Coleridge saw himself as doing something theologically and devotionally important.<sup>138</sup> In this way, he hoped to find a unity and meaningfulness in what otherwise would be a chaotic and disconnected reality.<sup>139</sup>

Wordsworth was undoubtedly influenced by this poetic potential but for different reasons. Rather than finding value in its "mystical" promise of re-establishing the true perception of Adam before The Fall, he sought to apply it to concerns that were more practical. He was still trying to come to terms with his disappointment and emotional shock over the failure of the French Revolution to deliver its promises. Such was his distress that only could its sublimation through empathy with the natural world bring him therapeutic relief. Poetry provided him with a legitimate reason to withdraw more and more into the natural world. Consequently, he felt it only natural to take parts of Hartley's theory and incorporate them into his long-established beliefs concerning the therapeutic value of the natural world.

Allied closely to the restorative qualities of nature are its educative qualities. From an early age, as *The Prelude* demonstrates, Wordsworth projected profound meaning onto the natural world. He saw in it not arbitrariness and chaos but a subtle order governed by benign if austere forces. These powers were discerned more obviously during times of positive and negative emotional excitement. It was during such times that the natural world was likely to reveal itself to the observer: sometimes as a teacher and



sometimes as a judge—we see this repeatedly in Wordsworth’s work. Consequently, he sought to articulate these polarities through the medium of a poetic language that was able to instruct and guide humanity towards a more morally conscientious conduct.

For this important instructional process to be effective Wordsworth had to prioritise the “message” of the poem over the more irrelevant (as he saw it) individual semantic elements that comprise it; and the message in Wordsworth’s case was of a philosophical nature. This philosophical emphasis is recognised by Keith G. Thomas in *Wordsworth and Philosophy*, where he cites Coleridge concerning his and Wordsworth’s programme with reference to Coleridge’s summary of the philosophical approach planned for Wordsworth’s *Recluse*:

Then the plan laid out, and I believe, partly suggested by me, was that Wordsworth should assume the station of a man in mental repose, one whose principles were made up, and so prepared to deliver upon authority a system of philosophy. He was to treat man as man—a subject of eye, ear, touch, and taste, in contact with external nature, [...].<sup>140</sup>

Wordsworth reiterates this to some extent in his preface to *The Excursion* where he mentions his early,

determination to compose a philosophical poem, containing views of Man, Nature, and Society; [...] as having for its principal subject the sensations and opinions of a poet living in retirement.<sup>141</sup>

As Thomas says, Wordsworth regards the subjective experiences of the poet as sufficient justification for the poem’s philosophical discourse.<sup>142</sup> And that,

any philosophical statement will derive its authority from this speaker and his experience, conditioned as they will be by the contingencies of time and place and by the varying motions of the senses, the mind and external nature.<sup>143</sup>

As an example of this procedure in operation, Robert Rehder in *Wordsworth and the Beginnings of Modern Poetry*, quotes the following passage:

Our animal appetites and daily wants,  
Are these obstructions insurmountable?  
If not, then others vanish into air.  
“Inspects the basis of the social pile:  
Enquire,” said I, “how much of mental power  
And genuine virtue they possess who live

By bodily toil, labour exceeding far  
 Their due proportion, under all the weight  
 Of that injustice which upon ourselves  
 Ourselves entail." Such estimate to frame  
 I chiefly looked (what need to look beyond?)  
 Among the natural bodes of men,  
 Fields with their rural works; recalled to mind  
 My earliest notices; with these compared  
 The observations made in later youth,  
 And to that day continued.<sup>144</sup>

(1850, XIII, 91-106)

Rehder observes that in this passage Wordsworth describes his feelings and then determines philosophical conclusions from them.<sup>145</sup> These conclusions are never fully stated but are manifested as a set of nebulous assumptions that are not fully formed methodically, nevertheless they,

find their way into his poetry when he needs to follow his feelings to something that he can believe in as a conclusion. Often these conclusions are rather perfunctory religious statements [...]. The very abstract passages are never far away from the description of a definite moment or a particular feeling; they are the result of Wordsworth's capacity to enter into reality in very specific terms.<sup>146</sup>

Quoting from *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, Alan Bewell, in *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment: Nature, Man and Society in the Experimental Poetry*, notes that for Wordsworth language is of prime importance in the formation of morality.<sup>147</sup> However, by language he means that which is precise and does not consist of 'lifeless words & abstract propositions', which are 'impotent over our habits'.<sup>148</sup> The cause of these 'lifeless words' is the attempt by moral philosophers to overvalue the faculty of reason.<sup>149</sup> In doing so they 'appeal to us' in a language devoid of images.<sup>150</sup> Imageless language is unable to influence, what Wordsworth calls, 'habitual feelings'.<sup>151</sup> It fails to be what he defines as poetry in the 1850 Preface: 'truth ... general and operative'.<sup>152</sup> Bewell says:

Furthermore, because moral philosophical texts 'contain no picture of human life', because 'they describe nothing', they cannot inform 'us how men placed in such or such a situation will necessarily act ... thence enabling us to apply ourselves to the means of turning them into a more beneficial course'.<sup>153</sup>

Paul Hamilton in *Coleridge's Poetics* echoes Bewell with regard to the passage Bewell is referring to:

Wordsworth's condemnation of certain kinds of philosophy on the grounds of its failure as description lends philosophical weight to the task he then saw himself as performing in *Lyrical Ballads*. Poetry remedies a deficient philosophy of action by showing how human actions, whose motives are never purely rational, are significant.<sup>154</sup>

Wordsworth's efforts are, as Hamilton says, 'devoted to making human actions intelligible by showing how they can speak to us, how they can be construed as the language of human "interest"'.<sup>155</sup> It would seem, then, that Wordsworth's aims for poetry were exclusively political, educational, social and moral.<sup>156</sup> Indeed, Wordsworth makes this explicit in an 1808 letter to George Beaumont where he says, 'Every great Poet is a Teacher: I wish either to be considered as a Teacher, or as nothing'.<sup>157</sup> Bewell adds in reference to

*The Recluse*:

When one recognises that Wordsworth's poems are more than vaguely philosophical, that they had their genesis in his ongoing critical engagement with Enlightenment moral philosophy, one can begin to appreciate that the coherence of *The Recluse* did not lie in its formal structure, but instead in the experimental discourse that shaped individual poems. This suggests that Wordsworth would have felt it necessary to take up, in individual poems or series of poems, the topics and speculative concerns that normally fell within moral philosophy's purview.<sup>158</sup>

Therefore, by appropriating the various concerns of moral philosophy and couching them in a discourse heavily contingent upon the use of images (i.e. descriptions) Wordsworth was attempting to achieve through poetry what he felt these philosophies were failing to do as enquiries. It would seem, then, that for Wordsworth the major motivation for his poetic output is not so much for it to entertain or be artistic expression but for it to function didactically as social education. This didactic intent can be seen in the following lines from *The Prelude*:

Prophets of Nature, we to them will speak  
A lasting inspiration, sanctified  
By reason, blest by faith: what we have loved,  
Others will love, and we will teach them how<sup>159</sup>

(1850, XIV, 444-47)

As Geoffrey Hartman notes in *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*:

The overt interpreter is rarely absent from Wordsworth's poems: a purely lyrical or descriptive moment is invariably followed by self-conscious explication. In 'The Old Cumberland Beggar',

after passages of description subtly colored by his feelings, Wordsworth turns to the statesmen of the world in a sudden moralizing apostrophe longer than these passages.<sup>160</sup>

Related to this is the observation that Nicholas Roe makes in *The Politics of Nature* that,

Wordsworth's frustrated history as radical journalist and French revolutionary was bound-up with his later career as a poet. [...] As a poet, one of Wordsworth's priorities was an imaginative restitution for complicity in revolutionary defeat.<sup>161</sup>

Consequently, according to Roe, Wordsworth,

manipulated his own past, therefore, to create himself as a poet and prophet: a figure of public authority who, in *The Recluse*, would address the great revolutionary themes of the day: 'Nature, Man and Society'.<sup>162</sup>

T. S. Eliot comes to similar conclusions in his lecture 'Wordsworth and Coleridge':

Wordsworth's revolutionary faith was more vital to him than it was to Coleridge. You cannot say that it inspired his revolution in poetry but it cannot be disentangled from the motives of his poetry.<sup>163</sup>

This goes a considerable way in explaining why his poetry is prose-like. To fulfil what he considers his educational and prophetic responsibility he has to express his moral and social agenda in a language that is devoid of the possibility of misinterpretation and ambiguity by educated readers,<sup>164</sup> otherwise the "importance" of his message would be in danger of being misconstrued by those he is attempting to educate and reform. This is something that is recognised by Eliot, who sees a measure of value in it:

When you find Wordsworth as the seer and prophet whose function it is to instruct and edify through pleasure, [...] you may begin to think that there is something in it, at least as for some kinds of poetry.<sup>165</sup>

In this chapter, I have not argued that Wordsworth's empiricism was an unmediated consequence of Coleridge's influence, or that he (in any organised sense) specifically favoured aspects of Coleridge's ideas that he understood to be empirical. However, the chapter does demonstrate the indirect influences that Coleridge's ideas had on Wordsworth. We have seen how Coleridge was certainly an empiricist in the 1790s and how his poetry and various statements reflected this. We saw how (like Wordsworth) he used poetry as primarily a means for communicating his philosophical ideas rather than for purely artistic purposes. We also

saw how Wordsworth's "emotion recollected in tranquility" was most probably the result of Coleridge's influence. We looked at how Coleridge influenced Wordsworth's preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (and openly claimed as much). We examined how Wordsworth's understanding of the Hartleian conception of "a philosophic language" was also most probably due to Coleridge's influence. Finally, we learned that Wordsworth's main motivating force was to use poetry as an educational tool for a better moral life.

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<sup>1</sup> The reason it is important to acknowledge this is in order to reach a just estimate of Coleridge's influence on Wordsworth. This is often assumed a transcendentalist one whereas it is actually grounded in empiricism.

<sup>2</sup> Graham Hough, *The Romantic Poets*, 3rd edn (London: Hutchinson, 1953), p.40.

<sup>3</sup> I. A. Richards, 'Coleridge: His Life and Work', in *Coleridge: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Kathleen Coburn (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967), pp.12-31 (p.15).

<sup>4</sup> S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. by J. Shawcross, 1st edn, 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, repr. 1962), II, p.19.

<sup>5</sup> René Wellek, 'The Concept of Romanticism in Literary History', in *Concepts of Criticism*, ed by Stephen G. Nichols (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963), pp.128-98 (p.185).

<sup>6</sup> Melvin Rader, *Wordsworth: A Philosophical Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p.37.

<sup>7</sup> Herbert Read, 'Coleridge as Critic', in Coburn, *Coleridge*, pp.94-111 (p.96).

<sup>8</sup> Ian Wylie, *Young Coleridge and the Philosophers of Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p.5.

<sup>9</sup> Wylie, pp.8-9.

<sup>10</sup> Wylie, p.9. While it is possible to discern elements of Platonism in *Joan of Arc*, where Coleridge uses Plato's cave analogy to illustrate the duty of mankind to acquire knowledge, H. W. Piper points that it 'can equally echo Priestley's belief that God may manifest himself as a natural appearance or "symbol"'. See *The Active Universe*, p.45.

<sup>11</sup> Kelvin Everest, *Coleridge's Secret Ministry: The Context of the Conversation Poems, 1795-1798* (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1979), p.32.

<sup>12</sup> Everest, pp.32-33.

<sup>13</sup> Everest, p.33.

<sup>14</sup> Everest, p.33.

<sup>15</sup> Read, Coburn, *Coleridge*, p.96. He took from the German Romantics the concept of poetic composition operating as a process whereby the manifestation of the poem develops, or grows in an unforced manner in much the same way as a tree. This concept became known as "organic form" and its influence is still felt today.

<sup>16</sup> Norman Fruman, *The Damaged Archangel* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1972), p.82.

<sup>17</sup> However, this was rather short lived as in 1801 he wrote to Thomas Poole saying that he had: 'Overthrown the doctrine of Association, as taught by Hartley, [...] especially, the doctrine of Necessity'. See *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, II, p.706. See also *Wordsworth: A Philosophical Approach*, pp.16-17. It has been argued that Wordsworth's later abandonment of necessitarianism is due to Coleridge's eventual rejection of it. See *Wordsworth: A Philosophical Approach*, p.20.

<sup>18</sup> Rader, p.19.

<sup>19</sup> Dorothy M. Emmet, 'Coleridge on the Growth of the Mind', in Coburn, *Coleridge*, pp.161-78 (p.163).

<sup>20</sup> *The Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by J. D. Campbell (London: Macmillan, 1938), p.60.

- <sup>21</sup> Emmet, Coburn, *Coleridge*, p.163.
- <sup>22</sup> Emmet, Coburn, *Coleridge*, pp.163-4.
- <sup>23</sup> Emmet, Coburn, *Coleridge*, p.164.
- <sup>24</sup> Quoted in Emmet, Coburn, *Coleridge*, p.164.
- <sup>25</sup> Emmet, Coburn, *Coleridge*, p.164.
- <sup>26</sup> Trevor H. Levere, *Poetry Revealed in Nature: Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Early Nineteenth-Century Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 3.
- <sup>27</sup> Humphrey House, *Coleridge: The Clark Lectures 1951-52* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1953), p.14.
- <sup>28</sup> House, p.26.
- <sup>29</sup> House, p.26
- <sup>30</sup> Kelvin Everest says, 'Coleridge's own eye for minute details of nature clearly grew more watchful under the influence of Dorothy and her brother, and the poem he wrote during their stay with Lamb ['This Lime-tree Bower my Prison'] displays a new keenness of visual awareness'. See *Coleridge's Secret Ministry*, p.242.
- <sup>31</sup> Quoted in House, p.123.
- <sup>32</sup> Quoted in House, p.123.
- <sup>33</sup> Quoted in House, p.123.
- <sup>34</sup> *Poetical Works*, ed. Campbell, p.116.
- <sup>35</sup> House, p.124.
- <sup>36</sup> *Collected Letters of S. T. Coleridge*, ed. by E. L. Griggs, 6 Vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956-71), I, p.334.
- <sup>37</sup> *Letters*, ed. Griggs, I, p.410.
- <sup>38</sup> *Letters*, ed. Griggs, I, p.658.
- <sup>39</sup> House, p.14.
- <sup>40</sup> House, p.48.
- <sup>41</sup> House, p.47.
- <sup>42</sup> Levere, p.9.
- <sup>43</sup> Levere, p.13.
- <sup>44</sup> Levere, p.2.
- <sup>45</sup> Levere, p.2.
- <sup>46</sup> Alan Richardson, 'Coleridge and the Dream of an Embodied Mind', *Romanticism*, 5.1, (1999), 1-25 (p.1).
- <sup>47</sup> Richardson, p.8.
- <sup>48</sup> Quoted in Richardson, p.15.
- <sup>49</sup> Albert Gérard, 'The Systolic Rhythm: The Structure of Coleridge's Conversation Poems', in Coburn, *Coleridge*, pp.78-87 (p.84).
- <sup>50</sup> Gérard, Coburn, *Coleridge*, p.85.
- <sup>51</sup> *Poetical Works*, ed. Campbell, p.92.
- <sup>52</sup> *Poetical Works*, ed. Campbell, pp.92-93.
- <sup>53</sup> *Poetical Works*, ed. Campbell, p.93.
- <sup>54</sup> *Letters*, ed. Griggs, I, p.210.
- <sup>55</sup> *Letters*, ed. Griggs, I, p.397.
- <sup>56</sup> House, p.47.
- <sup>57</sup> *Letters*, ed. Griggs, I, p.354.
- <sup>58</sup> Richardson, p.3.
- <sup>59</sup> Richardson, p.3.
- <sup>60</sup> J. A. Appleyard, *Coleridge's Philosophy of Literature: The Development of a Concept of Poetry 1791-*

1819 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), p.5.

<sup>61</sup> Appleyard, p.5.

<sup>62</sup> Appleyard, p. 5. Appleyard's view is supported by what Coleridge, himself, says in a letter to John Thelwell dated 17 December 1796. In it Coleridge writes, 'I feel strongly, and I think strongly; but I seldom feel without thinking, or think without feeling [...]. My philosophical opinions are blended with, or deduced from, my feelings: & this, I think, peculiarizes my style of Writing'. See *Letters*, ed. Griggs, I, p.279.

<sup>63</sup> Appleyard, pp.5-6.

<sup>64</sup> Seamus Perry, *Coleridge and the Uses of Division* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p.7.

<sup>65</sup> Perry, p.12.

<sup>66</sup> Perry, p.13.

<sup>67</sup> Perry, p.19.

<sup>68</sup> Perry, p.22.

<sup>69</sup> Perry, p.22.

<sup>70</sup> Everest, p.159.

<sup>71</sup> Everest, p. 9.

<sup>72</sup> Everest, p.147.

<sup>73</sup> Everest, p.147.

<sup>74</sup> Everest, pp.164-65.

<sup>75</sup> Everest, p.159.

<sup>76</sup> Everest, pp.189-90.

<sup>77</sup> Everest, p.90.

<sup>78</sup> House, p.73. Richard Holmes says that 'Frost at Midnight' was modelled on Cowper's *The Task*. See *Coleridge: Early Visions*, p.36.

<sup>79</sup> James C. McKusick, *Coleridge's Philosophy of Language*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), pp.13-14. Coleridge says of Bowles in a letter to Southey dated 17 December 1794: 'It is among the chief excellencies of Bowles that his Imagery appears almost always prompted by the surrounding Scenery'. See *Letters*, ed. Griggs, I, p.139.

<sup>80</sup> McKusick, p.14.

<sup>81</sup> McKusick, p.14.

<sup>82</sup> McKusick, p.16.

<sup>83</sup> Quoted in McKusick, p.16.

<sup>84</sup> Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989), p.35.

<sup>85</sup> Holmes, p.35.

<sup>86</sup> *Poetical Works*, ed. Campbell, p.11.

<sup>87</sup> *Biographia Literaria*, ed. Shawcross, I, p.2.

<sup>88</sup> Shawcross, I, p.3.

<sup>89</sup> Letter dated 18 September 1794, *Letters*, ed. Griggs, I, pp.103-4.

<sup>90</sup> Letter dated 22 July 1794, *Letters*, ed. Griggs, I, p. 94.

<sup>91</sup> *Coleridge's Verse*, ed. by W. Empson and D. Pirie (London: Faber, 1972), p.13.

<sup>92</sup> *Biographia Literaria*, ed. Shawcross, I, p.14.

<sup>93</sup> Letter dated 17 December 1796, *Letters*, ed. Griggs, I, p.277.

<sup>94</sup> Quoted in Holmes, p.141.

<sup>95</sup> Quoted in Holmes, p.141.

<sup>96</sup> Holmes, p.141.

<sup>97</sup> Letter dated 17 December 1796, *Letters*, ed. Griggs, I, p.278.

<sup>98</sup> Holmes, p.217.

- <sup>99</sup> Quoted in Holmes, p.217.
- <sup>100</sup> Quoted in Holmes, p.218.
- <sup>101</sup> Holmes, p.131.
- <sup>102</sup> Appleyard acknowledges that were it not for Wordsworth Coleridge's literary theories after 1797 would have been very different. See *Coleridge's Philosophy of Literature: The Development of a Concept of Poetry 1791-1819*, p.66. In addition, Shawcross notes that Coleridge was adamant that he, and not Wordsworth, was the originator of the distinction between imagination and fancy. See Shawcross, I, p.xxii.
- <sup>103</sup> Appleyard, p.66.
- <sup>104</sup> Appleyard, p.67.
- <sup>105</sup> Quoted in Gérard, Coburn, *Coleridge*, p.79.
- <sup>106</sup> *Letters*, ed. Griggs, II, p.830.
- <sup>107</sup> *Letters*, ed. Griggs, II, p.811.
- <sup>108</sup> *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. by Mary Moorman, (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p.43.
- <sup>109</sup> Quoted in Holmes, p.283.
- <sup>110</sup> Herbert Read, *The True Voice of Feeling: Studies in English Romantic Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 1953), p.38.
- <sup>111</sup> Holmes, p.283.
- <sup>112</sup> Holmes, pp.284-85.
- <sup>113</sup> Introduction, *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. by R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones (London: Methuin, 1963), p.xxi.
- <sup>114</sup> *Letters*, ed. Griggs, I, p.397.
- <sup>115</sup> Introduction, ed. Brett and Jones, p.xxi.
- <sup>116</sup> *Letters*, ed. Griggs, II, p.665.
- <sup>117</sup> *Letters*, ed. Griggs, II, p.666.
- <sup>118</sup> Admittedly, this observation is extremely tentative but may motivate further research on the matter.
- <sup>119</sup> Wylie, p.84.
- <sup>120</sup> Wylie, p.84.
- <sup>121</sup> David Hartley, *Observations of Man: His Frame, His Duty, His Expectations*, 2 vols (New York: Delmar, 1976), I, p.298.
- <sup>122</sup> Hartley, I, p.298.
- <sup>123</sup> Hartley, I, p.298.
- <sup>124</sup> Wylie, p.84.
- <sup>125</sup> Wylie, p.84.
- <sup>126</sup> Wylie, p.84.
- <sup>127</sup> Hartley, I, p.315.
- <sup>128</sup> McKusick, pp.8-9.
- <sup>129</sup> McKusick says that Coleridge probably read Plato's *Cratylus* while at Cambridge and 'at some later date, he acquired a copy of Plato's works in Greek, for in a notebook entry of 1817 he copies out a few words from the *Cratylus* and translates them into English'. See *Coleridge's Philosophy of Language*, pp.5-6.
- <sup>130</sup> McKusick, p.4.
- <sup>131</sup> McKusick, p.5.
- <sup>132</sup> Wylie, p.85.
- <sup>133</sup> Quoted in Wylie, p.85.
- <sup>134</sup> Shawcross, II, p.5.
- <sup>135</sup> Wylie, p.85.
- <sup>136</sup> As we have seen from Dorothy M. Emmet's comments in this chapter, this was Coleridge's main



criticism with Hartley's theory.

<sup>137</sup> Piper, p.57.

<sup>138</sup> Piper, p.58.

<sup>139</sup> Levere, p.15.

<sup>140</sup> Keith G. Thomas, *Wordsworth and Philosophy: Transcendentalism in Poetry* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989), p.7.

<sup>141</sup> *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by T. Hutchinson and E. de Selincourt, (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), Wordsworth Editions 1994, p.754.

<sup>142</sup> Thomas, p.10.

<sup>143</sup> Thomas, p.10.

<sup>144</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.741.

<sup>145</sup> Robert Rehder, *Wordsworth and the Beginnings of Modern Poetry* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), p.106.

<sup>146</sup> Rehder, p.106.

<sup>147</sup> Alan Bewel, *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment: Nature, Man and Society in the Experimental Poetry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), p.11.

<sup>148</sup> Bewel, p.11.

<sup>149</sup> Bewel, p.11.

<sup>150</sup> Bewel, p.11.

<sup>151</sup> Bewel, p.11.

<sup>152</sup> Bewel, p.11.

<sup>153</sup> Bewel, p.11.

<sup>154</sup> Paul Hamilton, *Coleridge's Poetics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p.142.

<sup>155</sup> Hamilton, p.143.

<sup>156</sup> Interestingly, Hamilton says that Hazlitt's objection to Wordsworth didacticism was because he 'resented Wordsworth's presentation of an apparent abdication of poetic responsibility as if it were a radical, democratic extension of the subject-matter of poetry—a radicalism which Wordsworth's own political behavior belied. Wordsworth purported to give new clothing to human apprehension, to make poetry the instrument of a radical reassessment of the nature of essential human responses, while in fact he was not writing as a poet at all. See *Coleridge's Poetics*, p.145.

<sup>157</sup> Quoted in Hugh Sykes Davies, *Wordsworth and the Worth of Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p.3.

<sup>158</sup> Bewel, p.13.

<sup>159</sup> *Poetical Works*, eds. Hutchinson and de Selincourt, p.752.

<sup>160</sup> Geoffrey Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* (London: Methuen, 1987), p.45.

<sup>161</sup> Nicholas Roe, *The Politics of Nature: Wordsworth and Some Contemporaries* (London: Macmillan, 1992), p.115.

<sup>162</sup> Roe, p.116.

<sup>163</sup> T. S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism: Studies in the Relation of Criticism to Poetry in England* (London: Faber and Faber, 1933; repr. 1959), p.75.

<sup>164</sup> I will look at this appeal to "educated readers" in more detail in chapter 5.

<sup>165</sup> Eliot, p.75.

## Chapter Four

### The Reading of Wordsworth in the Twentieth Century

The reading of Wordsworth in the twentieth century has to be understood in terms of the reaction to Romanticism in that century. While there is no consistent response to either, the debate to some extent echoes the uncertainty to be found within the Romantic period between empiricism and transcendentalism. In this chapter, I would like to take a thematic rather than a strictly chronological overview of the various readings of Wordsworth in the twentieth century in order to trace the development of a “Wordsworthian empiricism” that had become dominant by the end of that century.<sup>1</sup> This thematic approach will make it necessary to reduce the emphasis normally placed on the literary and historical account of the development of these ideas. In doing so, I will illustrate how criticism of Wordsworth in the twentieth century (even that which viewed him principally in transcendentalist terms) tended to foreground his empiricism resulting (intentionally or otherwise) in it being widely regarded as the best model for poetic composition. As I have said, the reading of Wordsworth in the twentieth century is best understood in terms of the wider critical reaction to Romanticism. This reaction has some bearing upon what John Casey in his *The Language of Criticism* sees as ‘certain presuppositions about “facts” and “emotions” which are very deeply ingrained in the empiricist tradition and which have generally dominated critical theory since Wordsworth’.<sup>2</sup>

Both the transcendentalist and empiricist strains in Wordsworth, at one time or another, have been foregrounded. Wordsworth’s poetical *modus operandi* was often to observe closely the objects of the natural world, reflect upon the thoughts, emotions and memories that these objects evoked in him, and then to describe both the objects and the resultant effects upon him.<sup>3</sup> Where this *modus operandi* was successful, the resultant verse can be seen to be heavily descriptive—I will refer to this aspect as the empiricist strain. Where it was not successful, given the natural ambiguities inherent in language, the poetry evinces

ambiguities and vagueness—I will refer to this as the transcendentalist strain.<sup>4</sup> In this chapter, I will show how it is Wordsworth’s empiricist strain that was valued by twentieth-century critics over the transcendentalist strain and how this critical favour consequently shaped twentieth-century poetry to the extent that we can say it is “Wordsworthian”.

When we come to examine the critical reaction to the Romantics in the wake of the acceptance of Modernism in the early twentieth century, we find that the majority of criticism is hostile to Wordsworth and many other romantic poets. F. R. Leavis, for instance, criticised Shelley’s ‘Ode to the West Wind’ for what he saw as its confused imagery due to Shelley’s ‘weak grasp upon the actual’.<sup>5</sup> Edward Larrissy lists the romantic qualities deprecated by Modernists as being ‘discursiveness, the emphasis on personality, the use of the language of the emotions and the aesthetic ideal of organic form’.<sup>6</sup> In their place, Modernists privileged ‘impersonality, directness of presentation and [...] the analogy of mechanical or sculptural form, as opposed to organic form’.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, T. S. Eliot’s mentor, Irving Babbitt, saw Romanticism’s foregrounding of the spontaneous and the individualistic, coupled with its philosophical thought, as being negatively influential upon modern democratic society. In *Rousseau and Romanticism*, he says that these romantic principles lead ‘to an anarchistic individualism that tends in turn to destroy civilisation’.<sup>8</sup>

George Bornstein in his Introduction to *Romantic and Modern: Revaluations of Literary Tradition* explains the Modernist reaction to Romanticism thus:

Modernist criticism often conflated strong, early Romanticism with its later and weaker derivatives. Early twentieth-century writers understandably attacked the debased Romanticism around them and then read their objections to its tone, conventions, and world view back onto the high Romantics.<sup>9</sup>

The result of this was to create a false perception among Modernist writers and critics that there was a permanent fracture between Romanticism and Modernism. In reality, however, there was no such breach. Rather, there was a continuation of romantic descriptiveness through Symbolist poetry and into Modernist poetry. This has been noted by Geoffrey Thurley who says, ‘The emergence of the descriptive poem is in

itself an important event in the history of Western literature. It led directly to the Romantic and thence, to the Symbolist poem'.<sup>10</sup> From Symbolist poetry, Imagism eventually emerged—Imagism being only a modification of Symbolism.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, Modernism inevitably shared with Romanticism the tenet that saw value in descriptions of the physical world.

Ezra Pound's attack on the Romantics was not because he disagreed with their empirical values but because they typified for him establishment poetry. Hugh Witemeyer expresses this view in his essay 'Walter Savage Landor and Ezra Pound':

Pound reacted specifically to a late Victorian reading of the Romantics which enshrined Wordsworth and Keats with Milton and Tennyson in a pantheon of stylistic and social respectability. This 'cult of the innocuous' impeded the acceptance of the modern poetry which Pound's circle was creating.<sup>12</sup>

Witemeyer further states:

Pound's strategy was to offer a deliberately subversive reading of literary history intended to shock received opinion. [...] If Wordsworth, Keats, and Tennyson had been made respectable establishment figures whose influence was grown oppressive, then they had to be undermined and blasted to make way for the new poetry.<sup>13</sup>

Of Pound's omission of any reference to Wordsworth, Coleridge and Blake in his *The ABC of Reading* while giving space to Browning, Crabbe, Landor and Beddoes, Witemeyer says:

This emphasis is no mere Browningsque obsession with *scriptores ignoti*, the unknown secondary artists of the period. It is a revolutionary effort to establish a heritage for a literary counter-culture.<sup>14</sup>

That Witemeyer's analysis is reasonable is supported by Pound's respect for Wordsworth's poetic empiricism. This is mentioned by Herbert N. Schneidau who says that Pound, despite his,

dismissal of Wordsworth as a 'silly old sheep' still grudgingly ascribed to him 'a genius, an unquestionable genius, for imagisme, for presentation of natural detail'.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, that Pound not only shared Wordsworth's fascination with objects but also his bias towards prose as superior to poetic artifice is illustrated in the following: 'In a curious extension of their parallel attacks on 'poetic diction', each [he and Wordsworth] offered prose as a model for good poetry'.<sup>16</sup>

Schneidau then quotes the following lines from Wordsworth's 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*:

There neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition [...] some of the most interesting parts of the best poems will be found to be strictly the language of prose when prose is well written.<sup>17</sup>

Then comments, 'With this we may compare Pound's belief in the 'prose tradition in verse', his dictum that poetry must be 'as well written as prose', and so on'.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Pound's comment in a letter dated 4 February 1913 to Alice Corbin Henderson (the Associate Editor of *Poetry*) on one of her poems is, 'Your most obvious superficial fault is that you invert, and in various ways disturb the natural prose order of the words'.<sup>19</sup> Adding, 'Every alteration of this sort, that is not made for definite and worthy reason weakens the impact'.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, to William Carlos Williams on the 19 December 1913 with regard to Williams's poem 'La Flor' he warns, 'Your syntax still strays occasionally from the simple order of natural speech'.<sup>21</sup>

In a Preface (dated 1914) for Lionel Johnson's *Poetical Works* Pound writes:

Now Lionel Johnson cannot be shown to be in accord with our present doctrines and ambitions. His language is a bookish dialect, or rather it is not a dialect, it is a curial speech, and our aim is natural speech, the language as spoken. We desire the words of poetry to follow the natural order. We would write nothing that we might not say actually in life—under emotion.<sup>22</sup>

This advocacy of a style stripped of artifice and geared towards a communicative functionality is, as we have seen in previous chapters, a penchant of Wordsworth's also. Moreover, in his essay 'A Retrospect', Pound echoes Wordsworth further, advising aspiring poets to:

Use no superfluous word, no adjective which does not reveal something. Don't use such expressions as "dim lands *of peace*". It dulls the image. It mixes an abstraction with the concrete. It comes from the writer's not realising that the natural object is always the *adequate* symbol.<sup>23</sup>

Even W. B. Yeats saw some value in this approach when he said that Pound 'helps me to get back to the definite and concrete, away from modern abstractions'.<sup>24</sup>

In 'How to Read' Pound laments the advent of 'the loose use of words'<sup>25</sup> that appeared during the Renaissance and which replaced what he saw as the more precise language of the medieval period:

What the renaissance gained in direct examination of natural phenomena, it in part lost in

losing the feel and desire for exact descriptive terms. I mean that the medieval mind had little but words to deal with, and it was more careful in its definitions and verbiage. It did not define a gun in terms that would just as well define an explosion, nor explosions in terms that would define triggers.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, in the same essay, he writes:

One “moves” the reader only by clarity. In depicting the motions of the “human heart” the durability of the writing depends on the exactitude. [...] It is as important for the purpose of thought to keep language efficient as it is in surgery to keep tetanus bacilli out of one’s bandages.<sup>27</sup>

On Rimbaud he says, ‘In Rimbaud the image stands clean, unencumbered by non-functioning words’.<sup>28</sup> In *The A B C of Reading*, he writes: ‘Good writers are those who keep the language efficient. That is to say, keep it accurate, keep it clear’.<sup>29</sup> Also, in the same book he praises Homer’s descriptive verity:

The sheer literary qualities in Homer are such that a physician has written a book to prove that Homer must have been an army doctor. (When he describes certain blows and their effect, the wounds are said to be accurate, and the descriptions fit for coroner’s inquest.)<sup>30</sup>

Additionally, he says that Catullus is in some ways better than Sappho is ‘for his economy of words’.<sup>31</sup>

Whilst admitting Ovid’s unevenness as a writer Pound, nevertheless, recognises that: ‘He is clear. His verse is as lucid as prose’.<sup>32</sup> In ‘A Retrospect’, the first two of Pound’s three principles of poetry are:

1. Direct treatment of the “thing” whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.<sup>33</sup>

These principles are echoed in his letters such as the one to publisher Harriet Monroe in October 1912:

This is the sort of American stuff that I can show here and in Paris without its being ridiculed. Objective—no slither; direct—no excessive use of adjectives, no metaphors that won’t permit examination.<sup>34</sup>

In addition to his three principles of poetry in ‘A Retrospect’ are his three categories of poetry in ‘How to Read’. The first he calls Melopeia where the words are charged with a musical property ‘over and above their plain meaning’.<sup>35</sup> The second is Phanopeia, which corresponds to the commonsense notion we have of imagination: ‘a casting of images upon visual imagination’.<sup>36</sup> The third is Logopeia that ‘employs words

not only for their direct meaning' but also for 'ironical play'.<sup>37</sup> The first category relies upon sound (internal/external), the second on vision (internal), and the third on semantics. All three are essential to poetry. Yet, Pound seems to have reservations about the last when he calls it a 'most tricky and undependable mode'.<sup>38</sup> This is presumably because its possibilities for 'ironical play' allow for a less precise hermeneutic.

However, it was not always this way with Pound, as the following passage from Paul Smith's *Pound Revised* makes clear:

What I think principally emanates from late-nineteenth-century verse, and what Pound's early work reduplicates, is precisely a concern for the artifice of poetic production and an ensuing respect for the autonomy of the language of poetry: both of these elements enter Pound's writing in a much more solid and formative manner than do any of the superficial elements that the critics point to. Whereas these early stylistic and thematic influences have most often been extirpated (or considerably refined) by the time of the *Cantos*, what does remain as an upshot for Pound's entire creative output is the question of the condition and status of autonomous poetic language.<sup>39</sup>

And he cites Pound's 'Cino' as 'a poem overtly concerned with the terms of its own production'<sup>40</sup> saying that the poem's language, 'is allowed to be aware of itself and of its many layers and registers within the poem's genesis—aware, indeed, of its whole role in the production of meanings'.<sup>41</sup> Smith points out that Swinburne's 'refusal to allow writing to be subservient to the expression of poetic reflection and impression' was influential on early Pound<sup>42</sup>:

What the young Pound learned from him, then, can be said to lie precisely in this trenchant attitude to the very materiality of writing, its activity.<sup>43</sup>

Pound's lesson from Swinburne, then, far from being an overt thematic one, resides in the recognition of the materiality of language and its tendency to break the barriers of that view of poetry which wishes to see language as simply a vehicle.<sup>44</sup>

The reflexive strain in his early writings lays great emphasis on the particular qualities of poetic language and poetic technique—on the materiality of language and general poetic procedures.<sup>45</sup>

Smith's general contention is that by 1915 Pound suppressed his 'recognition of the primacy of poetic materiality',<sup>46</sup> preferring instead to redevelop 'a notion of the master craftsman (with both words of the

phrase carrying their weight) in order to defuse the power of poetic materiality'.<sup>47</sup> Smith says:

It is with the distinctions that this new category allows him that Pound begins to redefine poetry so that materiality will finally not distort substance—in other words, to build a stronger vehicle for whatever substance the poet might wish to communicate.<sup>48</sup>

Smith explains this sea change in the following way:

The early poems had obviously served as an arena for experimentation [...]. But the fate of most of this early work was excision from the canon, on the grounds that such writing can say 'nothing in particular'. [...] And so in his Imagist and Vorticist periods he embarks upon a programme designed to efface the power of the signifier and replace it with a controlled and mastered language—one which supposedly can come into unambiguous contact with the truth of the world.<sup>49</sup>

In conclusion, Smith says:

Pound's Imagism, then, relies on a belief that a certain technique in language will allow language to embody the world and become efficiently denotative, capable of reproducing an external origin quite simply. As David Simpson puts it, this involves a 'realist' poetry which 'stands in an authoritarian relationship to its readers. It demands reception, it does not invite or necessitate interpretation'.<sup>50</sup>

It would appear, then, according to Smith, that Pound's participation in "the revolution of the word" was motivated by a desire for his poetry to be accepted within the traditional literary canon of the day. Consequently, he abandoned his earlier mode of writing in favour of that which he recognised as more acceptable to this literary establishment. Any such writing, of course, would have to deny the materiality of language, preferring instead to focus on language's denotative aspect—an aspect that, as Simpson infers, results in a poetics grounded in an autocratic denial of hermeneutic plurality.

Perhaps Pound's rejection of poetic artifice was also due to his reading of Ernest Fenollosa's *Essay on the Chinese Written Character*.<sup>51</sup> In *The A B C of Reading*, Pound says that Fenollosa was attempting to 'explain the Chinese ideograph [ideogram] as a means of transmission and registration of thought'.<sup>52</sup> In doing so he,

got to the root of the matter, to the root of the difference between what is valid in Chinese thinking and invalid or misleading in a great deal of European thinking and language.<sup>53</sup>

Pound expresses European thinking as follows:



In Europe, if you ask a man to define anything, his definition always moves away from the simple things that he knows perfectly well, it recedes into an unknown region, that is a region of remoter and progressively remoter abstraction.<sup>54</sup>

In contrast to this,

Fenollosa emphasises the method of science, ‘which is the method of poetry’, as distinct from that of ‘philosophic discussion’, and is the way the Chinese go about it in their ideograph or abbreviated picture writing.<sup>55</sup>

The Chinese ideograph unlike the Egyptian method of using ‘abbreviated pictures to represent sounds’<sup>56</sup> uses,

abbreviated pictures AS pictures, that is to say, Chinese ideogram does not try to be the picture of a sound, or to be a written sign recalling a sound, but it is still the picture of a thing; of a thing in a given position or relation, or of a combination of things. It *means* the thing or the action or the situation, or quality germane to the several things that it pictures.<sup>57</sup>

In this way Fenollosa,

was telling how and why a language written in this way simply HAD TO STAY POETIC; simply couldn’t help being and staying poetic in a way that a column of English type might very well not stay poetic.<sup>58</sup>

An obvious objection to Fenollosa’s theory is that it is truer of visual art than literature. Pound unwittingly hints at this when he writes: ‘This is nevertheless the RIGHT WAY to study poetry, or literature, or painting. It is in fact the way the more intelligent members of the general public DO study painting’.<sup>59</sup>

However, another objection can be found. G. C. Jaggs draws our attention to Smith’s main criticism of Pound that he quotes from the same book by Smith to which I refer above:

Language for [Pound] has the innate ability to close the gap between its signifier and its signified and so refer directly to the referent ... the fundamental Poundian metaphor ... assumes that language is co-extensive, analogous and co-operative with the natural world. This ... is thereby reductive of language and/or the natural world to a tautology: the signifier is limited, chained not to another signifier but to the functional expression of the natural world.<sup>60</sup>

Pound’s erstwhile colleague T. E. Hulme, as well as seeing the twentieth century as spawning a new classical movement, also elevated the position of the object via the process of accurate visual description: albeit without the excesses to which Pound was prone.<sup>61</sup> In his essay ‘Romanticism and Classicism’,

Hulme criticizes romantic poets for not considering that ‘accurate description is a legitimate object of verse’.<sup>62</sup> In addition, he regards the language of poetry as different to that of prose in that poetic language is,

a visual concrete one. [. . .] It always endeavours to arrest you, and to make you continuously see a physical thing, to prevent you gliding through an abstract process.<sup>63</sup>

Furthermore he says, ‘The new verse resembles sculpture rather than music; it appeals to the eye rather than the ear’;<sup>64</sup> and in poetry ‘each *word* must be an image *seen*, not a counter’ (Hulme’s emphases).<sup>65</sup> The new poetry ‘depends for its effect [. . .] on arresting the attention, so much so that the succession of visual images should exhaust one’.<sup>66</sup>

In *The True Voice of Feeling*, Herbert Read says that to Hulme ‘the poetic activity was in the nature of a physical or physiological act’. Read then quotes him regarding poetic composition:

Think of sitting at that window in Chelsea and seeing the chimneys and the lights in the dusk. And then imagine that by contemplation this will transfer itself bodily on to paper.<sup>67</sup>

Read then summarises Hulme’s main position:

What is there first, said Hulme, is the world in its concreteness, evident to the senses: the physical phenomena. The poet seizes these, finds their verbal equivalence, and the rest—beauty, significance, metaphysical reverberations—is there as an intrinsic grace.<sup>68</sup>

Read notes Michael Roberts’s observation that Hulme’s ideas were influenced by Nicolas Cusanus. Read quotes Roberts as saying:

It is easy to see how much Hulme derived from Cusanus, either directly or through Scheler. Hulme’s [. . .] conception of fancy (*phantasia*) as a faculty that compares and equates sense impressions, [. . .] are found in Cusanus.<sup>69</sup>

Furthermore, in *Romantic Image*, Frank Kermode says that for Hulme,

poetry is bad when it directs the attention away from the physical uniqueness and oneness of the image. [. . .] Whether the poem is good or not depends upon the accuracy of the representation, and upon that alone.<sup>70</sup>

Kermode says that Hulme’s theory,

makes a show of being in opposition to Romantic imprecision [. . .] but in fact it is fundamentally a new statement of the old defence of poetry against positivism [. . .]. It is a

revised form of the old proclamation that poetry has a special access to truth.<sup>71</sup>

Read also noted the continuance of Hulme's ideas with those of the Romantics especially with regard to Coleridge. Of Hulme's statement that 'the form of the poem is shaped by the intention', Read says that this 'shows the continuity or community of thought in Hulme and Coleridge'.<sup>72</sup>

Shortly, I will be looking at the empiricist tendencies in the poetry of Edward Thomas but before doing so, I would like to briefly discuss Georgian poetry in light of what has been said so far. That many of the Wordsworthian poetic tenets are present in Georgian poetry is apparent from contemporary reviews of the debut anthology of Georgian poetry. In *Georgian Poetry 1911-1912*, R. Ellis Roberts says of the poets included in this anthology that 'they all are agreed in this one supreme point, an intense interest in external things, an intense feeling for their reality and importance'.<sup>73</sup> A. C. Henson says of the poets that they are 'watching life, feeling, seeing, recording'.<sup>74</sup> Edmund Gosse notes appropriately:

There seems to be traceable in most of these poets a conviction, or a vague belief, that Nature as seen in the external world and the mind of Man as cultivated within the human individual are parallel to an extent which may be partly discerned by our own senses, so far as these are quickened by imagination and sympathy.<sup>75</sup>

Furthermore, one anonymous reviewer (in the course of his review of the anthology) defines poetry in terms that echo "the egotistical sublime", while also using the familiar vocabulary of empiricist writing: 'incidents' 'objects', 'integrity' and 'sincerity':

A state of the poet's own mind is always the real subject of a poem; incidents and objects are only the terms in which it is expressed, and the completeness with which we enter into the mind of another largely depends on our confidence in the integrity of his vision and the sincerity of his words.<sup>76</sup>

The same reviewer notes with approval the descriptiveness evident in the poems of T. Sturge Moore which appear in the anthology:

He writes for artists, and they are few; but anyone with a literary sense, though he may be jarred occasionally by what seems an infelicitous word, can feel the distinction of his descriptive passages.<sup>77</sup>

In addition, he applauds Lascelles Abercrombie for the 'hurrying vigour of his descriptions'.<sup>78</sup> He rounds

off his review with the following on Wilfrid Wilson Gibson:

‘The Hare’ and ‘Devil’s Edge’ are fine poems. He combines perfectly felicitous descriptions of Nature, never strained, observed by an eye which loves things as they are, with an intensity of mood, which raises these poems to the level of admirable poetry.<sup>79</sup>

From these reviews, we can see that Georgian poetry possesses much continuity with Wordsworthian poetics. Moreover, according to C. K. Stead Georgian poetry can be seen as paving the way for Modernism.

In an attack on David Daiches, Stead writes:

Mr Daiches, like so many critics of the past twenty years, has seen the Georgians through spectacles provided for him by the later, more vigorous movement led by Pound and Eliot. The suggestion is that the Georgians set themselves against the natural development of modern poetry: in fact they were its precursors.<sup>80</sup>

This is echoed to some extent by John Wain who sees aspects of Georgian poetry as potentially “modern”:

I believe that if the First World War had not happened the new idiom in English poetry would have been a development of Georgianism. The seeds were there: the honesty, the dislike of cant, the ‘selection from the real language of men’, the dissatisfaction with a narrow tradition of poetry laid down by the literary Establishment and enforced by teachers and anthologists.<sup>81</sup>

It is interesting to note here that the requirements for a modern poetry are almost exactly those that are required to write Wordsworthian poetry. Both statements by Stead and Wain, in their own way, imply a Georgian continuity with both Wordsworth and Modernism. As I demonstrated earlier in this chapter, this continuity is founded on a Wordsworthian poetic. That both Georgian and Modernist principles can be such happy bedfellows suggests that any perceived significant differences between them are only apparent.

Further support for the continuance of the empiricist strain in Modernist practices can be found in Andrew Motion’s *The Poetry of Edward Thomas* where he views Thomas’s poetry as foreshadowing in a more discreet manner innovations made more explicit in Modernist works.<sup>82</sup> Motion sees Thomas as writing, ‘slightly to the left of centre—drawing much from the Georgians but also anticipating the Modernists in several important respects’.<sup>83</sup> He argues that, ‘the Imagists’ juxtaposition of miniature fragments, and the Modernists’ generous use of collage and montage, both find their discreet counterpart in his [Thomas’s] poems’.<sup>84</sup> Motion then goes into an analysis of Thomas’s poem ‘The Long Small Room’,

saying of this poem that it is,

typical of the way in which he [Thomas] refers to a variety of objects with such quick clarity that orthodox pictorial and narrative techniques are replaced by what one of his earliest reviewers called ‘disconnected impressions’.<sup>85</sup>

Here is the poem:

The long small room that showed willows in the west  
Narrowed up to the end the fireplace filled,  
Although not wide. I liked it. No one guessed  
What need or accident made them so build.

Only the moon, the mouse, and the sparrow peeped  
In from the ivy round the casement thick.  
Of all they saw and heard there they shall keep  
The tale for the old ivy and older brick.

When I look back I am like moon, sparrow, and mouse  
That witnessed what they could never understand  
Or alter or prevent in the dark house.  
One thing remains the same--this is my right hand

Crawling crab-like over the clean white page,  
Resting awhile each morning on the pillow,  
Then once more starting to crawl on towards age.  
The hundred last leaves stream upon the willow.<sup>86</sup>

Motion notes that ‘the sense of insecurity and isolation conveyed here [in this poem] in visual terms appears elsewhere [in other poems] in linguistic ones’.<sup>87</sup> That the visual is foregrounded in this poem is obvious but Motion fails to direct us to examples of the latter (the linguistic terms) in Thomas’s other poems.

Motion also acknowledges the retrograde tendencies inherent in Modernist poetry—tendencies that arguably have their genesis in Romantic roots. Quoting Amy Lowell’s six attributes of Imagist poetry, listed in her anthology *Some Imagist Poets*, Motion writes:

The fact that these aims are sufficiently indeterminate to describe not only Thomas but a wide variety of authors suggests that strict Imagists were not espousing entirely new principles, but isolating a number of old ones and thereby making them seem unfamiliar. Imagism, in other words, is a matter of selection and amplification. The same can also be said of full-fledged Modernism, which shares many of its strategies.<sup>88</sup>

Indeed, Thomas approved of Pound's *Personae* because it contained 'no golden words shot with meaning; a temperate use of images and none far fetched'.<sup>89</sup> Thomas's praise for what can only be described as poetic conservatism confirms the unbroken link between the old and the "new" poetic, which Pound and Lowell failed to recognise. It is appropriate that such praise should come from a poet whose poetic aesthetic prompted him to write in defence of it: 'A poem of the old kind has a simple fundamental meaning which every sane reader can agree upon; above and beyond this each one builds as he can or must'.<sup>90</sup> As we have seen, Pound would have agreed with such a view.

Moreover, in his review of Robert Frost's collection *North of Boston* Thomas praises it for what are essentially Wordsworthian qualities:

These poems are revolutionary because they lack the exaggeration of rhetoric, and even at first sight appear to lack the poetic intensity of which rhetoric is an imitation. Their language is free from the poetical words and forms that are the chief material of secondary poets.<sup>91</sup>

Indeed, this review could have been written by Pound himself such is its conformity to Pound's poetic dicta. The continuity of the Wordsworthian legacy in Frost is so apparent that Thomas has little difficulty in recognising it: 'Mr Frost has, in fact, gone back as Whitman and as Wordsworth went back, through the paraphernalia of poetry into poetry again'.<sup>92</sup> The Wordsworthian belief that prose is the proper form for poetry is implied in Thomas's criticism of Swinburne—which also has echoes of organicism:

He was one of those ... who seem to shape their thought in order that it may fit a certain favourite type of sentence instead of allowing the thought to govern the form of the sentence.<sup>93</sup>

Thomas's penchant for poetry that is in actuality prose fiction is indicated by Philip Hobsbaum in *Tradition and Experiment in English Poetry*:

Thomas will often act out his feelings in terms of story, scene and character, rather than state it in his own person. And this brings him close to the writings of the finest poetic realists—Wordsworth, for example, whose best work is in narrative form, and is akin to the great nineteenth-century novelists, themselves the heirs of Shakespeare.<sup>94</sup>

Motion's recognition of Thomas's sensual handling of objects as being to some extent similar to that of the Imagists, and Thomas's Wordsworthian-like penchant for plain words (along with his approval of

Pound's *Personae*) demonstrates further the continuity between Wordsworthian poetic precepts and certain empirical strands within Modernism.

Turning to Robert Frost, we see a poet whose poetic traditionalism was much admired by Pound and Lowell. As Philip L. Gerber in his biography of Frost notes, Lowell even sought to include him among the Imagists.<sup>95</sup> Yet at the same time,

The Georgian poets, with their emphasis upon the pastoral [...] received Frost in a friendly embrace. He became relatively close to Wilfrid Wilson Gibson and Lascelles Abercrombie and to a number of younger poets, particularly Edward Thomas.<sup>96</sup>

That Frost was able comfortably to straddle both the Modernist and Georgian camps further confirms the Modernist project's connection to the past, as does Frost's broad appeal across all borders. Of this Lawrence Thompson, in his essay 'Robert Frost's Theory of Poetry', writes:

Poets so diverse in method as Ransom, MacLeish, and Hillyer revealed their obligation to Frost's poetry in their early work. And in 1936 an English edition of his *Selected Poems* was issued with introductory essays by a curious foursome: W. H. Auden, C. Day Lewis, Paul Engle, and Edwin Muir.<sup>97</sup>

Thompson explains the reason for this appeal was that his poetry 'from the beginning, caught fresh vitality without recourse to the fads and limitations of modern experimental techniques'.<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, Frost is seen by Robert Faggen in his edition of *The Cambridge Companion to Robert Frost* as being influential on later poets such as Richard Wilbur, Seamus Heaney and Paul Muldoon.<sup>99</sup> Frost's stylistic connection to Wordsworth is indicated by Faggen's remark that Frost 'cultivated an ingeniously sophisticated use of colloquial speech, giving new life to the ancient tradition of pastoral poetry'.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, in doing this, he 'realized what Wordsworth had proposed, "to adopt the very language of men"'.<sup>101</sup>

Gerber also notes Frost's links to the Wordsworthian tradition, as manifested in his similarities with the neo-romantic American poet William Cullen Bryant. Like Wordsworth, Bryant, 'looked upon nature with typical nineteenth-century romantic eyes, discerning in woods and sky an authentic healing power, a spiritual inspiration'.<sup>102</sup> In addition, both he and Frost used 'natural things as a springboard for poetry'.<sup>103</sup>

Gerber points out the similarities in the poetry of Frost and Bryant by placing examples of it side by side. He demonstrates that in ‘A Winter Piece’ and ‘Birches’ (by Bryant and Frost respectively) the treatment of the ice storm is remarkably similar. To do justice to Gerber’s comparison I will cite both poetic examples in full. Firstly, the section from ‘A Winter Piece’:

Come when the rains  
 Have glazed the snow, and clothed the trees with ice;  
 While the slant sun of February pours  
 Into the bowers a flood of light ...  
 Look! The massy trunks  
 Are cased in pure crystal, each light spray,  
 Nodding and tinkling in the breath of heaven,  
 Is studded with its trembling water-drops,  
 That stream with rainbow radiance as they move.  
 But round the parent stem the long low boughs  
 Bend, in a glittering ring, and arbors hide  
 The grassy floor. Oh! you might deem the spot  
 The spacious cavern of the virgin mine,  
 Deep in the womb of earth—where the gems grow,  
 And the diamonds put forth radiant rods and bud  
 With amethyst and topaz ...  
 But all shall pass away  
 With the next sun. From numberless vast trunks,  
 Loosened, the crashing ice shall make a sound  
 Like the far roar of rivers, and the eve  
 Shall close o’er the brown woods as it was wont.<sup>104</sup>

Now, from Frost’s ‘Birches’:

Often you must have seen them  
 Loaded with ice on a sunny winter morning  
 After a rain. They click upon themselves  
 As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored  
 As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.  
 Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells  
 Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust—  
 Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away  
 You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.  
 They are dragged to the withered bracken by the load,  
 And they seem not to break; though once they are bowed  
 So low for long, they never right themselves:  
 You may see their trunks arching in the woods  
 Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground  
 Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair



Before them over their heads to dry in the sun.<sup>105</sup>

Gerber notes in these passages the similarity of subject matter along with, ‘the similarity of treatment, with its mixture of realism and imagination, and the evocation in some instances of parallel imagery’.<sup>106</sup> He also notes Frost’s similarities to Henry David Thoreau. Thoreau was a significant influence on Frost whose favourite book was *Walden*:

Within a circle not so very much broader in diameter than Walden, Robert Frost discovered the world with which one typically associates him, most of what he created from its materials had been suggested by Thoreau long before: compare Thoreau’s description of the thaw in ‘Spring’ with Frost’s ‘A hillside Thaw’. The subjects are the same; so also are the author’s approaches.<sup>107</sup>

As is well known, Thoreau was a friend and “pupil” of Ralph Waldo Emerson who, like Wordsworth, was interested in the vitality of nature. Emerson, who had met Wordsworth, shared his opinion that poets were better able to understand and to commune with nature than the “ordinary” person could. As well as admiring Thoreau, Frost also admired Emerson. In ‘Frost as a New England Poet’, Lawrence Buell points out that Frost was particularly fond of Emerson’s poem ‘Monadnoc’. The following passage from the poem, Buell says, would have especially appealed to him for its ‘Wordsworthian commendation of peasant speech as the vital force behind good poetry’<sup>108</sup>:

Now in sordid weeds they sleep,  
 In dulness [sic] now their secret keep;  
 Yet, will you learn our ancient speech,  
 These the masters who can teach.  
 Fourscore or a hundred words  
 All their vocal muse affords;  
 But they turn them in a fashion  
 past clerks’ or statesmen’s art or passion.  
 I can spare the college bell,  
 And the learned lecture, well;  
 Spare the clergy and libraries,  
 Institutes and dictionaries,  
 For that hardy English root  
 Thrives here, unvalued, underfoot.  
 Rude poets of the tavern hearth,  
 Squandering your unquoted mirth,  
 Which keeps the ground and never soars  
 While Jake retorts and Reuben roars;

Scoff of yeoman strong and stark,  
 Goes like bullet to its mark;  
 While the solid curse and jeer  
 Never balk the waiting ear.<sup>109</sup>

As the Modernist experiment became the recognised literary orthodoxy, techniques of reading literature compatible to Modernist tenets developed. One such was the New Criticism, which was designed to analyse a poem in terms of its formal and intrinsic qualities (or “self-sufficiency”) as opposed to its biographical and historical context. Under such examination, much of Romantic poetry came to be seen as deficient. Perhaps in an effort to distance Wordsworth’s poetry from such criticism, certain critics sought to emphasise his empiricist aspects over that of the transcendentalist. I. A. Richards (whose writings are regarded as having established the foundations of New Criticism) in *Principles of Literary Criticism* allows for a favourable evaluation of the empiricist strain in Wordsworth. His view on the nature of the “poetic experience” makes possible a defence for realist poetry. Richards is critical of A. C. Bradley’s view of the “poetic experience” as being ‘an end in itself’ and ‘worth having on its own account’.<sup>110</sup> Richards sees this view as insisting upon ‘a severance between poetry and what, in opposition, may be called life’.<sup>111</sup> For Richards, poetry is primarily communicable: ‘It may be experienced by many different minds with only slight variations. That this should be possible is one of the conditions of its organization’.<sup>112</sup> Moreover, he warns that we must preserve poetry from contamination and from the ‘irruptions of personal particularities’.<sup>113</sup>

This view of poetry as unequivocal communication of experience, features predominantly in his ideas on what constitutes “bad art” (to use his term). He says that, ‘sometimes art is bad because communication is defective, the vehicle inoperative’.<sup>114</sup> To illustrate his point he cites a poem called ‘The Pool’:

Are you alive?  
 I touch you.  
 You quiver like a sea-fish.  
 I cover you with my net.  
 What are you—banded one?<sup>115</sup>

Of this, he says:

Not the brevity only of the vehicle, but its simplicity, makes it ineffective. The sacrifice of metre in free verse needs, in almost all cases, to be compensated by length. The loss of so much of the formal structure leads otherwise to tenuousness and ambiguity.<sup>116</sup>

He concludes that, 'the experience evoked in the reader is not sufficiently specific. [...] The reader here supplies too much of the poem'.<sup>117</sup>

Another poem that he cites to illustrate bad art is 'Friendship after Love' by Ella Wheeler Wilcox:

After the fierce midsummer all ablaze  
 Has burned itself to ashes, and expires  
 In the intensity of its own fires,  
 There come the mellow, mild, St. Martin days  
 Crowned with the calm of peace, but sad with haze.  
 So after Love has led us, till he tires  
 Of his own throes, and torments, and desires,  
 Comes large-eyed friendship: with a restful gaze,  
 He beckons us to follow, and across  
 Cool verdant vales we wander free from care.  
 Is it a touch of frost lies in the air?  
 Why are we haunted with a sense of loss?  
 We do not wish the pain back, or the heat;  
 And yet, and yet, these days are incomplete.<sup>118</sup>

In this instance, Richards's complaint is with the execution of the poem's main themes rather than its effectiveness as a vehicle of communication. In commending the poem's effectiveness as unequivocal communication Richards says that it 'reproduces the state of mind of the writer very exactly'.<sup>119</sup> He echoes the point in his *Practical Criticism* where, among his list of ten "difficulties" of criticism, the third and fourth deal with imagery and mnemonic irrelevances respectively. With regard to the former Richards says:

But images are erratic things; lively images aroused in one mind need have no similarity to the equally lively images stirred by the same line of poetry in another, and neither set need have anything to do with any images which may have existed in the poet's mind. Here is a troublesome source of critical deviations.<sup>120</sup>

Of mnemonic irrelevances he writes:

These are misleading effects of the reader's being reminded of some personal scene or adventure, erratic associations, the interference of emotional reverberations from a past which may have nothing to do with the poem.<sup>121</sup>

The first half of *Practical Criticism* details the results of a survey Richards conducts with his students. His method was to hand out sheets of poems (withholding their authorship) to these students and to ask them to write detailed reports on what they thought of these poems. The poems are numbered 1 to 13. Of poem 11, he received this response from one of its readers:

Outside of the mood, *I felt no real personal connection, no personal emotion*. If they had been my words winging on, or my closest friend's—if he had alluded to my death, or let me apply it so—I should have felt it more deeply (Richards's emphasis).<sup>122</sup>

Whilst Richards acknowledges the validity of such a response he is cautious as to its universal applicability:

The dangers are that the recollected feelings may overwhelm and distort the poem and that the reader may forget that the evocation of somewhat similar feelings is probably only a part of the poem's endeavour.<sup>123</sup>

His remedy to such responses is to encourage a Wordsworthian mode of poetic writing:

The only corrective in all cases must be a closer contact with reality, either directly, *through experience of actual things*, or mediately through other minds which are in closer contact. If good poetry owes its value in a large measure to the closeness of its contact with reality, it may thereby become a powerful weapon for breaking up unreal ideas and responses (Emphasis added).<sup>124</sup>

F. L. Lucas, in *Decline and Fall of the Romantic Ideal*, notes that romantic writing, rather than being engaged upon the “wonderful” or “mysterious” (as Pater, Watts-Dunton and others thought<sup>125</sup>), is replete with realist descriptions:

Hugo, it will be recalled, justified Romanticism as, [...] a return to reality; because real life perpetually mingles hornpipes and funerals to compose its ironic ‘Satires of Circumstance’. [...] What, again, could be more realistic than the low life in Scott's romances, or the carpets rising along the gusty floor in *The Eve of St Agnes*? [...] Similarly with the minute realism of Pre-Raphaelite painting. It was, in fact, this love of the Romantics for realistic *décor* and setting, furniture and local colour, that provided one source of Naturalism in the later novel.<sup>126</sup>

In addition, Lucas cites Byron's call for greater contact with reality: ‘The great object of life is sensation, to feel that we exist, even though in pain’.<sup>127</sup> Of this Lucas says, ‘that Byronic cry is the keynote of one Romantic career after another’.<sup>128</sup>

While it is true that Lucas recognises the importance of the “dream element” underpinning much of

Romanticism ('The Romantic is in fact, like Joseph, a "dreamer";<sup>129</sup> 'Romantic literature is a dream-picture of life',<sup>130</sup> 'Romanticism is not, in Goethe's phrase, "disease". It is intoxicated dreaming'.<sup>131</sup>), he emphasises the reality upon which this dreaming is grounded. Indeed, 'dreams themselves can be at times only too realistic',<sup>132</sup> and, like a nightmare, 'be vividly realistic at moments'.<sup>133</sup> Lucas concludes:

Romanticism is only partly opposed to Realism; its true enemy is the hackneyed and humdrum present, [...] Snatches of realism remain very welcome to Romantic sensationalists, [...] Thus Romantic diction shows fondness not only for the romantically remote, in place and time, but also for the realistic.<sup>134</sup>

With regard to Wordsworth in particular Lucas writes: 'While Coleridge, Keats, and Morris revived words long and hoary and moss-grown, Wordsworth, on the contrary, copied the actual speech of "huts where poor men lie"'.<sup>135</sup> Lucas illustrates this with some lines from Wordsworth. The lines are from his *The Blind Highland Boy*:

A Household Tub, like one of those,  
Which women use to wash their clothes<sup>136</sup>

Lucas notes that for Coleridge this description may have been a little too trite thus prompting him to persuade Wordsworth to change them to:

A shell of ample size, and light  
As the pearly car of Amphitrite,  
That sportive dolphins drew.<sup>137</sup>

Consequently, Wordsworth's colourless and empiricist observation is transformed into language that is more vibrant.

In addition, Lucas is critical of the transcendentalist strain in Coleridge's poetic criticism because 'transcendental mysticism may not be altogether helpful in building critical theories'.<sup>138</sup> And of Coleridge's distinction between Fancy and Imagination Lucas says, 'It still seems to me, then, unnecessary to assume two distinct "faculties", Fancy and Imagination'.<sup>139</sup> And:

I doubt if a distinction often so debatable and terms so hazy can in any case be of much practical use. Coleridge's whole theory seems to me an example of that barren type of classification so dear to those who believe that if they can invent a few transcendental pigeon-

holes, the Holy Spirit of poetry will descend to nest in them.<sup>140</sup>

Lucas also regards as nonsense Coleridge and Wordsworth's dispute over poetic diction, and he is critical of its celebration by critics as, 'the most magnificent piece of critical writing in the English language'.<sup>141</sup> He writes: 'And it seems to me a poor service to the young, especially, to hold up these pages of rambling as a masterpiece of hard thought'.<sup>142</sup> He concludes by saying:

Coleridge suits admirably those persons with religious instincts who want not critics but mystagogues; who care not for the truth of what they are told, but for its tune.<sup>143</sup>

F. R. Leavis was also critical of transcendentalism—at least with regard to its potential to damage Wordsworth's reputation in light of New Criticism. In *Revaluation* he steers Wordsworth away from accusations of mysticism towards the more grounded practice of liberal humanism:

Wordsworth, we know, is the 'poet of Nature', and the associations of the term "Nature" here are unfortunate, suggesting as it does a vaguely pantheistic religion-substitute. [...] But Wordsworth himself, [...] proposes something decidedly different when he stresses 'the Mind of Man' as 'My haunt, and the main region of my song'.<sup>144</sup>

Leavis regards him as so far removed from the mystical life that his poetry can act as instruction to daily commonplace living:

[Wordsworth] stands for a distinctly human naturalness; [...] A poet who can bring home to us the possibility of such a naturalness should today be found important. In Wordsworth's poetry the possibility is offered us realized—realized in a mode central and compelling enough to enforce the bearing of poetry upon life, the significance of this poetry for actual living.<sup>145</sup>

That his poetry should enable this derives from his early upbringing, 'in a congenial social environment, with its wholesome simple pieties and the traditional sanity of its moral culture, which to him were nature'.<sup>146</sup> This early nurturing was able to produce a man who 'was, on the showing of his poetry and everything else, normally and robustly human'.<sup>147</sup> Leavis says that Wordsworth's reputation as a mystic and the 'current valuation' of his greatness is due largely to the 'visionary moments' and 'spots of time'.<sup>148</sup> He acknowledges that Wordsworth, himself, placed value on the visionary aspect of his verse but thinks it important to examine the significance he assigns to it. Leavis then cites the following from Book II of *The Prelude*:

and at that time  
 Have felt whate'er there is of power in sound  
 To breathe an elevated mood, by form  
 Or image unprofaned; and I would stand,  
 Beneath some rock, listening to sounds that are  
 The ghostly language of the ancient earth,  
 Or make their dim abode in distant winds.  
 Thence did I drink the visionary power.  
 I deem not profitless these fleeting moods  
 Of shadowy exultation: not for this,  
 That they are kindred to our purer mind  
 And intellectual life; but that the soul,  
 Remembering how she felt, but what she felt  
 Remembering not, retains an obscure sense  
 Of possible sublimity, to which,  
 With growing faculties she doth aspire,  
 With faculties still growing, feeling still  
 That whatsoever point they gain, they still  
 Have something to pursue.<sup>149</sup>

Leavis, while admitting that the passage is philosophically vague, nevertheless, tries to recuperate it from any transcendentalist taint by drawing our attention away from its vagueness and towards the ‘sober verse’ in which these ineffable experiences are presented.<sup>150</sup> Moreover, having glossed over this transcendentalism Leavis refers to the eighteenth-century poet Mark Akenside to root Wordsworth in a pre-transcendentalist tradition:

How strong are the eighteenth-century affinities to this verse Mr. Nichol Smith brings out when, in his introduction to *The Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse*, he quotes a piece of Akenside and suggests rightly that it might have passed for Wordsworth’s. Wordsworth’s roots were deep in the eighteenth century. To say this is to lay the stress again—where it ought to rest—on his essential sanity and normality.<sup>151</sup>

This placing of aesthetic value upon the empirical and humanistic aspects of Wordsworth is also reflected in Raymond Williams’s *Culture and Society 1780-1950*, where his positive valuation of the socially concerned aspect of Wordsworth is worth noting. In this book he writes:

We may usefully remind ourselves that Wordsworth wrote political pamphlets [and that this activity] essentially related to a large part of the experience from which the poetry itself was made.<sup>152</sup>

Moreover, he sees the new ideas of Romanticism emanating from ‘a larger system of ideas in European

thinking as a whole'.<sup>153</sup> For Williams, this system of ideas is essentially humanistic for the reason that the influence of such humanists as Rousseau and Schiller can be traced back to it.<sup>154</sup> In addition, he says that, 'In England, these ideas that we call Romantic have to be understood in terms of the problems in experience with which they were advanced to deal'.<sup>155</sup> Even the Wordsworthian notion of the poet as privileged seer and conduit of special insights to the masses is seen by Williams as essentially an aspect of Platonic moralism in that it can be traced back to the Socratic definition of the poet as outlined in Plato's *Ion*.<sup>156</sup> This moralism is the main function of Wordsworth's poetry and Williams draws our attention to a passage in the 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* where Wordsworth attacks those,

who talk of Poetry as of a matter of amusement and idle pleasure; who will converse with us as gravely about a *taste* for poetry, as they express it, as if it were a thing as indifferent as a taste for rope-dancing, or Frontiniac or Sherry.<sup>157</sup>

Williams sees the full implications of Wordsworth's ideas on the role of the poet as 'deeply and generally humane'.<sup>158</sup>

Two other critics who see in Wordsworth's poetic output a social and moral agenda are T. S. Eliot and Nicholas Roe. Recognition of this can be seen in Eliot's lecture 'Wordsworth and Coleridge', which appears in his *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*. Eliot sees the humanism of Wordsworth as the primary purpose of his poetry. He cites an 1801 letter that Wordsworth wrote to Charles James Fox (accompanying a copy of *Lyrical Ballads*) expressing Wordsworth's social concerns:

Recently by the spreading of manufactures through every part of the country, by the heavy taxes upon postage, by workhouses, houses of industry, and the invention of soup shops, etc., superadded to the increasing disproportion between the price of labour and that of the necessaries of life, the bonds of domestic feeling among the poor, as far as influence of these things has extended, have been weakened, and in innumerable instances entirely destroyed.<sup>159</sup>

Of this Eliot says:

Wordsworth was not merely taking advantage of an opportunity to lecture a rather disreputable statesman and rouse him to useful activity; he was seriously explaining the content and purpose of his poems: without this preamble Mr. Fox could hardly be expected to make head or tail of the Idiot Boy or the sailor's parrot. You may say that this public spirit is irrelevant to Wordsworth's greatest poems; nevertheless I believe that you will understand a great poem like



*Resolution and Independence* better if you understand the purposes and social passions which animated its author; and unless you understand these you will misread Wordsworth's literary criticism entirely.<sup>160</sup>

In *The Politics of Nature*, Roe suggests that Wordsworth's humanistic agenda was to some extent born out of the failure of the French Revolution to deliver its utopian promises. The disappointment resulting from this failure had negative consequences for the role of the transcendental in poetry because 'after the revolutionary Terror of 1793-4, nature could never again answer as a transcendent ideal that entirely "displaced" history'.<sup>161</sup> Consequently, 'any appeal to nature as a transcendent category would reflect upon the moral, social and historical realities of the day'.<sup>162</sup> In response to Marjorie Levinson's claim that Wordsworth's greatest poetry excludes sociopolitical themes that had occupied him less than a decade earlier, Roe writes:

Far from "erasing" sociopolitical contexts, the philosophical poetry written by Wordsworth in spring and summer 1798 seeks to affirm that 'nature and the language of the sense' may inform 'moral being' to the good of society as a whole. [...] The strength of this poetry is not its *denial* of history, but the gravity with which it answers 'What man has made of man' with 'acts / Of kindness and love'.<sup>163</sup>

Moreover, Roe links the revolutionary events of the 1790s to the 'childish poetry of experience' as evidenced particularly in Wordsworth's 'We are Seven' and 'Anecdote for Fathers'.<sup>164</sup> What links these poems to the revolutionary events of the 1790s is that they are the result of Wordsworth's response to 'the British terror directed at the reformists from 1792 onwards: the spy network, the treason trials, the threat of exile or execution "for opinion"'.<sup>165</sup> This repression 'initiated Wordsworth's quest for an inviolable source of renewal' that was to be found principally in 'the experience of the eternal unfallen Adam, the child, and ultimately in the glimpses of his own past life that constitute the 'spots of time' in *The Prelude*'.<sup>166</sup>

With particular reference to 'We are Seven' and 'Anecdote for Fathers', Roe says:

As the children of 'We are Seven' and 'Anecdote for Fathers' had set the adult to school, so Wordsworth was drawn to the childhood horizon of his own life as a possible source for an understanding of his own more recent experiences.<sup>167</sup>

After an analysis of the bird-snatching episode in the earlier part of *The Prelude*, Roe concludes that the,

memory of guilt associated with bird-trapping overlaps with Wordsworth's later involvement in the events of the French Revolution. The two memories are simultaneous, merged together to imply a pattern in childhood and adult life in which overwhelming expectation is self-deceiving, self-betrayed. And the ultimate cause of that betrayal is the tragic delinquency of human nature. [...] For Wordsworth in *The Prelude* this self-awareness was the melancholy lesson of revolution, although it generated his affirmative realisation that the histories of personal and political dislocation may be reconciled in an imaginative continuity.<sup>168</sup>

For Roe, Wordsworth's revolutionary experience 'informs the imaginative radicalism of his greatest poetry written between 1798 and 1805'.<sup>169</sup> It is the word "experience" as used here that locates Wordsworth's revolutionary poetry further within the empiricist camp.

M. H. Abrams sees Wordsworth in transcendentalist terms. Nevertheless, Abrams's argument that there was a breach between classicism and romanticism that allowed for a more personal poetic utterance does not preclude the importance of the empiricist strain. In *The Mirror and the Lamp*, he says that before the Romantics poetry was not an end in itself but had some didactic purpose, one of the foremost being to entertain the reader through the imitation of nature.<sup>170</sup> After this,

the stress was shifted more and more to the poet's natural genius, creative imagination, and emotional spontaneity, [...]. As a result the audience gradually receded into the background, giving place to the poet himself, and his own mental powers and emotional needs, as the predominant cause and even the end and test of art.<sup>171</sup>

This predominance of the poet's concerns Abrams calls the "expressive theory" which he defines as:

The internal made external, resulting from a creative process operating under the impulse of feeling, and embodying the combined product of the poet's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings.<sup>172</sup>

This had important implications for poetic language:

Of the elements constituting a poem, the element of diction, especially figures of speech, becomes primary; and the burning question is, whether these are the natural utterance of emotion and imagination or the deliberate aping of poetic conventions. The first test any poem must pass is no longer, 'Is it true to nature?' or 'Is it appropriate to the requirements either of the best judges or the generality of mankind?' but a criterion looking in a different direction; namely, 'Is it sincere? Is it genuine? Does it match the intention, the feeling, and the actual state of mind of the poet while composing?'<sup>173</sup>

For the poet's feelings to be expressed adequately poetic language had to become more "true to life", more

concordant with the facts of emotional experience. Poetic language that formerly relied upon convention for its affects was deemed too generalised and unspecific for this new task.

The “expressive theory” requires poetic language to function as mimesis of the poet’s thinking processes rather than mimesis of nature. This new emphasis upon the poet enables the poetic work to give ‘the reader insights into the mind and heart of the poet himself.’<sup>174</sup> The value of a poem, therefore, is contingent upon the sincerity of the poet’s utterances and less upon the poem’s effect upon the audience:

There is, in fact, something singularly fatal to the audience in the romantic point of view. Or, in terms of historical causes, it might be conjectured that the disappearance of a homogenous and discriminating reading public fostered a criticism which on principle diminished the importance of the audience as a determinant of poetry and poetic value.<sup>175</sup>

To illustrate this poet-centred conceptualisation of poetry Abrams cites Coleridge from his 1818 lecture ‘On Poesy or Art’:

[Art is] the mediatrix between, and reconciler of, nature and man. It is, therefore, the power of humanising nature, of infusing the thoughts and passions of man into everything which is the object of his contemplation.<sup>176</sup>

However, it should not be assumed here that the presentation of an “actual state of mind” is incompatible with the empiricist strain in Romantic writing.

With particular regard to Wordsworth, Wordsworth’s statement that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings is viewed by Abrams as indicating that the locus of poetic inspiration is within, rather than without the poet. The result of this is that,

the focus of attention is upon the relation of the elements of the work to his [the poet’s] state of mind, and the suggestion, underlined by the word ‘spontaneous’, is that the dynamics of the overflow are inherent in the poet and, perhaps, not within his deliberate control.<sup>177</sup>

Here Abrams has “mystified” the poetic process as recounted by Wordsworth. However, as I mentioned in chapter one, there are serious doubts as to the reliability of Wordsworth’s explanations regarding his poetic *modus operandi*. From that chapter it will be recalled that on some occasions he knowingly appropriated phrases from his sister’s journals and inserted them into his poetry. It should be noted that Dorothy made no

claims to poetic inspiration when she composed these phrases; she merely recorded what she had seen on country rambles into her journals. As far as it is possible to discern these descriptions had no other inspiration than the objects that they describe. Dorothy certainly did not experience powerful feelings, spontaneous or otherwise, at the time of composition; therefore it is unlikely that these phrases are imbued with anything transcendental. In light of this fact, it is odd that these descriptive phrases should have been so readily appropriated by Wordsworth given his supposed criteria for poetry as being the consequence of a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.

Abrams cites the following statement by Wordsworth and argues that it is not, despite appearances, a confirmation for the empiricist view of Wordsworth: ‘I have at all times endeavoured to look steadily at my subject’.<sup>178</sup> Of this he writes:

This statement is often taken to be no more than a recommendation for objective accuracy and particularity. Wordsworth’s ‘subject’, however, is not merely the particularised object of the sense, any more than it is in the neo-classic ideal.<sup>179</sup>

In addition, he quotes Wordsworth’s preface to *Poems* (1815) to further the case:

Throughout, objects ... derive their influence 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.<sup>180</sup>

The key phrase here is: ‘bestowed upon them’. As I mentioned in chapter two, with regard to his passive stance in the face of nature, Wordsworth did not merely take the objects of nature as he found them and present them precisely as such. To a certain extent, he “modified” them. In that chapter, I discussed in particular Wordsworth’s passivity in relation to the use of the word “create” in *The Prelude*, arguing that it would be erroneous on the bases of the existence of this word in that poem to assume that Wordsworth did not take a passive stance. I mentioned that his use of the word was not to be confused with the common understanding of it: to make or cause to be or to become. Rather, in *The Prelude* he is calling for something more modest. I discuss lines 254-60 of Book II and conclude that the child rather than unreceptively perceiving the world around him is able to “create” or make “present” what would otherwise be imprecise

and unstructured incoming sense data. This “creative activity” was seen to function as a means to a more accurate perception of inert matter. Consequently, nothing new is created and reality is not proved untrustworthy. All that occurs is that objects have had ‘bestowed upon them’ a clearer sense of their actuality.<sup>181</sup>

In order to illustrate the idea of an object that has had the mind of the poet at work on it Abrams cites Hazlitt’s essay ‘On Poetry in General’. In this essay, Hazlitt quotes the following from *Cymbeline*, Act II:

... The flame o’ th’ taper  
Bows toward her, and would under-peep her lids  
To see the enclosed lights ...<sup>182</sup>

Of this Hazlitt says, ‘This passionate interpretation of the motion of the flame to accord with the speaker’s own feelings, is true poetry’.<sup>183</sup> But is it really? Yes, if a sort of defamiliarization were the sole measure of what poetry should be. Abrams says of Coleridge that he was most concerned, ‘with the problem of how the poetic mind acts to modify or transform the materials of sense without violating truth to nature’.<sup>184</sup> Not ‘violating truth to nature’ seems a high price to pay if it can only reward us with lines such as those just quoted from *Cymbeline*. Coleridge’s call to “animate” the inanimate surely only draws more attention upon the object, however cleverly executed.

René Wellek in ‘Romanticism Re-examined’ takes a largely empiricist view of Wordsworth. Transcendentalism in Wordsworth cannot be taken at face value if the following statement by Wellek is considered:

What is called romanticism in England and on the Continent is not the literal vision of the mystics but the concern for the reconciliation of subject and object, man and nature, [...] <sup>185</sup>

Wellek then cites Paul de Man’s analysis of Rousseau, Wordsworth, and Hölderlin’s writings about the Swiss mountains in de Man’s essay ‘Structure intentionnelle de l’image romantique’ to demonstrate ‘the peculiar paradox of the romantic poet’s nostalgia for the object’.<sup>186</sup> De Man writes:

Sometimes romantic thought and poetry seem about to surrender so completely to the nostalgia for the object that it becomes difficult to distinguish between object and image, between

imagination and perception, between expressive and constitutive language and mimetic and literal language.<sup>187</sup>

Wellek says:

De Man thinks of passages in Wordsworth and Goethe, Baudelaire and Rimbaud, where the 'vision becomes almost a presence, a real landscape'. But he argues that even the most extreme believer in the magic of language, Mallarmé, never doubted the intrinsic ontological primacy of the natural and earthly object. But the attempt of language to approach the ontological status of the object fails. Contradicting his statement a few pages before, de Man concludes that we have misunderstood these poets if we call them "pantheists" while 'they are probably the first writers who, within the Western Hellenic and Christian tradition, have in their poetic language questioned the ontological primacy of the sensible object'. Though de Man seems to waver on the issue of the romantics' precise view of nature, he strongly corroborates our central theme. The reconciliation of art and nature, language and reality *is* the romantic ambition.<sup>188</sup>

In his essay 'The Drunken Boat: The Revolutionary Element in Romanticism', Northrop Frye concurs with much of Abrams's view of Romanticism. With regard to the "internal made external", Frye argues that because of Rousseau's influence there was a shift away from thinking of God as the ultimate creative force towards the idea that man now occupied this role:

The basis of civilisation is now the creative power of man; its model is the human vision revealed in the arts. [...] the sources of creative power are now located in the mind's internal heaven, the external world being seen as a mirror reflecting and making visible what is within.<sup>189</sup>

Therefore, in Romantic poetry, 'the emphasis is not on what we have called sense, but on the constructive power of the mind, where reality is brought into being by experience'.<sup>190</sup> Frye says that one of the results of this is that,

the Romantic poets sought to defy external reality by creating a uniformity of tone and mood. [...] Such a poetic technique is, psychologically, akin to magic, which also aims at bringing spiritual forces into reality through concentration on a certain type of experience.<sup>191</sup>

For these reasons,

Romanticism is difficult to adapt to the novel, which demands an empirical and observant attitude; its contribution to prose fiction is rather, appropriately enough, a form of romance. In the romance the characters tend to become psychological projections, and the setting a period in a past just remote enough to be re-created rather than empirically studied.<sup>192</sup>

Frye adds:

The poet has always been supposed to be imitating nature, but if the model of his creative power is in his mind, the nature that he is to imitate is now inside him, even if it is also outside.<sup>193</sup>

Nevertheless, with particular regard to Wordsworth, Frye does acknowledge that he is still informed by much of pre-Rousseauian ideas of ‘nature as an objective order’ and nature as landscape.<sup>194</sup>

In *From Classic to Romantic*, W. J. Bate views the Romantics from an empirical perspective. He notes:

Critics of the later eighteenth century frequently insisted that resemblances must never be too exact in art. [...] Similarly, in poetry, metaphors must not be too close, nor descriptions too detailed.<sup>195</sup>

Bate says the reason for this is that:

Much of aesthetic pleasure, said Adam Smith, is determined by the very ‘degree of disparity between the imitating and the imitated object’: imitation fruits and flowers, for example, please far less than a mere picture of them, and painted statues have less appeal than unpainted ones. By summoning up an active response of imagination and feeling, moreover, an augmented vitality of realization is made possible.<sup>196</sup>

As we have seen, Wordsworth departed from this precept drastically. Bate also makes another important observation:

Classicism does not subscribe, therefore, to the belief that man’s feelings and responses are themselves inherently good—a belief which was to underlie at least some romantic assumptions towards the close of the eighteenth century.<sup>197</sup>

Bate further says that if art is to give expression to the subjective emotions of the poet then it becomes ‘difficult to draw the line between what is valid and what is not’.<sup>198</sup> The assumption that the personal poetic utterance is itself of artistic value is accepted unquestioningly by both Abrams and Frye. As we also saw, such a stance is able to justify empiricist writing by arguing that the expressive outpourings of the poet must necessarily particularise and be unambiguous in order for their authenticity to be recognised. However, Bate says that ‘Subjectivism in one form or another is perhaps an inevitable companion of extreme empiricism’.<sup>199</sup> In addition, he sees this need to particularise as growing out of British associationism, which ‘exerted a far stronger immediate influence on criticism by its emphasis on the particular’.<sup>200</sup>

We have also seen how Wordsworth's attraction to the objective world in part grew out of his understanding of Hartley's associationism. Bate uses the term 'sympathy with the inanimate' to express this sort of identification with nature.<sup>201</sup> He observes this identification with objects operating in Keats who 'could almost project himself into a moving billiard-ball'.<sup>202</sup> Moreover, Bate notices that even with regard to such abstract concepts as "feeling" and "thinking" Wordsworth cannot help but amalgamate them with perception: 'Wordsworth tended to apply the term "feeling" to a state of comparatively vivid awareness, and "thought" to a later and vestigial "representative" of that awareness'.<sup>203</sup> Of such a process, 'perceptions and ideas are capable of becoming melted, so to speak, into this crucible of imaginative and emotional response'.<sup>204</sup> Yet, the imagination that is alluded to is, 'hardly to be confused with revery [sic] or rank illusion'.<sup>205</sup> The term "imagination" was traditionally connected 'with direct sensory experience' and was applicable by many romantic critics 'to almost the entire associational capacity of the mind, when it is employed in any non-abstract endeavour'.<sup>206</sup> Moreover, 'the expression and character of the particular itself might thus become an objective goal for imaginative grasping'.<sup>207</sup> Bate adds, 'If English romantic criticism was cognizant of the universal, it tended to regard the universal as attainable only through the particular'.<sup>208</sup> Most early-nineteenth-century critics used the term,

as means of implying a broader and more intense awareness and employment of experience than can be achieved by analytical enumeration or by the artificial postulation of separate categories and concepts.<sup>209</sup>

These critics thought they had, 'found an appropriate term in "imagination"; [...] to postulate a faculty which is at all times acutely aware, [...] of the empirically concrete'.<sup>210</sup> The conversion of abstract ideas into sense impressions is, Bate says, a British assumption prevalent in English romantic criticism.<sup>211</sup>

Harold Bloom in *The Visionary Company* similarly takes an empiricist reading of Wordsworth. Bloom emphasises the fact that far from being caught up in the transcendental, for Wordsworth 'the earth is enough'.<sup>212</sup> Wordsworth's imagination is, 'like Wallace Stevens' *Angel Surrounded by Paysans*: not an angel of heaven, but the necessary angel of earth, as, in its sight, we see the earth again, but cleared'.<sup>213</sup>



This lucidity is, according to Bloom, a result of alert perception:

Wordsworth writes his poetry as a commentary upon Nature. [...] Ordinary perception is then a mode of salvation for Wordsworth, provided that we are awake fully to what we see.<sup>214</sup>

For Wordsworth, this sort of perception enables him to discover more readily the true reality beneath surface objects:

For the visual surfaces of natural reality are mutable, and Wordsworth desperately quests for a natural reality that can never pass away. That reality, for him, lies just within natural appearance, and the eye made generously passive by Nature's generosity is able to trace the lineaments of that final reality.<sup>215</sup>

This desire for immutable reality grows out of his love of nature 'for its own sake alone'.<sup>216</sup> Nature gives 'beauty to the poet's mind, again only for that mind's sake'.<sup>217</sup> This relationship between mind and matter is 'exquisitely fitted, each to the other'.<sup>218</sup>

Turning to Bloom's analysis of 'Tintern Abbey', we see his further de-emphasising the transcendental.

He quotes the following passage from the poem:

that blessed mood,  
 In which the burthen of the mystery,  
 In which the heavy and the weary weight  
 Of all this unintelligible world,  
 Is lightened:—that serene and blessed mood,  
 In which the affectations gently lead us on, —  
 Until the breath of this corporeal frame  
 And even the motions of our human blood  
 Almost suspended, we are laid asleep  
 In body, and become a living soul:  
 While with an eye made quiet by the power  
 Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,  
 We see into the life of things.<sup>219</sup>

Of this he says:

This is not mysticism but, rather, a state of aesthetic contemplation. All contemplation of objects except the aesthetic is essentially practical, and so directed toward personal ends. The poet's genius frees contemplation from the drive of the will, and consequently the poet is able to see with a quiet eye.<sup>220</sup>

He quotes another passage from the same poem:

a sense sublime  
 Of something far more deeply interfused,  
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
 And the round ocean and the living air,  
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:  
 A motion and a spirit, that impels  
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought  
 And rolls through all things.<sup>221</sup>

He writes:

It is a laziness of our imaginations that tempts us to call this vision mystical, for the mystical is finally incommunicable and Wordsworth desires to be a man talking to men about matters of common experience. The emphasis in *Tintern Abbey* is on things seen and things remembered, on the light of sense, not on the invisible world.<sup>222</sup>

He further demystifies Wordsworth (whilst at the same time illustrating the last point: ‘... things remembered, on the light of sense, not on the invisible world’) in his analysis of the following from *The*

*Prelude*:

in such strength  
 Of usurpation, when the light of sense  
 Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed  
 The invisible world, doth greatness make abode,  
 There harbours; whether we be young or old,  
 Our destiny our being’s heart and home,  
 Is with infinitude, and only there;  
 With hope it is, hope that can never die,  
 Effort, and expectation, and desire,  
 And something evermore about to be.<sup>223</sup>

Bloom writes:

Even here, in a passage bordering the realm of the mystical, the poet’s emphasis is naturalistic. Imagination usurps the place of the baffled mind, and the light of sense momentarily goes out: that is, the object world is not perceived. *But*, and this proviso is the poet’s, the flash of greater illumination that suddenly reveals the invisible world is itself due to the flicking light of sense.<sup>224</sup>

Here Bloom demonstrates clearly that any semblance of a transcendental aspect to Wordsworth’s poetry is ultimately dependent upon sense impressions. Bloom’s judgement on Wordsworth’s theory of poetry is that it is ‘a theory of description’.<sup>225</sup> He adds:

The language of description is employed by him both for the external world and for himself; if he will not analyse Nature, still less will he care to analyse man. The peculiar *nakedness* of Wordsworth's poetry, its strong sense of being alone with the visible universe, with no myth of figure to mediate between ego and phenomena, is to a surprisingly large extent not so much a result of history as it is of Wordsworth's personal faith in the reality of the body of Nature.<sup>226</sup>

Philip Hobsbaum, who was a major influence on late twentieth-century British poetry, takes an empiricist stance on Wordsworth. In his *Tradition and Experiment in English Poetry*, he notes Wordsworth's 'unwavering gaze'<sup>227</sup> and compares the 1805 and 1850 versions of *The Prelude*—favouring the 1805 version because it 'exhibits a preternatural keenness of eye and ear'.<sup>228</sup> He cites the following samples from this version:

and lo!  
The Moon stood naked in the heavens, at height  
Immense above my head ...

Far, far beyond, the vapours shot themselves,  
In headlands, tongues, and promontory shapes,  
Into the sea, the real sea ...

Meanwhile, the Moon looked down upon this show  
In single glory, and we stood, the mist  
Touching our very feet ...<sup>229</sup>

He says of these lines: 'Here the concrete particulars of the summer night assume startling urgency as they impinge upon the young traveller's mind'.<sup>230</sup> However, in the later *Prelude* these particulars, for Hobsbaum, have been somewhat muted and are less visually plausible:

The 'vapours' of the early version are in flux—they 'shot themselves / In headlands, tongues and promontory shapes'. But, in the later version, they appear as '*solid vapours stretched / In headlands, tongues ...*'. Now this is a complete impossibility, since the vapours cannot be solid, and, if they were, could not be stretched—and, if they *could* be stretched, they would hardly stretch into forms as various as those of headlands, tongues and promontories. Such images as these could only be appropriate to something flexuous and evanescent.<sup>231</sup>

Here, Hobsbaum's criticism rests on his view of poetic language as being primarily for the purposes of accurate visual description. This sort of criticism also extends to the following lines from the 1805 *Prelude*:

The full-orbed Moon,  
Who, from her sovereign elevation, gazed

Upon the billowy ocean ...<sup>232</sup>

For Hobsbaum these lines ‘give us no idea of how things looked to the young Wordsworth’.<sup>233</sup> He adds:

These verbal points are not small ones, even in the local context of a single episode; and, multiplied as they are throughout the revised *Prelude*, they serve to blur and dissipate the sharp impressions of the original.<sup>234</sup>

These criticisms contrast with his favourable comments on the emphasis of observation evident in the Discharged Soldier passage in Book IV of the 1805 *Prelude*:

[The passage’s] sharp, detached details never lapse into catalogue: what fuses them together is the sense of man’s vulnerability and loneliness. And it is Wordsworth’s greatness that he can make so static a mode as description—description, moreover, of a stationary object—develop in the manner of narrative. This effect of development is partly owing to the poet’s sense of the beholder: we are keenly aware of Wordsworth himself watching the old man.<sup>235</sup>

With regard to ‘The Ruined Cottage’, Hobsbaum notes that it shares with *The Prelude* ‘the accurate observation of detail’.<sup>236</sup> So much so, that of the following passage from ‘The Ruined Cottage’,

At the door arrived  
I knocked, and when I entered with the hope  
Of usual greeting Margaret looked at me  
A little while, then turned her head away  
Speechless, and sitting down upon a chair  
Wept bitterly ...<sup>237</sup>

Hobsbaum can say, ‘The action is as graphic as that of a stage play’.<sup>238</sup> Of the returning visit of the pedlar to the cottage in ‘the wane of summer’, when the cottage displays signs of decay, Hobsbaum notes that the detail is ‘sharp and accurate’.<sup>239</sup> Also the lines,

And, stranger, here  
In sickness she remained, and here she died,  
Last human tenant of these walls.<sup>240</sup>

prompt Hobsbaum to write: ‘The graphic simplicity is characteristic and supreme: no embellishing metaphors are required here. The observed facts speak for themselves [...]’.<sup>241</sup> Hobsbaum concludes his analysis of Wordsworth’s poetry by complimenting it for its “novelistic” character and dependency upon experience:

The poems I have discussed brought something new to literature. They show, for instance, a handling of narrative vastly superior to anything since Shakespeare and the medieval poets; and an aspect of narrative unknown even to these great narrators—the concentration upon a single experience until all its implications are drawn out of it. In many respects, these poems unite the virtues of prose and poetry—clarity and definition on the one hand, emotional heightening and dramatic rhythm on the other.<sup>242</sup>

Jerome McGann, in *The Romantic Ideology*, also takes an empiricist approach to Romantic poetry:

Romantic poetry, “reflects”—and reflects upon—those individual and social forms of human life which are available to the artist’s observation, and which are themselves a part of his process of observation.<sup>243</sup>

He also praises Raymond Williams’s liberal humanist criticism for its conformity to Heinrich Heine’s criticism, which refuses to ‘set the ideological materials of poetry free from their concrete historical environments.’<sup>244</sup> McGann writes:

Williams is an important critic partly because he understands the central place which historical and ideological facts occupy in the experience we call poetry and the products we call poems. Much of his strength as a critic lies in his ability to save those materials for poetry without at the same time transforming them into abstract or trans-historical ideas.<sup>245</sup>

McGann is also cognisant of the material and sensuous aspects of Wordsworth’s ‘The Ruined Cottage’ where ‘Armytage, poet, and reader all fix their attention on a gathering mass of sensory, and chiefly vegetable, details’.<sup>246</sup> And in the ‘Intimations Ode’ McGann notes Wordsworth’s emotional dependency upon the object:

The poem’s problem emerges when Wordsworth recognises that his sense of a universal joy—his insight into the life of things—has resulted in his loss of the concrete and particular. [...] These things are gone, and Wordsworth fears—despite his own reiterated convictions—that their departure will signal the passage of ‘the glory and the dream’ as well.<sup>247</sup>

As can be seen from the preceding digest of poetic criticism, the empiricism favoured by Wordsworth as his *modus operandi* has been acknowledged by most of the major literary critics of the twentieth century, even those who principally view him in transcendentalist terms. I would now like to look at the artistic ramifications of this Wordsworthian influence upon late twentieth-century poetry. One of the consequences of this influence upon poetic practice during that period is that it allowed for an anti-connotative view of

poetic language to become predominant. This predominance was facilitated in Britain in the late 1950s by the rise of the poetic coterie known as The Movement. Similarly to the antipathetic reactions of early modernist critics to the “excesses” of later Romantic poetry, the Movement reacted against what they considered the extreme “romanticism” of the New Apocalypse poets of the 1940s.

The Movement critics were mostly critical of the non-empiricist characteristics of New Apocalypse poetry. Referring to the New Apocalypse period, Robert Conquest, in his Introduction to his influential anthology of Movement poetry, *New Lines*, says that ‘the debilitating theory that poetry *must* be metaphorical gained wide acceptance’.<sup>248</sup> This statement clearly signals Conquest’s anti-connotative view of poetic language. In contrast to New Apocalypse poetry, Conquest welcomes the emergence in the late 1940s and early 1950s of poets who, ‘have been progressing from different viewpoints to a certain unity of approach, a new and healthy general standpoint’.<sup>249</sup> The poetry that these poets write is, ‘free from both mystical and logical compulsions and—like modern philosophy—it is empirical in its attitude’.<sup>250</sup> Moreover, like so much poetry motivated by an empiricist aesthetic, it values clear meanings and there is a ‘refusal to abandon a rational structure and comprehensible language’.<sup>251</sup> This poetry has influences from W. B. Yeats, Robert Graves and Edwin Muir, especially with regard to visual perception:

It is a question not merely of technical influence, but of the example of these poets’ unabashed and untheoretical eye to the visual and emotional events, which their sometimes eccentric views cannot obscure.<sup>252</sup>

The Movement spawned empiricist poets such as Philip Larkin, Kingsley Amis, D. J. Enright, John Wain, Elizabeth Jennings, Donald Davie and Ted Hughes.

Philip Hobsbaum was also closely linked with the Movement. While studying at Cambridge University, Hobsbaum (a former student of F. R. Leavis) was introduced to the poetry of Larkin by Thom Gunn who had recently graduated from Trinity College. He also met Peter Redgrove at Cambridge who urged him to start a poetry group, which he did in his London flat in late 1955. This gathering became known as The Group and attendees at these meetings included Ted Hughes, George MacBeth, Peter Porter, Peter

Redgrove, Edward Lucie-Smith, Rosemary Joseph, Julian Cooper, and Martin Bell. When Hobsbaum had to leave London in 1959 to study for a PhD at Sheffield University under William Empson, Lucie-Smith took over running the London meetings until its disbandment in 1965, due to ever increasing numbers that made the original purpose of the meetings difficult to accomplish. Meanwhile, Hobsbaum was a lecturer at Queen's University, Belfast, where he had formed a branch of the Group there. Attendees included Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley, Edna Longley, and Derek Mahon. Heaney was very much an admirer of Robert Frost, and Edna Longley an admirer of Edward Thomas. As we have seen, both Thomas and Frost were predominately empiricist poets. Heaney was seen as something of a rising star within this group. This is noted by Ulster poet James Simmons who says, 'In those old gatherings under the auspices of Philip Hobsbaum in Belfast it was obvious that Seamus was being groomed for stardom'.<sup>253</sup> Hobsbaum was instrumental in getting Heaney's first collection of poetry published by Faber & Faber. In *Seamus Heaney: The Making of a Poet*, Michael Parker writes:

Hobsbaum introduced Seamus and Marie Heaney to Edward Lucie-Smith at a dinner party [...] and, on returning to London, Lucie-Smith sent some of Heaney's poems to Karl Miller [a friend of Thom Gunn], who accepted three for *The New Statesman*. 'Digging', 'Scaffolding' and 'Storm on the Island' appeared on 4 December 1964. Then in January 1965 he [Heaney] received a letter from Charles Monteith of Faber & Faber, asking for a manuscript.<sup>254</sup>

Although the Group asserted it had no unified poetic agenda as such, an indication of its poetic aims can be discerned from the sorts of poets it nurtured (most obviously Heaney) and the poetic values asserted by Hobsbaum himself. The first thing that is noticeable about Hobsbaum's poetic is its objection to the suggestiveness and lack of plot in T.S. Eliot's poetry. In *Tradition and Experiment in English Poetry* he writes:

If we suggest Langland, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Eliot are among our greatest poets, it is the last-named that appears to be the wild card in the pack. All the others had a high regard for plot and logic that carries them through the aesthetic variability of their poetry. Eliot, on the other hand, seems to work rather by suggestion, qualitative progression, evocative catalogue.<sup>255</sup>

The idea that suggestiveness in poetry is a shortcoming is most peculiar indeed. His criticism of Eliot

extends to what he sees as the negative influence on English poetry of Eliot's use of the American idiom: 'Some damage was done to English verse by too close an imitation in the 1930s of the American idiom as evidenced in such poets as Eliot and Pound'.<sup>256</sup> Hobsbaum also sees a disparity between Eliot's American writing-style and traditional English poetic writing practice. Although Hobsbaum does not see this in itself as necessarily negative, the implication is that American modernism is largely a geographical and cultural entity, unable

to successfully function within an English milieu:

Again, Eliot's work exhibits the characteristic American qualities of free association or phanopoeia and autobiographical content. English verse, however, has been at its best as fiction: an arrangement of what is external to the poet to convey the tension or release within.<sup>257</sup>

This poetic "nationalism" is also expressed more explicitly, and with some frustration in the following:

I would never deny that Eliot and Pound, who derive much from Whitman, are fine poets. But is it not time to insist that they are fine *American* poets? And that therefore the influence they may be expected to have on English poets is limited?<sup>258</sup>

This appears a most extraordinary and insular (not to say irrational) approach to art. If Hobsbaum really believes that Eliot and Pound are fine poets then why must this talent not be allowed to function in England? How can one admit to value in a form of art yet insist that it is a value that is worthless outside of the cultural conditions which spawned it?

Hobsbaum makes further statements as to the unsuitability of "American" modernism for the English reader:

Whitman's abstractions and random collocations have a raw life of their own, a form even through their formlessness; and this has remained highly characteristic of American poetry ever since. *The Waste Land* (1922) is, indeed, a heap of broken images: this is its meaning, and, to some extent, its distinction. But that kind of writing has never worked well in England.<sup>259</sup>

Hobsbaum then goes on to say that the influence of Eliot had a negative effect on W. H. Auden's poetry. Up until his discovery of Eliot, Hobsbaum claims, Auden's early poetry had certain affinities with Thomas Hardy. Hobsbaum quotes some lines from a poem Auden wrote as a youth, 'The Carter's Funeral':



Sixty odd years of poaching and drink  
 And rain-sodden wagons with scarcely a friend,  
 Chained to this life; rust fractures a link,  
 So the end ...<sup>260</sup>

After quoting the above lines without purposely indicating who wrote them, Hobsbaum writes:

Who wrote this, for example? [...] Hardy? Edward Thomas? In fact, it is the earliest Auden—Auden before the influence of Eliot. And I do not think that it is accidental that this gifted poet showed himself at the very first in the direct line of Hardy and the war poets; that is to say, in the mainstream of English poetry. But in the absence of any strong direction—Hardy was very old and the war poets had not survived—English poetry became Americanised, and the result was the brilliant obscurity of Auden’s first (1930) volume.<sup>261</sup>

However, despite Hobsbaum’s reservations as to the poetry of the later Auden, it must be noted that Auden is particularly problematic with regard to his actual placement in the history of modernist development. While it is true that his later work did diverge from the Hardian aesthetic, it is not altogether clear as to the degree of this deviation. Certain pre-modernist characteristics are still discernable in his poetic style. This is pointed out by J. Williams in *Twentieth-Century British Poetry*, who also sees a parallel in Auden’s use of traditional English with Wordsworth’s project to instil the ‘language really used by men’ into poetry.<sup>262</sup> Williams writes:

Parallels with the evolution of Romanticism over and against the hegemony of classicism suggest themselves, in particular the use of traditional English rather than Augustan, Latinate forms.<sup>263</sup>

Williams also echoes Geoffrey Thurley in seeing Auden’s poetic motivation rooted in a quest for self-knowledge. In this respect Auden has,

affinities with the early Romantics. Like them, his work evolved initially from a sense of personal identity defined in the context of a small circle of friends and family, not of society as a national concept.<sup>264</sup>

Furthermore, he shared the romantic notion that ‘it was the poet in person who addressed the reader from the page’.<sup>265</sup>

Whatever the case may be, Hobsbaum viewed Auden as having negative modernist tendencies and he laments English poetry’s loss of a national character and Auden’s “misspent” talent:

The renaissance of the 1930s rested largely on the shoulders of one man: W. H. Auden. And, as we have seen, he himself had ignored his earliest influences and embarked upon a misdirected course. [...] Modern poetry was to be obscure, condensed, fantastic in diction, freed from logic. [...] the revolution ended in Dylan Thomas and the New Apocalypse, when poetry in England ceased to mean anything even to an educated reader.<sup>266</sup>

A near-remedy to this state of affairs was the Movement:

The poems of the Movement were self-contained, formal, and sought to be unrheterical. Like most schools of poetry, the Movement proved too constricting for its more talented members. [...] But the Movement was a necessary spring-cleaning whose real achievement may have been to arouse interest in a number of poets of the 1930s who had been unjustly neglected.<sup>267</sup>

As mentioned earlier Seamus Heaney was a protégé of Hobsbaum and it is perhaps reasonable to assume that Heaney's poetic may owe something to this fact. Heaney has been much praised over the years, particularly with his election to the Professorship of Poetry at Oxford University in 1989 and culminating in his winning a Nobel Prize for literature in 1995. However, his critics have asserted that his poetic style is essentially anachronistic—a throwback to pre-modernist concerns. Perhaps the most perceptive criticism of him is that of Al Alvarez, which is cited in James Fenton's *The Strength of Poetry*:

If Heaney really is the best we can do, then the whole troubled, exploratory thrust of modern poetry has been a diversion from the right true way. Eliot and his contemporaries, Lowell and his, Plath and hers had it all wrong: to try to make clearings of sense and discipline and style in the untamed, unfenced darkness was to mistake morbidity for inspiration. It was, in the end, mere melodrama, understandable perhaps in the Americans who lack a tradition in these matters, but inexcusable in the British.<sup>268</sup>

Although such considerations may be value-laden, they do indicate the way in which Heaney may be linked to the opinions of his mentor, Hobsbaum, despite the high opinion he came to have of Lowell. As I will attempt to show in the following pages, Heaney places great value on poetry that is dependent upon sense impressions. For instance, he praises the use of the authorial "I" in Yeats's poetry because, 'it is brilliantly and concretely at one with the eye of the poet as retina overwhelmed by the visual evidence of infinity and solitude'.<sup>269</sup>

The influence of Wordsworth on Heaney is well known. Hugh Haughton notes that 'the Lake Poet's texts haunt Heaney more radically than those of any other poet',<sup>270</sup> and though 'Heaney's early poems do

not directly echo Wordsworth, his criticism of the 1970s hitches them unforgettably to the Wordsworthian star'.<sup>271</sup> Also:

It was very much as an Irish follower of Wordsworth that Heaney first presented himself as a poet-critic. In critical discussions such as 'Feeling and Words' (1974) and 'The Making of Music' (1978), Heaney not only re-created Wordsworth in his own image but forged a poetic image of himself out of Wordsworth.<sup>272</sup>

Furthermore:

Heaney's sustained encounter with the Romantic poet during the 1970s played a crucial part in the forging of his discursive identity as a major poet, not only in the essays of *Preoccupations* (1980), which did so much to shape public perception of his work, but in the autobiographical poems of *North* (1975), *Stations* (1975), and the 'Glanmore Sonnets' of *Field Work* (1979).<sup>273</sup>

Additionally:

In his introduction to *The Essential Wordsworth* (1988), Heaney calls the Lake Poet's achievement 'the most securely founded in the canon of native English poetry' since Milton's. He declares him 'an indispensable figure in the evolution of modern writing, a finder and keeper of the self-as-subject, a theorist and apologist whose Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802) remains definitive'.<sup>274</sup>

Wordsworth's penchant for writing apologia for his poetry is also apparent in Heaney who 'has used critical prose as a powerful instrument in helping define the terms through which his own work can be understood. In readings, essays, interviews and lectures, he has proved himself [...] an eloquent self-promoter of his own art'.<sup>275</sup> Moreover, he is 'not only an unreconstructed admirer of the English Romantic poet but an avowed heir to the Wordsworthian defence of poetry'.<sup>276</sup>

Similarly to Wordsworth, Heaney also sees the value of poetry as having to do with its functionality as an educative process in service to humanistic and ethical concerns. In his 1989 inaugural lecture on having been elected Professor of Poetry at Oxford University he said:

Professors of poetry, apologists for it, practitioners of it, from Sir Philip Sidney to Wallace Stevens, all sooner or later have to attempt to show how poetry's existence at the level of art relates to our existence as citizens of society—how it is "of present use".<sup>277</sup>

This "present use" is closely associated with politics, as can be seen when he says:

The truth is, the purer and more concentrated a poet's faculties and the more aligned within his

sensibility the poles of politics and transcendence, then the simpler and more distinct will be something that we might call the poetic DNA pattern.<sup>278</sup>

Moreover, Heaney readily admits to humanist leanings when he says, ‘I am still enough of a humanist to believe that poetry arises from the same source as that ideal future which Derek Mahon, in his poem ‘The Sea in Winter’, envisages’.<sup>279</sup> Additionally, Heaney shows his deference to Wordsworth’s emphasis on poetry as a vehicle for unambiguous content by saying that, ‘as Wordsworth once said, our subject is indeed important’.<sup>280</sup>

Later he says that, ‘the best poetry will not only register the assault of the actual and quail under the brunt of necessity; it will also embody the spirit’s protest against all that’.<sup>281</sup> The interesting thing here is that Heaney views the ‘assault of the actual’ as a given, independent of poetic linguistic invention and creativity. His vaguely phrased qualification to this assertion (‘it will also embody the spirit’s protest against all that’) can be taken less seriously since such a “protest” is absent from his own poetry. (Shortly, I will discuss one possible reason why Heaney makes frequent use of qualification and oblique justifications to account for the descriptiveness apparent in his poetry.) Heaney also alludes (via Emerson—a “pupil” of Wordsworth) to the Wordsworthian ideal that poetry should comprise self-reflection:

The poet—as representative man, as representative woman—this Emersonian figure then comes under the strain of bearing witness in his or her own life to the plane of consciousness established in the poem.<sup>282</sup>

Turning to Heaney’s poetry, we can see that it is characterized by his use of accurate descriptions (Ciarán Carson refers to him as ‘a writer with the gift of precision’) of the quotidian in rural settings.<sup>283</sup> This, he has in common with Georgian poetry with its, ‘country cottages, old furniture, moss-covered barns, rose-scented lanes, apples and cherry orchards’.<sup>284</sup> Such is the accuracy of Heaney’s descriptiveness that it prompts J. W. Foster to write in *The Achievement of Seamus Heaney*:

Not only are Heaney’s poems about manual work on the farm—ploughing, planting, harvesting, horse-shoeing—but they are themselves manuals on how the work is actually done. It is amusing, for instance, to set ‘Churning Day’ beside E. Estyn Evan’s account of churning in *Irish Heritage* (1942) and *Irish Folk Ways* (1957).<sup>285</sup>

Moreover, this reliance upon descriptive accuracy lends to the charge that his poetry is readily paraphrasable. In ‘Seamus Heaney—from Major to Minor’, R. Caldwell says, ‘there is too often the feel with his poetry that the paraphrase is the end of the matter: there is little of the multifaceted richness of suggestion that invites one to probe further’.<sup>286</sup>

Heaney is perhaps famous for his aversion to the idea that poetic language can be suggestible and connotative. This can be seen in Heaney’s critique of Dylan Thomas in *The Redress of Poetry* (based on a series of lectures he delivered as Oxford Professor of Poetry) where he says that Thomas ‘continued to place a too unenlightened trust in the plasticity of language’.<sup>287</sup> What he means by the word “unenlightened” is unclear. Is he referring to a Wordsworthian transcendentalist ideal that Thomas has failed to emulate? Alternatively, is he being merely subjectively pejorative? In any case, his point is clear. For Heaney, poetry is primarily concerned with language as unequivocal communication. In his critique of Thomas’s poem ‘Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night’, Heaney calls this unequivocal communication “knowledge”. He praises Thomas’s poem for delivering a clear message:

The poem does not begin with words, as the young Thomas too simply insisted that poetry should, but it moves towards them. And it is exactly the sensation of language on the move towards a destination in knowledge which imbues ‘Do Not Go Gentle’ with a refreshing maturity.<sup>288</sup>

Here we can see how Heaney not only admonishes the ‘young Thomas’ for his assumed poetic naiveté, but also infers from the poem’s “clarity of meaning” that Thomas has achieved the necessary poetic maturity, a maturity that has enabled him to make his meanings clear in order to ‘move towards a destination in knowledge’ that does not ‘begin with words’ (i.e. linguistic creativity). Heaney’s use of the term “knowledge” is significant because it has a resonance with Wordsworth’s belief in the ‘poetic experience as a form of knowledge’.<sup>289</sup> His reservations about poetic language extend also into his opinion of poetic artifice. Of Thomas’s use of it, he says that ‘the demand for more matter, less art, does inevitably arise’.<sup>290</sup> Elizabeth Bishop, however, has his approval because ‘she never allows the formal delights of her

art to mollify the hard realities of her subjects'.<sup>291</sup>

However, Heaney appears to want his cake and eat it when he says, 'Poetry cannot afford to lose its [...], joy in being a process of language as well as a representation of things in the world'.<sup>292</sup> His empiricism is unavoidably evident in this statement. However, his about-face on the nature of poetic language is puzzling. Certainly, in the Oxford lecture mentioned above Heaney is suspicious of linguistic ingenuity:

And yet, limber and absolved as linguistic inventiveness may seem in poetry, it is not disjunct from or ever entirely manumitted by the critical intelligence. If it appears to be so, that may simply mean that there is none of said intelligence available in that particular quarter.<sup>293</sup>

Here, Heaney places reason above artifice and content before form. Words are to be subservient at all times to specific and conventional meanings. There is little room here for the joy poetry evokes by 'being a process of language'. Could the turnaround perhaps indicate that Heaney realizes that his poetic *modus operandi* is beginning to lose currency in the more progressive circles of academic poetic discourse and that to fully safeguard his posthumous poetic reputation he has to enable future critics of his work to capably defend his reputation against charges that he is merely a nature poet? Yet, his continual wariness of the linguistic and formal properties of a poem is still very much evident. This can be seen in his cautious praise of Thomas:

Thomas came through with a poem in a single, unfumbled movement, one with all the confidence of a necessary thing, one in which again at last the fantasy and extravagance of the imagery and diction did not dissipate themselves or his theme.<sup>294</sup>

Heaney can be seen here, again, elevating poetic content over poetic language. This would seem to bring in to question his sincerity in saying that poetry cannot afford to lose its 'joy in being a process of language'.

His preoccupation with content and clarity of meaning is also evident in his reference to a line from John Clare's, 'Mouse's Nest'. The line is: 'With all her young ones hanging at her teats [...]'; and Heaney says of it: "Hanging on" would have had certain pathetic, anthropomorphic associations that would have weakened the objective clarity of the whole presentation'.<sup>295</sup> He praises Clare for avoiding the more

impressionistic phrase “hanging on” in favour of the more visually accurate ‘hanging at’ that Clare does use. For Heaney, to sanction ambiguity in a poem would mean endangering the poem’s Wordsworthian potential for the representation of mundane phenomena. He thinks it a good thing of Clare’s ‘Mouse’s Nest’ that ‘there is an unspectacular joy and totally alert love for the one-thing-after-anotherness of the world’.<sup>296</sup> However, he is aware that this approach to poetry needs defending. Consequently, in an attempt to do this (and also to justify his own poetic writing) he claims that there is more than mere description in Clare’s poetry:

Just because Clare’s poetry abounds in actualities, just because it is full of precise delightful detail as a granary is full of grains, does not mean that it is doomed to pile up and sink down in its own materiality.<sup>297</sup>

He illustrates this with reference to the cesspool in the ‘Mouse’s Nest’, which embodies, for Clare,

not only the reality of all such places *as* places, with distinct characters and histories, but also their value as a set of memories and affections at the back of his mind. There is dreamwork going on here as well as photography.<sup>298</sup>

Yet, for this to be the case there would surely be no need to admit to the photographic elements of such poetry as existing in the first place. To admit such, and then deny their actual affects on the reader in favour of an assumed “dreamwork” in operation seems pointless. If a poem is not photography, then that will be apparent and will not need an apology.

Heaney excuses Clare for certain stylistic faults (‘lines repeating and intersecting with the trajectory of other lines’<sup>299</sup>) because accurate observation underlies them:

This is why the “ands” and “whens” and self-contained couplets and end-stopped movement of the lines do not irk as they might. They are clearly a function of the perception rather than a fault of execution. [...] They are both a prerequisite and consequence of one kind of accuracy and immediacy.<sup>300</sup>

By apologizing for the descriptive nature of Clare’s poetry (and, elsewhere, poetry like it) Heaney is in effect apologizing for his own poetry. This is indicated in his following statement:

The poet who would be most the poet has to attempt an act of writing that outstrips the conditions even as it observes them. The truly creative writer, by interposing his or her

perception and expression, will transfigure the conditions and effect thereby what I have been calling “The Redress of Poetry”.<sup>301</sup>

One cannot help but sense that he regards himself too much as ‘the poet who would be most the poet’. Here, he apologizes for descriptive poetry by claiming that (in his case at least) it is not merely descriptive. He claims that the descriptive poet’s perceptions and expressions (although he is not specific as to what he means by the latter) will transform in some sense the appearance of objects described. Blake Morrison and Andrew Motion in the Introduction to their anthology *The Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry* unwittingly indicate that for Heaney transforming an object’s appearance is achieved through defamiliarisation.<sup>302</sup> Concerning his poem ‘The Grauballe Man’ they write:

As Heaney’s eye ranges over the anatomy it transforms skin and bone to a clutter of inanimate things: the wrist to ‘bog oak’, the heel to a ‘basalt egg’, the mortal wound to a ‘dark elderberry place’, and so on.<sup>303</sup>

It should be pointed out that defamiliarisation is dependent upon vision in order to revive our awareness of objects that have become over-familiar through constant exposure to them. To this extent, it is the servant of empiricist writing. Seen in this light, Heaney’s transfigurations are not as transcendental as perhaps he would have us believe.

Heaney figures largely in Morrison and Motion’s anthology. Morrison and Motion are mainstream poets, both believe in the transparency of language and the communicative aspects of poetry. Indeed, Morrison was responsible for an apologia for Movement poetry (*The Movement: English Poetry and Fiction of the 1950s*) and Motion is Britain’s Poet Laureate. Given these mainstream credentials, it is to be expected that the anthology would include mostly empiricist poetry. Therefore, it is odd that Morrison and Motion claim that the anthology marks in some sense a continuation of the spirit of High Modernism. It is this attempt by Morrison and Motion to “rebrand” the anthology’s descriptive poetry as non-descriptive, in order to suggest that the descriptive aspects of the poetry are merely apparent rather than actual, that I will deal with now.

In the Introduction, Morrison and Motion claim that the poets in this volume ‘show greater imaginative



freedom and linguistic daring than the previous poetic generation'.<sup>304</sup> They also add that, 'The new spirit in British poetry began to make itself felt in Northern Ireland during the late 1960s and early 70s'.<sup>305</sup> This is undoubtedly referring to the Belfast branch of the Group run by Hobsbaum at Queen's University. We can be confident of this because several of this group's attendees are included in this anthology: Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon and Michael Longley.<sup>306</sup> As we have seen, their mentor, Philip Hobsbaum, was critical of Eliot, Pound, and Modernism in general. In addition, I have shown that his protégé, Heaney, is a poet who believes in truthfulness and clarity in poetic utterances. It is curious, therefore, that Morrison and Motion describe the poets in the anthology as displaying 'a literary self-consciousness reminiscent of the modernists'.<sup>307</sup> While it is true that the anthology's empiricist assumptions are modernistic, it would not be accurate to credit much of the poetry as particularly exemplifying a literary self-consciousness (or a postmodernist playfulness, for that matter). In any case, the claimed for innovativeness of this is emasculated by Morrison and Motion when they qualify it by saying of the poets: '[...] this does not imply that their work is frivolous or amoral'.<sup>308</sup> With this caveat, we have an echo of a liberal humanist view of poetry as having to have "worth", "value" and so on.

The poets in this anthology are praised by Morrison and Motion for 'making the familiar strange again'.<sup>309</sup> As mentioned earlier with regard to Heaney, the practice of defamiliarisation is dependent upon vision as its aim is to refresh our perception of the world and to focus our attention on its objects. To this extent, it operates empirically. Another point worthy of praise for Morrison and Motion is the outlook,

which expresses itself, in some poets, in a preference for metaphor and poetic bizarrerie to metonymy and plain speech; in others it is evident in a renewed interest in narrative—that is, in describing the details and complexities of (often dramatic) incidents. [These poets are] not poets working in a confessional white heat but dramatists and story-tellers.<sup>310</sup>

There are several points to be noted about this passage. Firstly, the term 'poetic bizarrerie' is left undefined by Morrison and Motion, who also fail to cite examples of it in this anthology. Therefore, I will regard it as a red herring. Secondly, a preference for metaphor is hardly novel, Ted Hughes was heavily dependent on

it. Thirdly, metonymy is a legitimate poetic device and one that is non-empiricist; however, Morrison and Motion also fail to cite instances of it in the anthology's poetry. Fourthly, the use of narrative and plain speech in poetry to describe dramatic events is something that, as we have seen, Edward Thomas, Robert Frost and Philip Hobsbaum would advocate. As an apologia for this anthology's poetic operating procedures, this passage leaves much to be desired.

What is most telling about the anthology's Introduction is its emphasis upon visual perception and the act of witnessing. Morrison and Motion point out that most of the poets have developed procedures 'designed to emphasize the gap between themselves and their subjects'; and that these poets are 'not inhabitants of their own lives so much as intrigued observers, not victims but onlookers'.<sup>311</sup> The poet who most embodies this in the anthology is Craig Raine, whose "Martian" poetry typifies the poetic outlook of the anthology's Introduction with regard to its championing of visual perception, simile and defamiliarisation. Morrison and Motion apologise for Martian poetry by claiming that far from its being the cold, arid, visually-based entity that it is usually taken for it is in actuality imbued with emotion: 'It would be wrong to think that the Martians' ingenuity prevents them from expressing emotion: their way of looking is also a way of feeling'.<sup>312</sup> However, like most of the assertions made by Morrison and Motion in this Introduction, it is not instanced by textual examples or any other evidence—it is to be taken on faith.

In this chapter, I have sought to trace the development of "Wordsworthian empiricism" in the various critical readings of Wordsworth in the twentieth century. In doing so, I have suggested that such readings of Wordsworth (even those that viewed him principally in transcendentalist terms) tended to spotlight his empiricism. Consequently, such empiricism came to be seen by the majority of that century's poets as having a value in and of itself to the extent that it became widely regarded as the best model for poetic composition.

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<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Hartman notes the importance of Wordsworth on the development of modern poetry when he says, 'Wordsworth [...] is the last of a giant race of poets to whom the moderns are as indebted as the neoclassical poets to their Renaissance predecessors'. See *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*, p.16.

<sup>2</sup> John Casey, *The Language of Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1966), p.177.

<sup>3</sup> Albert Wlecke notes that, 'the proper subject of 'The Solitary Reaper' is not the solitary, singing lass but the evolving drama of Wordsworth's conscious reactions to his memory of the girl'. He adds: 'One of the productive ways of reading certain poems by Wordsworth is to take them as documents descriptive, explicitly and sometimes implicitly, of evolving structures of consciousness'. See *Wordsworth and the Sublime*, pp.13 & 14.

<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, Peter Malekin notes: 'Yet while the attributing of unique value to Wordsworth's poetry on the mind is generally conceded, there is little common agreement as to what he is actually saying, partly because Wordsworth himself can be tantalizingly vague, and partly because what he says will anyway be interpreted according to an individual critic's own understanding of what is possible to the human mind. [...] His vagueness comes in his uncertainty about how to interpret his experiences'. See 'Wordsworth and the Mind of Man', in *An Infinite Complexity: Essays in Romanticism*, pp.1-25 (pp.1 & 23).

<sup>5</sup> F. R. Leavis, *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1956), p.206.

<sup>6</sup> Edward Larrissy, 'Modernism and Postmodernity', in *Romanticism: An Oxford Guide*, ed. by Nicholas Roe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.665-74 (p.665.).

<sup>7</sup> Larrissy, Roe, *Romanticism*, p.666.

<sup>8</sup> Irving Babbitt, *Rousseau & Romanticism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1919, 1947, 1977) p.280.

<sup>9</sup> George Bornstein, *Romantic and Modern: Revaluations of Literary Tradition* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977), p.8.

<sup>10</sup> Geoffrey Thurley, *The Romantic Predicament* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p.54.

<sup>11</sup> Thurley, p.65.

<sup>12</sup> Hugh Witemeyer, 'Walter Savage Landor and Ezra Pound', in *Romantic and Modern: Revaluations of Literary Tradition*, ed. by George Bornstein (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977), pp.147-63 (p.147).

<sup>13</sup> Witemeyer, Bornstein, *Romantic and Modern*, p.148.

<sup>14</sup> Witemeyer, Bornstein, *Romantic and Modern*, p.148

<sup>15</sup> Herbert N. Schneidau, 'Pound and Wordsworth on Poetry and Prose', in Bornstein, *Romantic and Modern*, pp.133-45 (p.134).

<sup>16</sup> Schneidau, Bornstein, *Romantic and Modern*, p.134.

<sup>17</sup> Schneidau, Bornstein, *Romantic and Modern*, p.134.

<sup>18</sup> Schneidau, Bornstein, *Romantic and Modern*, p.134.

<sup>19</sup> *The Letters of Ezra Pound to Alice Corbin Henderson*, ed. by Ira B. Nadel (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), p.29.

<sup>20</sup> *Letters*, ed. Nadel, p.29.

<sup>21</sup> *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound 1907-1941*, ed. by D. D. Page (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), p.28.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Herbert Read, *The True Voice of Feeling: Studies in English Romantic Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 1953), p.122.

<sup>23</sup> *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. by T.S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, [n.d.] ), pp.4-5.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Joseph Hone, *W. B. Yeats: 1865-1939*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1962), p.272. Of Yeats's Romantic lineage Frank Kermode says, 'It is not really surprising that what is often regarded as Symbolist influences in Yeats can be traced to earlier Romantic thought'. See *Romantic Image*, p.107.

<sup>25</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays*, ed. Eliot, p.21.

<sup>26</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays*, ed. Eliot, pp.21-22.

<sup>27</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays*, ed. Eliot, p.22.

<sup>28</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays*, ed. Eliot, p.33.

<sup>29</sup> Ezra Pound, *The A B C of Reading* (London: Faber and Faber, [n.d.] ), p.32.

<sup>30</sup> *Pound, A B C*, p.43.

<sup>31</sup> *Pound, A B C*, p.48.

<sup>32</sup> *Pound, A B C*, p.48.

<sup>33</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays*, ed. Eliot, p.3. Herbert Read says of these two principles that they ‘come from Hulme, almost in his own words’. He then quotes Hulme: ‘Always seek the hard, definite, personal word’ and ‘All emotion depends on real solid vision or sound. It is physical’. See *The True Voice of Feeling*, p.121.

<sup>34</sup> Pound, *Selected Letters*, ed. Page, p.11.

<sup>35</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays*, ed. Eliot, p.25.

<sup>36</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays*, ed. Eliot, p.25.

<sup>37</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays*, ed. Eliot, p.25.

<sup>38</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays*, ed. Eliot, p.25.

<sup>39</sup> Paul Smith, *Pound Revised* (London and Canberra: Croom Helm, 1983), p.8.

<sup>40</sup> Smith, p.8.

<sup>41</sup> Smith, p.9.

<sup>42</sup> Smith, p.10.

<sup>43</sup> Smith, p.10.

<sup>44</sup> Smith, p.15.

<sup>45</sup> Smith, p.15.

<sup>46</sup> Smith, p.17.

<sup>47</sup> Smith, p.17.

<sup>48</sup> Smith, p.17.

<sup>49</sup> Smith, pp.17-18.

<sup>50</sup> Smith, p.21.

<sup>51</sup> Read notes that Hulme’s statement on thought and language (‘Thought is prior to language and consists in the simultaneous presentation of the mind of two different images. Language is only a more or less feeble way of doing this’), ‘anticipates Pound’s “ideogrammatic method”, which he supposedly owes to Fenollosa. See *The True Voice of Feeling*, p 109.

<sup>52</sup> *Pound, A B C*, p.19.

<sup>53</sup> *Pound, A B C*, p.19.

<sup>54</sup> *Pound, A B C*, p.19.

<sup>55</sup> *Pound, A B C*, p.20.

<sup>56</sup> *Pound, A B C*, p.21.

<sup>57</sup> *Pound, A B C*, p.21.

<sup>58</sup> *Pound, A B C*, p.22.

<sup>59</sup> *Pound, A B C*, p.23. Read notes that in a letter to William Carlos Williams dated 21 October 1908, Pound says that the ultimate accomplishment of poetry should be: ‘To paint the thing as I see it’. See *The True Voice of Feeling*, p.105.

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Geoffrey Clifford Jaggs, ‘Techniques of Truth in the Poetry of William Wordsworth and Ezra Pound’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, 2002), p.127.

<sup>61</sup> *T. E. Hulme: Selected Writings*, ed. by Patrick McGuinness (Manchester: Carcanet Press Limited, 1998), p.68. Pound and Hume became estranged due to ‘Pound’s dislike of the metaphysics adhering to the Hulmian theory’. See *Romantic Image*, p.121.

<sup>62</sup> *Hulme*, p.75.

<sup>63</sup> *Hulme*, p.80.

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Read, p.107.

- <sup>65</sup> Quoted in Read, p.108.
- <sup>66</sup> Quoted in Read, p.121.
- <sup>67</sup> Quoted in Read, p.109.
- <sup>68</sup> Read, p.115.
- <sup>69</sup> Quoted in Read, p.108.
- <sup>70</sup> Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), p.128.
- <sup>71</sup> Kermode, p.129.
- <sup>72</sup> Read, p.111.
- <sup>73</sup> 'Poets of the Hour' from *The Daily News and Leader*, 8 January 1913. Quoted in *Georgian Poetry 1911-1922: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Timothy Rogers (London, Henley and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), p.64.
- <sup>74</sup> 'Georgian Poetry' from *The Cambridge Magazine*, 18 January 1913. Quoted in Rogers, p.69.
- <sup>75</sup> 'Knocking at the Door' from *The Morning Post*, 27 January 1913. Quoted in Rogers, p.76.
- <sup>76</sup> 'Some Poets of the Day' from *The Nation*, 8 March 1930. Quoted in Rogers, p.85.
- <sup>77</sup> Quoted in Rogers, p.86.
- <sup>78</sup> Quoted in Rogers, p.87.
- <sup>79</sup> Quoted in Rogers, pp.88-89.
- <sup>80</sup> Quoted in Rogers, p.34.
- <sup>81</sup> Quoted in Rogers, p.35.
- <sup>82</sup> Interestingly, Edna Longley in 'The Great War, History, and the English Lyric', says that Thomas's poem 'Lob', 'preempts *The Waste Land*' when he writes lines such as: 'This is tall Tom that bore / The logs in, and with Shakespeare in the hall / Once talked'. See *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War*, p. 67.
- <sup>83</sup> Andrew Motion, *The Poetry of Edward Thomas* (London, Boston and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1980), p.2. It should be pointed out that it is important for us not to conclude from this analysis that Modernist and Georgian styles are to be equated.
- <sup>84</sup> Motion, p.3.
- <sup>85</sup> Motion, p.3.
- <sup>86</sup> Motion, p.4.
- <sup>87</sup> Motion, p.4.
- <sup>88</sup> Motion, p.3.
- <sup>89</sup> Quoted in Motion, p.2.
- <sup>90</sup> Quoted in Motion, p.3.
- <sup>91</sup> Quoted in Motion, p.9.
- <sup>92</sup> Quoted in Motion, p.67.
- <sup>93</sup> Quoted in Motion, p.64.
- <sup>94</sup> Philip Hobsbaum, *Tradition and Experiment in English Poetry* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1979), p.299.
- <sup>95</sup> Philip L. Gerber, *Robert Frost* (New York: University of South Dakota, 1960), p.67.
- <sup>96</sup> Gerber, p.66.
- <sup>97</sup> Lawrence Thompson, 'Robert Frost's Theory of Poetry', in *Robert Frost: A collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by James M. Cox (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1962), pp.16-35 (pp.16-17).
- <sup>98</sup> Thompson, Cox, *Critical Essays*, p.17.
- <sup>99</sup> Robert Faggen, *The Cambridge Companion to Robert Frost*, ed. by Robert Faggen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.2.
- <sup>100</sup> Faggen, p.2.
- <sup>101</sup> Faggen, p.4.

- <sup>102</sup> Gerber, p.53.
- <sup>103</sup> Gerber, p.53.
- <sup>104</sup> Quoted in Gerber, p.53.
- <sup>105</sup> Quoted in Gerber, p.54.
- <sup>106</sup> Gerber, p.54.
- <sup>107</sup> Gerber, p.55.
- <sup>108</sup> Lawrence Buell, 'Frost as a New England Poet', in *The Cambridge Companion to Robert Frost*, ed. by Robert Faggen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp.101-22 (p.115).
- <sup>109</sup> Buell, Faggen, *Companion to Robert Frost*, p.115.
- <sup>110</sup> I. A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism*, Fifteenth Impression 1959 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1924), p.73.
- <sup>111</sup> Richards, *Literary Criticism*, p.78.
- <sup>112</sup> Richards, *Literary Criticism*, p.78.
- <sup>113</sup> Richards, *Literary Criticism*, p.78.
- <sup>114</sup> Richards, *Literary Criticism*, p.199.
- <sup>115</sup> Richards, *Literary Criticism*, p.199. Richards does not say who wrote this poem.
- <sup>116</sup> Richards, *Literary Criticism*, p.200.
- <sup>117</sup> Richards, *Literary Criticism*, p.200.
- <sup>118</sup> Richards, *Literary Criticism*, pp.200-1.
- <sup>119</sup> Richards, p.201. It is curious that Richards should say this because his assessment of Eliot's *The Waste Land* in 'The Poetry of T. S. Eliot' (See Appendix to *Principles of Literary Criticism*, pp.289-95) demonstrates that he fully appreciates *The Waste Land's* less than coherent and ambiguous operating procedures.
- <sup>120</sup> I. A. Richards, *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgement* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd, 1930), p.15.
- <sup>121</sup> Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.15.
- <sup>122</sup> Richards, *Practical Criticism*, pp.147-48.
- <sup>123</sup> Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.239.
- <sup>124</sup> Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.251.
- <sup>125</sup> F. L. Lucas, *Decline and Fall of the Romantic Ideal*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), p.12.
- <sup>126</sup> Lucas, pp.13-14.
- <sup>127</sup> Lucas, p.106.
- <sup>128</sup> Lucas, p.106.
- <sup>129</sup> Lucas, p.35.
- <sup>130</sup> Lucas, p.35.
- <sup>131</sup> Lucas, p.46.
- <sup>132</sup> Lucas, p.15.
- <sup>133</sup> Lucas, p.35.
- <sup>134</sup> Lucas, p.47.
- <sup>135</sup> Lucas, p.47.
- <sup>136</sup> Lucas, p.14.
- <sup>137</sup> Lucas, p.14.
- <sup>138</sup> Lucas, p.175. This is not to imply that Lucas is anti-transcendentalist.
- <sup>139</sup> Lucas, p.176.
- <sup>140</sup> Lucas, p.180.
- <sup>141</sup> Lucas, p.185.

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- <sup>142</sup> Lucas, p.186.
- <sup>143</sup> Lucas, p.199.
- <sup>144</sup> Leavis, p.164.
- <sup>145</sup> Leavis, p.170.
- <sup>146</sup> Leavis, p.171.
- <sup>147</sup> Leavis, p.171.
- <sup>148</sup> Leavis, p.173.
- <sup>149</sup> *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by T. Hutchinson and E. de Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), Wordsworth Editions 1994, p.646.
- <sup>150</sup> Leavis, p.174.
- <sup>151</sup> Leavis, p.174.
- <sup>152</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (Middlesex: Penguin Books in association with Chatto & Windus, 1961), pp.48-49.
- <sup>153</sup> Williams, pp.53-54.
- <sup>154</sup> Williams, pp.53-54.
- <sup>155</sup> Williams, p.54.
- <sup>156</sup> Williams, p.54.
- <sup>157</sup> Williams, p.57.
- <sup>158</sup> Williams, p.57.
- <sup>159</sup> Quoted in T. S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism: Studies in the Relation of Criticism to Poetry in England* (London: Faber and Faber, 1933; repr. 1959), p.73.
- <sup>160</sup> Eliot, p.73.
- <sup>161</sup> Nicholas Roe, *The Politics of Nature: Wordsworth and Some Contemporaries* (London: Macmillan.1992), p.9.
- <sup>162</sup> Roe, p.9.
- <sup>163</sup> Roe, p.10.
- <sup>164</sup> Roe, p.139.
- <sup>165</sup> Roe, p.139.
- <sup>166</sup> Roe, p.140.
- <sup>167</sup> Roe, p.150.
- <sup>168</sup> Roe, p.152.
- <sup>169</sup> Roe, p.140.
- <sup>170</sup> M. A. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp.16-17.
- <sup>171</sup> Abrams, p.21.
- <sup>172</sup> Abrams, p.22.
- <sup>173</sup> Abrams, p.23.
- <sup>174</sup> Abrams, p.23.
- <sup>175</sup> Abrams, pp.25-26.
- <sup>176</sup> Abrams, p.52. An almost parallel example of this can be seen in 20th century German Expressionist cinema, which through the use of lighting, editing and camera angle, projected the emotion of the characters onto the surrounding objects within the mise-en-scene.
- <sup>177</sup> Abrams, p.47.
- <sup>178</sup> Abrams, p.53.
- <sup>179</sup> Abrams, p.53.
- <sup>180</sup> Abrams, p.54.
- <sup>181</sup> See chapter two, also, for my discussion of Joel Pace's essay, 'Emotion and Cognition in *The Prelude*' which looks at Wordsworth's "creativity".

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- <sup>182</sup> Abrams, p.54.  
<sup>183</sup> Abrams, pp.54-55.  
<sup>184</sup> Abrams, p.55.  
<sup>185</sup> René Wellek, 'Romanticism Re-examined', in *Concepts of Criticism*, ed. by Stephen G. Nichols (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963), pp.199-221 (p.218).  
<sup>186</sup> Wellek, Nichols, *Concepts of Criticism*, p.219.  
<sup>187</sup> Quoted in Wellek, Nichols, *Concepts of Criticism*, p.219.  
<sup>188</sup> Wellek, Nichols, *Concepts of Criticism*, pp.219-20.  
<sup>189</sup> Northrop Frye, 'The Drunken Boat: The Revolutionary Element in Romanticism', in *Romanticism Reconsidered*, ed. by Northrop Frye, 3rd edn (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1966), pp.1-25 (p.10).  
<sup>190</sup> Frye, Frye, *Romanticism Reconsidered*, p.11.  
<sup>191</sup> Frye, Frye, *Romanticism Reconsidered*, p.11.  
<sup>192</sup> Frye, Frye, *Romanticism Reconsidered*, pp.11-12.  
<sup>193</sup> Frye, Frye, *Romanticism Reconsidered*, p.13.  
<sup>194</sup> Frye, Frye, *Romanticism Reconsidered*, p.21.  
<sup>195</sup> W.J. Bate, *From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth Century England*, First Harper Torchbook edition (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), p.157.  
<sup>196</sup> Bate, p.157.  
<sup>197</sup> Bate, p.12.  
<sup>198</sup> Bate, pp.164-65.  
<sup>199</sup> Bate, p.172.  
<sup>200</sup> Bate, p.110.  
<sup>201</sup> Bate, p.145.  
<sup>202</sup> Bate, p.146.  
<sup>203</sup> Bate, p.174.  
<sup>204</sup> Bate, p.176.  
<sup>205</sup> Bate, p.172.  
<sup>206</sup> Bate, pp.112-13.  
<sup>207</sup> Bate, p.182.  
<sup>208</sup> Bate, p.184.  
<sup>209</sup> Bate, p.172.  
<sup>210</sup> Bate, p.186.  
<sup>211</sup> Bate, p.176.  
<sup>212</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry*, rev. edn, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1971), p.127.  
<sup>213</sup> Bloom, p.127.  
<sup>214</sup> Bloom, p.128.  
<sup>215</sup> Bloom, p.159.  
<sup>216</sup> Bloom, p.132.  
<sup>217</sup> Bloom, p.132.  
<sup>218</sup> Bloom, p.127.  
<sup>219</sup> Bloom, pp.133-34.  
<sup>220</sup> Bloom, p.134.  
<sup>221</sup> Bloom, p.135.  
<sup>222</sup> Bloom, p.136.  
<sup>223</sup> Bloom, p.153.



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- <sup>224</sup> Bloom, p.153.  
<sup>225</sup> Bloom, p.133.  
<sup>226</sup> Bloom, p.133.  
<sup>227</sup> Hobsbaum, p.205.  
<sup>228</sup> Hobsbaum, p.187.  
<sup>229</sup> Hobsbaum, p.188.  
<sup>230</sup> Hobsbaum, p.188.  
<sup>231</sup> Hobsbaum, pp.188-89.  
<sup>232</sup> Hobsbaum, p.189.  
<sup>233</sup> Hobsbaum, p.189.  
<sup>234</sup> Hobsbaum, p.189.  
<sup>235</sup> Hobsbaum, p.190.  
<sup>236</sup> Hobsbaum, p.196.  
<sup>237</sup> Hobsbaum, p.198.  
<sup>238</sup> Hobsbaum, p.198.  
<sup>239</sup> Hobsbaum, p.198.  
<sup>240</sup> Hobsbaum, p.200.  
<sup>241</sup> Hobsbaum, p.200.  
<sup>242</sup> Hobsbaum, pp.203-4  
<sup>243</sup> J. J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp.12-13.  
<sup>244</sup> McGann, pp.11-12.  
<sup>245</sup> McGann, p.12.  
<sup>246</sup> McGann, p.83.  
<sup>247</sup> McGann, pp.89-90.  
<sup>248</sup> Robert Conquest, *New Lines: An Anthology* (London: Macmillan & Co Ltd, 1957), p.xii.  
<sup>249</sup> Conquest, p.xiv.  
<sup>250</sup> Conquest, p.xv.  
<sup>251</sup> Conquest, p.xv.  
<sup>252</sup> Conquest, p.xvii.  
<sup>253</sup> Quoted in James Fenton, *The Strength of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.92.  
<sup>254</sup> Michael Parker, *Seamus Heaney: The Making of a Poet* (Dublin and London: Gill and Macmillan), p.58.  
<sup>255</sup> Hobsbaum, p.256.  
<sup>256</sup> Hobsbaum, p.xii.  
<sup>257</sup> Hobsbaum, p.290.  
<sup>258</sup> Hobsbaum, p.291.  
<sup>259</sup> Hobsbaum, p.294.  
<sup>260</sup> Hobsbaum, p.294.  
<sup>261</sup> Hobsbaum, p.294.  
<sup>262</sup> *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), I, p.123.  
<sup>263</sup> J. Williams, *Twentieth-Century British Poetry* (London: Edward Arnold, 1987), p.42.  
<sup>264</sup> Williams, p.50. See also *The Ironic Harvest*, p.54.  
<sup>265</sup> Williams, p.44.  
<sup>266</sup> Hobsbaum, p.297.  
<sup>267</sup> Hobsbaum, p.298.  
<sup>268</sup> Quoted in Fenton, p.89.

- <sup>269</sup> Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry* (London: Faber & Faber, 1995), p.149.
- <sup>270</sup> Hugh Haughton, 'Power and Hiding Places: Wordsworth and Seamus Heaney', in *The Monstrous Debt: Modalities of Romantic Influence in Twentieth-Century Literature*, ed. by D. A. Davies and R. M. Turley (Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2006), pp.61-100 (p.62).
- <sup>271</sup> Haughton, Davies and Turley, *The Monstrous Debt*, p.63.
- <sup>272</sup> Haughton, Davies and Turley, *The Monstrous Debt*, p.62.
- <sup>273</sup> Haughton, Davies and Turley, *The Monstrous Debt*, p.62.
- <sup>274</sup> Haughton, Davies and Turley, *The Monstrous Debt*, p.65.
- <sup>275</sup> Haughton, Davies and Turley, *The Monstrous Debt*, p.75.
- <sup>276</sup> Haughton, Davies and Turley, *The Monstrous Debt*, p.64.
- <sup>277</sup> Seamus Heaney, 'The Redress of Poetry', An Inaugural Lecture, Oxford University, October 1989, printed by Oxford University Press, p.1.
- <sup>278</sup> Heaney, Lecture, p.6.
- <sup>279</sup> Heaney, Lecture, p.10.
- <sup>280</sup> Heaney, Lecture, p.7.
- <sup>281</sup> Heaney, Lecture, p.7.
- <sup>282</sup> Heaney, Lecture, p.4.
- <sup>283</sup> Quoted in Fenton, p.93.
- <sup>284</sup> J. Reeves, *Georgian Poetry* (London: Penguin, 1962), p.xv.
- <sup>285</sup> J. W. Foster, *The Achievement of Seamus Heaney* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1995), p.7.
- <sup>286</sup> R. Caldwell, 'Seamus Heaney—From Major to Minor', *P. N. Review*, 5 vol. 24 (1998), 63-64 (p.64).
- <sup>287</sup> Heaney, p.144.
- <sup>288</sup> Heaney, p.141.
- <sup>289</sup> Wellek, Nichols, *Concepts of Criticism*, p.213.
- <sup>290</sup> Heaney, p.136.
- <sup>291</sup> Heaney, p.168.
- <sup>292</sup> Heaney, p.5.
- <sup>293</sup> Heaney, Lecture, p.6.
- <sup>294</sup> Heaney, p.138.
- <sup>295</sup> Heaney, p.66.
- <sup>296</sup> Heaney, p.70.
- <sup>297</sup> Heaney, p.78.
- <sup>298</sup> Heaney, p.71.
- <sup>299</sup> Heaney, p.67.
- <sup>300</sup> Heaney, p.67.
- <sup>301</sup> Heaney, p.159.
- <sup>302</sup> Defamiliarisation can be connected to Wordsworth as is indicated in Wordsworth's statement concerning *Lyrical Ballads*: 'The principle object, then, [...] was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, [...] in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby *ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect*.' (Emphasis added). See *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, I, p.123.
- <sup>303</sup> Introduction, *The Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry*, ed. by B. Morrison and A. Motion (London: Penguin Books, 1982), p.15.
- <sup>304</sup> Introduction, Morrison and Motion, *Contemporary British Poetry*, p.12.
- <sup>305</sup> Introduction, Morrison and Motion, *Contemporary British Poetry*, p.12.
- <sup>306</sup> Longley's wife, Edna Longley, is well known for her admiration of the empiricist poetry of Edward Thomas.

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- <sup>307</sup> Introduction, Morrison and Motion, *Contemporary British Poetry*, p.12.  
<sup>308</sup> Introduction, Morrison and Motion, *Contemporary British Poetry*, p.12.  
<sup>309</sup> Introduction, Morrison and Motion, *Contemporary British Poetry*, p.12.  
<sup>310</sup> Introduction, Morrison and Motion, *Contemporary British Poetry*, p.12.  
<sup>311</sup> Introduction, Morrison and Motion, *Contemporary British Poetry*, p.12.  
<sup>312</sup> Introduction, Morrison and Motion, *Contemporary British Poetry*, p.18.

## Chapter Five

### Empirical and Non-Empirical Identifiers

#### Introduction

In this chapter, I will show how the influence of Wordsworthian empiricism has manifested itself in twentieth-century poetry and how this has limited the hermeneutical value of the poetry concerned. Later in the chapter, I will look at various uses of language that allow poetry to disengage itself from Wordsworthian empiricism and to generate a non-empiricist sort of poetry. In *The Making of the Reader*, David Trotter notes a concern ‘written into the recent history of American, English and Irish literature’: namely ‘the disappearance of the Common Reader’.<sup>1</sup> He sees this concern as having particularly affected poets more than others because ‘their art is felt to be peculiarly at odds with modern civilization’.<sup>2</sup> At one time, the widely shared grammar of the Common Reader was so secure that ‘he or she could convert a wide range of linguistic sequences into literary structures and meanings without hesitation’.<sup>3</sup> He cites F. R. Leavis as saying that this situation was ‘a homogenous culture [which contained] one predominant pervasive ethos, grammar and idiom’.<sup>4</sup> Trotter adds that ‘the reader born into a homogenous culture develops a linguistic and a literary “grammar” at one and the same time; to make sense of the culture is to make sense of the literature which it has produced and which confirms it’.<sup>5</sup> For Leavis, the Industrial Revolution that had destroyed this cultural homogeneity, replacing the shared community of citizens and readers with aggregated groupings, both isolated and internally divided.<sup>6</sup> In such a situation, cultural homogeneity was replaced by confusion and relativism.<sup>7</sup> Trotter quotes Leavis’s exasperated question in light of this state of affairs: ‘By what standards, what criteria, what principles can we bring order into our reading?’<sup>8</sup> Trotter comments, ‘It seemed to Leavis, as it has to many others before and since, that the stable and easily identifiable Common Reader had given way to an anonymous crowd of uncommon readers, each loyal to a tiny sect or to himself alone’.<sup>9</sup> The important thing about Common Readers was that they were easily

identifiable. Because the poet and reader had been schooled to respond, as Trotter puts it, to the ‘same signals of limited variety’ it was likely that a poem was read for the “right” reasons—the reasons for which it had been written.<sup>10</sup> As the numbers of readers grew larger, ‘the identity of the individual reader could no longer be known or deduced’.<sup>11</sup>

The significance of this to our discussion of Wordsworth becomes apparent when we recognize that this plurality of readership worried him, because he believed he had important philosophical insights that could only be appreciated by the right audience. His attitude towards the “wrong” audience can be seen in the following:

Wordsworth insisted that his work would not have any effect on those who ‘do not *read* books’ but ‘merely snatch a glance at them that they may talk about them’; such people were clearly incompetent, and the poems would make no effort to capture their idle glances.<sup>12</sup>

This tacit desire to communicate with a discriminating readership can be viewed as a further affirmation of Wordsworth’s empiricist poetic aims. By wishing to limit communication to a select audience, he is acknowledging that whatever he has to say is of such value that its overt meaning cannot be allowed to fall into the hands of readers who may misinterpret him. He is signalling that his poetry is content driven and that this content can be successfully communicated through poetic language. As we saw in an earlier chapter, Wordsworth particularly sought to use poetry to communicate his moral and social philosophy to an educated readership; the quoted passage merely emphasises this. The legacy of his desire to communicate “important” content through poetic language can be found in much of the poetry written since his time. Whilst I recognise that not all poetry since then is “philosophical” in the sense that Wordsworth’s poetry is, there are certainly linguistic elements in the majority of it that Wordsworth would appreciate as being beneficial to a clearer communication between poet and reader. With this in mind, I would now like to turn to the main purpose of this present chapter.

The view that has been expressed throughout this thesis is that the influence of Wordsworth’s empiricist poetic aesthetic on twentieth-century poetry has been largely negative. That is to say that it has become the received standard by which poetic writing is to be measured. This standard is evident in

certain effects of language that I call Empirical Identifiers because of the ways in which they encourage exegetical closure through their functioning as referents to phenomena. It is my view that these Empirical Identifiers owe their existence in large part to Wordsworth's theory of poetics. Because of this, I think it appropriate to examine, in this chapter, their effect on poetic composition in the twentieth century. I will also look at their opposites, which I call Non-Empirical Identifiers because of the ways in which they invite readers to participate in the creation of individual meaning and significance from language. These Identifiers, by enabling a ready recognition of empirical and non-empirical writing procedures in poetry, may prove useful as diagnostic devices for future criticism.

Aside from suggesting some further critical tools that may be of use to criticism there is also the possibility that this undertaking will have artistic value in that it may encourage the individual reader to ultimately decide upon the meaning of a poetic text, either unconsciously or by volition. By "volition" I mean the conscious determination of the reader to decide upon any one of a number of associations the words and phrases of any given sentence suggest, and to choose this particular association as the constituent of meaning despite its being the less obvious or appropriate choice (in comparison to the others) given the complete denotative meaning the sentence's lexis implies. This sort of practice is possible because the poetic text is arguably without intentionality: both in the sense of having no meaning inherently, and of the impossibility of its having an authorial intent conferred upon it.

### Empirical Identifiers

By Empirical Identifiers, I mean those aspects of a poem that function as controlling agents to limit ambiguity and increase the possibilities for closure. There are seven of these in all:

1. Paraphrasable Sentences.
2. Grammatical Syntax.
3. Conventional Punctuation.
4. Sense-Data Descriptions of Events and Objects.
5. Absence of Ellipsis.
6. Absence of Metonymy.
7. Use of Simile and Metaphor.

The first three do not inhibit plural interpretation by themselves but do so only when used in conjunction with the four remaining ones. It is these four I would like now to discuss. I will deal with

the former three as the need arises during the course of this discussion.

#### **Empirical Identifier No. 4: Sense-Data Descriptions of Events and Objects**

Sense-data descriptions of events and objects attempt to make knowable that which cannot be known. Delineating the objects of perception using language is bound to be a failed enterprise if it is motivated by the desire to make the experience, or “essence”, of these objects more palpable (and hence knowable) than perception alone can render them. In a passage on Locke, which appears in J. P. Ward’s *Wordsworth’s Language of Men*, it is explained that Locke doubts the ability of language to express the “essences” of objects:

Locke argues that ‘the greatest parts of words are general’. But we never apprehend the general as sense experience. We only apprehend the particular, and this therefore has to be expressed verbally not in single words but in their combination. Thus ‘tree’ is general but ‘tall red tree’ is more particular and nearer to what might be an actual experience. But if the total reality is a continuous single substance, as science seemed now to have confirmed, it follows that no particular substance has an ‘essence’ unique to itself, and therefore no word can be expressing such an essence. Rather, says Locke, it is the general abstraction that expresses the only ‘essence’ there can be, namely, the essence of the species. But, as said, we can never sense that general essence. We can never sense the only thing the word can express.<sup>13</sup>

#### **Empirical Identifier No. 5: Absence of Ellipsis**

An absence of ellipses while not inhibiting indeterminacy of meaning, nevertheless, greatly reduces the possibility of it occurring. In Robert C. Holub’s *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction*, the importance of “gaps” in a text and their relation to indeterminacy is discussed in a section on the phenomenologist Roman Ingarden who,

considers the literary work to be a purely intentional or heteronomous object, i.e. [...] dependent on an act of consciousness. It consists of four layers or strata, each of which affects the others, and two distinct dimensions. [...] What is particularly important for Ingarden’s theory of cognition of the literary work is the notion that these layers and dimensions form a skeleton or ‘schematized structure’ to be completed by the reader. [...] The objects represented in a literary work exhibit ‘spots’ or ‘points’ or ‘places’ of indeterminacy [...]. All objects, according to phenomenological theory, have an infinite number of determinants, and no act of cognition can take into account every determinant of any particular object. But while a real object must have a *particular* determinant—a real object cannot be merely colored; it must have a particular color—the objects in a literary work, because they are intentionally projected from meaning units and aspects, must retain some degree of indeterminacy. For example, if we read the sentence, ‘The child bounced

the ball', we are confronted with a myriad of 'gaps' in the represented object. Whether the child in this case is 10 or 6 years old, whether it is male or female, brown or white, red-haired or blond—all of these features are not contained in this sentence and thus constitute 'gaps' or points of indeterminacy.<sup>14</sup>

From this we can gather that if even non-elliptical sentences contain indeterminate gaps then certainly elliptical sentences will guarantee them.

### **Empirical Identifier No. 6: Absence of Metonymy**

Metonymy is the replacement of one word for another with which it is associated. Examples are: "The press" for the news media, and "The Crown" for the monarchy. Metonymy operates through a connectedness to a thing rather than a resemblance to it. For instance, the metonym "The press", which stands for news media, derives from the fact that a printing press creates newspapers; and the metonym "The Crown", standing for the monarchy, derives from the crown that royalty historically wore. Metonymy is not used to transfer qualities to things, as is the case with metaphor; instead metonymy transfers an entire set of associations that may or may not be essential to the meaning.

Absence of metonymy is indicative of empiricism's attempts at a confirmation of reality: confirmation being rendered via sense-data descriptions of phenomena and experiences. Metonymy is not dependent upon sense-data descriptions but on the production of abstractions from particulars. Abstractions are mental formulations of associated ideas independent of sense-data and relying, instead, upon language's ability to connote meaning without reference to signifieds.

### **Empirical Identifier No. 7: Use of Simile and Metaphor**

Simile and, to a lesser extent, metaphor are contingent upon a recognition of comparisons. In the former, the comparison is explicit, in the latter it is implied. Both are dependent upon vision and the rendering of the objects of vision into language. Ted Hughes says of these devices:

It is one of those curious facts that when two things are compared in a metaphor or a simile, we see both of them much more distinctly than if they were mentioned separately as having nothing to do with each other [...] You are forced to look more closely [...] How is a dragonfly like a helicopter?<sup>15</sup>

The question 'How is a dragonfly like a helicopter?' can only be asked if one assumes that the metaphor



representing the dragonfly is, indeed, representing a dragonfly and not some other creature or thing. That such an assumption *is* made indicates the restrictive nature of metaphor as an agent of indeterminacy, and demonstrates its effectiveness as a device that encourages closure and draws attention away from the syntactical to the referent. We see this also in Kate Rhode's 'Out of Water':

Not far away a man fishes,  
shirtless and glimmering.

He spreads his small net  
as a waiter casts his cloth  
deftly, with one smart flick.  
It comes back shaking with life,

Silver beads in a fancy choker <sup>16</sup>

Here the comparison of the fishing net with the waiter's cloth renders both more palpable. The use of defamiliarization on the image of the fish in the net achieves the same result.

### An Example and Analysis of Empiricist Poetry

The following is an account of Anthony Easthope's analysis of Edward Thomas's, 'Adlestrop':

Yes, I remember Adlestrop—  
The name, because one afternoon  
Of heat the express-train drew up there  
Unwontedly. It was late June.

The steam hissed. Someone cleared his throat  
No one left and no one came  
On the bare platform. What I saw  
Was Adlestrop—only the name

And willows, willow-herb, and grass,  
And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry,  
No whit less still and lonely fair  
Than the high cloudlets in the sky.

And for that minute a blackbird sang  
Close by, and round him, mistier,  
Farther and farther, all the birds  
Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.<sup>17</sup>

Easthope sees the poem's opening as confronting the speaker with a disturbing sense of a separation between the accustomed unity of subject and object:

At first, when the train stops and there is no sign of life on the bare platform, the speaker

feels a little crisis of subjectivity, as though meaning has dropped out of his world leaving him separated from it, facing only writing, a name, Adlestrop.<sup>18</sup>

This ‘crisis’, though, is soon dispelled by his experiencing natural phenomena as being connected with his own feelings. Seeing the willows, grass and meadows as,

No whit less still and lonely fair  
Than the high cloudlets in the sky

The disconnection between subject and object is now restored: and he is able to confirm both his independent existence and that of phenomena. For Easthope, ‘Adlestrop’,

represents an ‘I’ who is coherent and self-possessed, a unified subject, secure in its ability to affirm ‘I remember’, ‘I saw’. The speaker does have a moment of loss—silence except for hissing steam, emptiness, the strange writing—but this is quickly recuperated into imaginary plenitude [...]. And though the language of the poem is elaborate at certain points (‘Unwontedly’, ‘No whit’, ‘cloudlets’) this does not interfere with the overall clarity of the statement—initial hesitations and hiatuses are overcome in the fluent syntax and confident tone of the ending. This is a speaker who is sure that language can represent the real.<sup>19</sup>

Easthope’s methodology is to draw attention to the suppressed existential insecurities that he believes motivate the sort of poetic aesthetic subscribed to by Thomas. Easthope’s hypothesis implies that the speaker of this sort of poetry assumes a natural harmonious unity between subject and object, which is ordinarily in operation, but that occasionally a ‘crisis of subjectivity’ is experienced which causes the speaker to feel separated from his physical surroundings. Consequently, this produces a fear that the union between subject and object may be illusory. This anxiety is alleviated only when the speaker more fully experiences the natural phenomena surrounding him. We see some aspect of this in what I said in chapter one concerning Wordsworth’s childhood need to physically touch the natural objects around him in order that he would not lose grip with reality and be forced into an uncomfortable solipsism.

### The Functioning of Empirical Identifiers

I will use Simon Armitage’s poem ‘Night Shift’ to illustrate how Empirical Identifiers function. This poem appears in *The New Poetry* edited by Michael Hulse, David Kennedy and David Morley:

Once again I have missed you by moments;  
steam hugs the rim of the just-boiled kettle,

water in the pipes finds its own level.  
In another room there are other signs

of someone having left: dust, unsettled  
by the sweep of the curtains; the clockwork

contractions of the paraffin heater.  
For weeks now we have come and gone, woken

in acres of empty bedding, written  
lipstick love-notes on the bathroom mirror

and in this space we have worked and paid for  
we have found ourselves, but lost each other.

Upstairs, at least, there is understanding  
in things more telling than lipstick kisses:

the air, still hung with spores of your hairspray;  
body-heat stowed in the crumpled duvet.<sup>20</sup>

This poem contains all of the Empirical Identifiers: paraphrasable sentences, grammatical syntax, conventional punctuation, sense-data descriptions of events and objects, absence of ellipses, absence of metonymy and the use of metaphor.

It is similar to ‘Adlestrop’ in that the speaker is confronted with the sense of a separation between the unity of subject and object. He fears his self-identity diminishing without the physical presence of his partner. To remedy this he recreates her presence by alluding to her through sense-data descriptions of objects she has recently come into contact with: the steam on the rim of the recently switched-off kettle; the unsettled dust caused by the ‘sweep of the curtains’; written lipstick notes on the bathroom mirror; the scent of her hairspray; the duvet retaining her body heat. These things are indexes of her actual presence elsewhere, and confirm the speaker’s existence as a separate identity both from her and these objects. It is this comforting knowledge that enables the speaker to reconnect the subject with the object. Here is how the Empirical Identifiers each relate to this poem.

### **Empirical Identifier No. 1: Paraphrasable Sentences**

The poem consists entirely of paraphrasable sentences. Here is a paraphrase of it:

You have just left the building. So recently, in fact, that the kettle still has steam on its rim after just being switched off. However, this is not the only sign that your departure has been recent: in the other room, the dust is still floating about from the action of the curtains you opened. Similarly, the heater you have just turned off makes a noise, as it cools, like the

regular ticking of a clock.

For weeks now we have not spent much time together because we work at different times. And because of this inconvenient arrangement we have to sleep and wake at different times, which means that when I wake you are not in the bed with me.

The only way we can communicate is by leaving messages of our love for each other written using your lipstick (lipstick: because lipstick is a symbol of romance—isn't it?) on the bathroom mirror. Moreover, isn't it ironic that in this home of ours (one that we have worked and paid for) we have each gained self-knowledge but, sadly, lost a certain intimacy of each other?

Nevertheless, back to what I was saying before: about the objects I am looking at which represent your physical existence in this room and, by implication, your continuing existence elsewhere. For example, the scent of your hairspray still lingers, and the bed is still warm from the heat of your body. These things remind me of us making love and are, therefore, more sensuous indicators of our physical relationship than are the lipstick messages I have already mentioned.

Paraphrasable sentences are not exclusive to mainstream twentieth-century poetry; most poetry up until the first decade of that century exhibited them to varying degrees. That Wordsworth's poetry did similar, should not, however, be held as a particular criticism of him as given the pre-Modernist period in which he wrote such a practice was probably unavoidable. I say "probably" because its avoidance was not out of the question as the following lines from Blake's 'The Book of Thel' may demonstrate:

The eternal gates' terrific porter lifted the northern bar:  
Thel enter'd in & saw the secrets of the land unknown.  
She saw the couches of the dead, & where the fibrous roots  
Of every heart on earth infixes deep its restless twists:  
A land of sorrows & of tears where never smile was seen.<sup>21</sup>

(103-7)

Whilst these lines are not inevitably immune to paraphrase, they make obvious their difference with the opening lines from Wordsworth's 'Daffodils':

I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host, of daffodils;  
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.<sup>22</sup>

(1-6)

A simple paraphrase of these lines is:

I walked along, alone like an isolated cloud in the sky, when I suddenly saw some yellow daffodils blowing in the breeze, under the trees next to the lake.

Similarly, the following stanza from his poem, 'The Waggoner',

'Tis spent—this burning day of June!  
Soft darkness o'er its latest gleams is stealing;  
The buzzing dor-hawk, round and round, is wheeling,—  
That solitary bird  
Is all that can be heard  
In silence deeper far than that of the deepest noon! <sup>23</sup>

(1-6)

can be paraphrased as follows:

This hot June day is over and night is drawing in. Only the vibrating trill of a single nightjar circling in the sky breaks the profound silence.

Such an exercise in paraphrase would be difficult with non-empiricist poetry.

### **Empirical Identifier No. 2: Grammatical Syntax**

The grammar and sentence structure is conventional, and places the communication of content above any stylistic or formal considerations. If the grammar were not conventional, meaning would become plural as can be seen in the following lines from 'Into the Day' by J. H. Prynne:

Who does we reign our royal house  
is roofed with fateful slates.<sup>24</sup>

These lines begin with the words 'who does' which immediately puts us into questioning mode, but the next word, 'we', draws our attention to the grammatical inappropriateness of the preceding word, 'does', in its location between 'who' and 'we'. We have been led to expect a question but the grammatically incorrect syntax has frustrated this expectation. We are left instead with a language which rather than denoting a position of enquiry relies, instead, on connotation for this effect. This sort of "question" belongs to neither an ontological nor an epistemological enquiry (both products of empirical reasoning) but to an enquiry that is syntactical rather than referential.

Similarly, 'our royal house is roofed with fateful slates' although syntactically correct contain the juxtaposition of 'fateful' with 'slates', two words not usually associated or combined with each other.

This cannot be said of ‘roofed’ and ‘slate’ which often share the same collocation. If the word ‘fateful’ had not been included there would be little room for plurality of meaning. The word ‘slates’ would mean solely roofing materials. It is the juxtaposition of ‘fateful’ and ‘slates’ that produces the plurality. A few of the dictionary definitions of the word ‘slate’ are: 1) a fine-grained rock that can be easily split into thin layers and is used as a roofing material. 2) a roofing tile of slate. 3) a writing tablet of slate. 4) a dark grey colour. 5) a list of candidates in an election. ‘Slate’ is, thus, rich in connotation. The addition of ‘fateful’ enables two of these meanings to become appropriate. For example, it is quite possible to have a fateful dark grey colour—as in the sense of an omen. So, too, is it possible to have a fateful group of electoral candidates.

If we were to choose this latter image for one of the meanings of ‘fateful slates’ we could make it fit into the rest of the sentence (if it can rightly be called one) by opening up the meanings of ‘our royal house is roofed with’. This is simple, as the idea of electoral candidates enables ‘royal house’ to connote a political arena of some sort as suggested by the word ‘house’ (The Houses of Parliament or The White House, for instance). The word ‘roofed’ connotes a ‘covering over’—a protection of some sort as in the image of a bird’s wing covering and protecting its young. If we take this as our connotation, then one of the many meanings of ‘our royal house is roofed with fateful slates’ could be: ‘Our political system is protected from tyranny by its processes of electing political candidates who are under oath (fated) to guarantee this freedom from tyranny’.

The same sort of exegesis can be performed even with lines that are grammatically sparser, such as the following:

I a egg  
I a waffle  
I broken  
the better to live <sup>25</sup>

For example, if we look at the words ‘egg’, ‘waffle’, ‘broken’ and ‘better to live’ it is possible to free-associate from each one. From ‘egg’, we can get to “delicate”, or “clever” (as in “egg-head”) or “baby” (as in “chicklet”). ‘Waffle’ has another meaning apart from a food; it also means: “Pause or hold back

in uncertainty or unwillingness”. ‘Broken’ can mean, “broken physically” or “broken emotionally”, the word can also mean: “interrupt”. ‘Better to live’ can mean “able to live”, “more fit to live” or “more worthy of life”

My interpretation of these lines is: “I am an unborn baby (egg). I sense my mother's uncertainty about having me (waffle). I hope she does not abort me (broken). I am worthy of life (better to live). Consequently, from a set of ungrammatical phrases it is possible to confer a depth of meaning. Such interpretations as given in the above two examples would be difficult with lines that were grammatically syntactical, as are, for instance, the following from Wordsworth’s, ‘The Idle Shepherd-Boys’:

The valley rings with mirth and joy;  
Among the hills the echoes play  
A never ending song,  
To welcome in the May.  
The magpie chatters with delight;  
The mountain raven’s youngling brood  
Have left the mother and the nest;  
And they go rambling east and west  
In search of their own food;  
Or through the glittering vapours dart to  
In very wantonness of heart.<sup>26</sup>

(1-11)

### **Empirical Identifier No. 3: Conventional Punctuation**

Every comma, semi-colon, and full stop is in the “right” place. If the punctuation were not conventional, the poem would be more amenable to plural interpretation. I will use as an example lines nine and ten from Helen Kidd’s ‘The Paper City’:

Hills in the West fumbling the sky over  
a damp moulder of ground where marsh spooks stand.<sup>27</sup>

I will quote Kidd’s own analysis of these lines in relation to their flexibility of meaning and punctuation:

Similarly, punctuation can impose a straight-jacket on meaning, whereas removing it can allow a lexical item to spill over into an entirely different or ambiguous usage, thus deepening the poem’s field of association. For example ‘over’ in line nine [...] can be read to refer back into its own line as meaning ‘all over the sky’ or it can connect with line ten as ‘over a damp moulder of ground’. By placing it at the end of the line it effects a double

movement, backwards, as I have said, and also forward, operating as an open link with the following line.<sup>28</sup>

**Empirical Identifier No. 4:  
Sense-Data Descriptions of Events and Objects**

The use of description is essential in the speaker's attempt to reconnect subject and object. Confirmation of phenomena independent of perception is required for full mental equilibrium. To this end, detail is important. It is not sufficient that there is steam on the kettle: the steam has to 'hug' the 'rim'. It is also essential to tell us that the kettle has just boiled. This attention to detail is designed to drive home the idea that precision in description is a means to a direct knowledge of phenomena. The speaker is almost obsessive in his need to confirm this: 'the clockwork / contractions of the paraffin heater', 'lipstick love-notes on the bathroom mirror', 'the air, still hung with spores of your hairspray'.

This concentration on precision echoes a stanza from Frank O'Hara's 'Cambridge':

It is still raining and the yellow-green cotton fruit  
looks silly round a window giving out on winter trees  
with only three drab leaves left. The hot plate works,  
it is the sole heat on earth, and instant coffee. I  
put on my warm corduroy pants, a heavy maroon sweater,  
and wrap myself in my old maroon bathrobe.

O'Hara was considered by many critics to be an innovative poet, reacting against descriptive realism in poetic writing, however in this stanza, at least, this is not the case. What we see here is descriptive prose that leaves little to the reader's imagination. In contrast to this, let us look at some song lyrics, one by Leonard Cohen and two by Bob Dylan. In Cohen's 'Night Comes On' from the album *Various Positions*, we have this verse:

I said mother I'm frightened,  
the thunder and the lightning,  
I'll never get through this alone.  
She said I'll be with you,  
my shawl wrapped around you,  
my hand on your head when you go.  
And the night came on,  
it was very calm.  
I wanted the night to go on and on  
but she said go back,  
go back to the world.



Unlike O'Hara, Cohen is not averse to generalising. Consequently, this verse is pregnant with interpretative possibilities. From the beginning of this verse, ambiguity is allowed to operate in that we cannot be certain if the speaker is addressing his actual biological mother or whether "mother" is a metaphor for God or "Mother Nature". Similarly, we cannot be sure whether the thunder and lightning that frightens him is literal or metaphorical. The imprecision surrounding his fear serves to enrich listeners' experience of the song and allows them to decide for themselves the precise nature of this "fear". Moreover, this imprecision allows for numerous enquiries. The speaker's mother tells him that she will be with him when he goes. Where is he going? Is he going into the fearful situation represented by the thunder and lightning? Is this situation an existential experience analogous to what Christian contemplatives have referred to as "the dark night of the soul"? Is the "night" in 'the night came on' also metaphorical? Perhaps, it stands for a feeling of comfort and reassurance brought about by the knowledge that his biological mother/God/Nature is with him in some sense. If so, does he want it to continue? He probably does but something tells him to 'go back to the world'. Who tells him this: the "mother" figure or the "night" (whatever the latter represents)? That this verse can invite such questions indicates its superiority to the O'Hara stanza quoted earlier.

Similar ambiguities and the questions they prompt can be found in the following verse from Dylan's 'Changing of the Guards' from the album *Street Legal*:

Fortune calls.  
I stepped forth from the shadows, to the marketplace,  
Merchants and thieves, hungry for power, my last deal gone down.  
She's smelling sweet like the meadows where she was born,  
On midsummer's eve, near the tower.

Like Cohen, Dylan is not afraid to generalise. He is also unafraid to mix poetic registers, instances of which are his use of archaic-sounding phrases such as 'I stepped forth', 'smelling sweet like the meadows' and 'on midsummer's eve' alongside the more demotic 'last deal gone down'. This adds a linguistic variety whilst paying homage to his poetic inheritance. The verse states at its beginning that 'fortune calls', but we are not told for whom. Is it for the speaker? Is it for the listeners? Is it for humanity in general? Dylan leaves the choice up to us. The verse then introduces a persona with 'I

stepped forth from the shadows' but this persona is not developed or elaborated upon, and we are left guessing as to its identity. Even the word 'shadows' (so vague that Pound surely would have frowned upon it) leaves open innumerable interpretive possibilities. Furthermore, phrases such as 'merchants and thieves', and 'hungry for power', not only function as specific symbols for corruption, decay and amorality, but as more general statements about the nature of the human condition. In addition, more questions are prompted by the figure of the woman. Who is the woman who is 'smelling sweet'? How is she like the meadows? Why is the word 'meadows' plural—how can she be born in more than one meadow? Is the meadow a meadow? If not what does it symbolise? What is the tower—is that symbolic also?

Similarly with Dylan's song 'The Wicked Messenger', more questions are raised than answered. The first verse is:

There was a wicked messenger  
from Eli he did come,  
with a mind that multiplied  
the smallest matter.  
When questioned who had sent for him,  
he answered with his thumb,  
for his tongue it could not speak, but only flatter.

We note immediately the presence of ambiguity with the line: 'from Eli he did come'. We are not told if Eli is a place or a person. The name has biblical connotations and can easily be a person. In the Old Testament Eli was the judge and high priest of Israel and although loyal to God, his reluctance to remove his two corrupt sons from the priesthood resulted in disgrace. Dylan's lack of indication as to whom or what Eli is allows us to perhaps see a biblical reference in the name. If we take the name as referring to the biblical Eli then we have to ask the question: If the messenger was sent by Eli (who was a faithful servant of God) why is he seen as wicked? Is it because his mind 'multiplied the smallest matter' (possibly meaning he was neurotic), or that his 'tongue it could not speak, but only flatter' (possibly meaning he was a liar)? Are these common human failings sufficient grounds for someone to be designated as wicked? Alternatively, perhaps the messenger is wicked because there is a crudity about him—he 'answered with his thumb' (he gave the finger, perhaps?). For want of detailed

information, we simply do not know.

Still more mysterious is the line: ‘When questioned who had sent for him’. This alludes to the possibility that perhaps Eli is not a person but a place since whoever sent for the messenger was requesting it from another geographical location than the one the messenger inhabited. If Eli is a person, then Eli would have been the one who sent him—there would be no need for a second person to request it.

With the second verse we have:

He stayed behind the assembly hall,  
it was there he made his bed.  
Oftentimes he could be seen returning,  
until one day he just appeared  
with a note in his hand which read,  
‘The soles of my feet, I swear they’re burning’.

From the first two lines of this verse, we obtain the impression that the people of the community he has entered have shunned him, which has forced him to live in less than hospitable surroundings. There is irony in this, in that his bed is behind the assembly hall—a place that one often associates with the (usually friendly) gathering of a community, yet he has been isolated. With the line: ‘Oftentimes he could be seen returning’, more questions are prompted. From where is he returning? Is it from Eli (be it a place or person)? What is the reason for the frequency of his trips to and from the community? Is he on some secret errand—if so, for whom? When he does return from one of his trips Dylan describes it as: ‘until one day he just appeared’—no one has seen him returning on this occasion. The note he is carrying which reads: ‘The soles of my feet, I swear they’re burning’, seems ominous. Does it indicate some sort of eternal judgment and damnation for him and/or the community? The final verse is:

Oh, the leaves began to fallin’  
and the seas began to part,  
and the people that confronted him were many.  
And he was told but these few words  
which opened up his heart  
‘If you cannot bring good news, then don’t bring any’.

The first two line of this verse have apocalyptic connotations. The falling leaves evocative of decay and death and the parting seas connoting massive geological and meteorological upheavals redolent of End

Time prophesies. Such is the message that he delivers to the community that he is confronted by them with the words: ‘If you cannot bring good news, then don’t bring any’. All this is very different from the descriptiveness of the following stanza from Wordsworth’s ‘Resolution and Independence’:

There was a roaring in the wind all night;  
The rain came heavily and fell in floods;  
But now the sun is rising clam and bright;  
The birds are singing in the distant woods;  
Over his own sweet voice the Stock-dove broods;  
The Jay makes answer as the Magpie chatters;  
And all the air is filled with pleasant noise of waters.<sup>29</sup>

(1-7)

As I have attempted to demonstrate, the songs ‘Night Comes On’, ‘The Changing of the Guards’ and ‘The Wicked Messenger’ utilise vagueness and ambiguity to allow the listener to create highly individualised interpretations. This is not possible with poetry that conforms to the traditions in contemporary poetry exemplified by Seamus Heaney.

#### **Empirical Identifier No. 5: Absence of Ellipsis**

The nearest thing to ellipsis is the omission of the word “and” after the word ‘hairspray’ in the following lines:

The air, still hung with spores of your hairspray;  
body-heat stowed in the crumpled duvet.

However, it would be more accurate to describe these lines as asyndetic rather than elliptical. To give a demonstration of what the effect of these lines would be if ellipsis were present is difficult, principally because ellipsis is something that, ideally, has to be incorporated into the syntactical structure during composition, and not after. To simply delete words from these lines to illustrate my point would be to render them examples of asyndeton or parataxis.

#### **Empirical Identifier No. 6: Absence of Metonymy**

There is no metonymy in the poem.

#### **Empirical Identifier No. 7: Use of Simile and Metaphor**

The poem makes use of metaphor as in ‘steam hugs’, in the line ‘steam hugs the rim of the just-boiled kettle’. This use of metaphor links the signifier (‘kettle’) inextricably with the signified (kettle), thus, inhibiting connotation. ‘Hugs’ is also used to personify the steam and kettle and to draw attention to the speaker’s “un-hugged” state.

### Non-Empirical Identifiers

The constituents of non-empiricist poetry that distinguish it from empiricist poetry, I will refer to as Non-Empirical Identifiers. They are:

1. Multiple Registers (e.g. archaism, rhetoric, cliché).
2. Intertextuality.
3. Incoherent Syntax and Sentence Structures.
4. Novel Word Juxtapositions.
5. Abstraction.
6. No Distinct Ego or Poetic Persona.
7. No Philosophical Discursiveness.
8. Unconventional Punctuation.
9. Use of Ellipsis.
10. No Metaphors.

It is not necessary for every Non-Empirical Identifier to be present in a poem for the poem to be classified as non-empirical. However, the more of these identifiers a poem has the more it can be classified in such a way.

### The Functioning of Non-Empirical Identifiers

#### **Non-Empirical Identifier No. 1: Multiple Registers**

An example of a poem that contains some of the Non-Empirical Identifiers is Veronica Forrest-Thomson’s ‘The Garden of Proserpine’. In this poem, we find examples of the use of multiple registers, particularly in close juxtaposition:

And, O, many-toned, immortal Aphrodite,  
Lend me thy girdle.  
You can spare it for an hour or so  
Until Zeus has got back his erection.<sup>30</sup>

Here we see the use of the rhetorical device of apostrophe, which is now considered archaic but was frequently used in elegiac and epic poetry to invoke the presence of the dead or that of a muse. Here it

serves a similar function, as the goddess of love, Aphrodite, is summoned to assist the speaker in matters of love. The syntax of the first two lines is noticeably archaic, containing words such as, ‘many-toned’, ‘immortal’, ‘thy’, ‘girdle’ and the single capitalised letter ‘O’. This is in sharp contrast with the second two lines with their twentieth-century colloquial register and comic bathos.

The juxtaposition of these two discordant registers draws attention to the artifice involved in their construction, and connects the Elizabethan concept of courtly love to its modern equivalent of unrequited love, which is being alluded to by the use of the girdle, with its associations of sexuality, seduction and denial. The speaker (whom I will make into a female) is calling upon Aphrodite to rectify her loveless situation by conferring upon her the power of sexual attraction. Other juxtapositions of discordant registers in the poem are:

I lie alone. I am weary, weary,  
I would that I were dead.  
Be my partner and you’ll never regret it.<sup>31</sup>

In lines one and two we have the archaism, and in line three the colloquialism. Interestingly, the register of the first line is redolent of lines written by Elizabethan male poets. Such lines as ‘Come, Sleep!, O Sleep!, the certain knot of peace’, and ‘Weep no more, nor sigh, nor groan’ by Philip Sidney and John Fletcher, respectively, have the same jaded response to life that is discernable in ‘I lie alone. I am weary, weary’. The colloquial third line with its modern contraction (‘you’ll’) produces more bathos. As well as mixed registers there is a mixture of archaic and non-archaic vocabulary and phraseology. Among the archaic are: ‘the moon is sinking’, ‘Pleiades’, ‘gods’, ‘Aphrodite is also Persephone’, ‘queen of love and death’. The non-archaic include: ‘time runs on she said’, ‘stick together’, they make a strong combination’, ‘so just make him love me again’, ‘you good old triple goddess of tight corners’, ‘and leave me to deal with gloomy Dis’, ‘we all know better’, ‘love kills people and the police can’t do anything to stop it’.

It should be pointed out here that although Forrest-Thompson uses the above devices to some effect, her actual poetic aesthetic is, surprisingly, empiricist. She still regards the text as the ultimate arbiter of meaning, hence her criticism of David Gascoyne’s ‘The Rites of Hysteria’ as being meaningless

because, ‘the formal levels exercise no control, so that one cannot tell how the external world is filtered through the language of the poem’.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, whilst accepting the fact that readers will inevitably use their imaginations with regard to their appreciation of the text, in the following statement she qualifies the degree to which imagination is to be used:

The reader must, of course, use his imagination; that is what poetry is for. But he must use it to free himself from the fixed forms of thought which ordinary language imposes on our minds, not to deny the strangeness of poetry by inserting it in some non-poetic area: his own mind, the poet’s mind, or any non-fictional situations.<sup>33</sup>

By setting up a dubious opposition between ‘poetry’ and so-called ‘non-poetic areas’ she is redefining poetry as that which can only operate textually. In this sense her poetic has similarities to New Criticism.

Returning to the matter in hand, John Ashbery is also notable for his use of conflicting registers. In ‘How Much Longer Will I Be Able to Inhabit the Divine Sepulcher...’ the opening stanza repeats the neo-Romantic utterance of the poem’s title while extending it into rhetorical query: ‘How much longer will I be able to inhabit the divine sepulcher / Of life my great love?’ We then have a surreal-like semi-philosophical enquiry into whether,

dolphins plunge bottomward  
To find the light? Or is it rock  
That is searched? Unrelentingly?<sup>34</sup>

To this is appended the hipster/cowboy demotic sullenness of ‘Huh’.<sup>35</sup> The resultant effect of this mixture of discourses is to disorient the reader sufficiently to enable recognition of this disorientation tactic in process and, thereby, allow the reader to re-engage with the text on its own terms. Inevitably, this means that readers are forced to create meanings from the indeterminate and contextually dissonant linguistic signs presented to them.

### **Non-Empirical Identifier No. 2: Intertextuality**

Another Non-Empirical Identifier is the use of intertextuality. Among the most celebrated instances of this are T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, and Ezra Pound’s *Cantos*. Before them, Alfred Lord Tennyson and Mathew Arnold both referred to other texts. Tennyson’s *Maud* draws heavily on *Hamlet*, while

Arnold's *Empedocles* attempts to 'debunk the influence of Keats in contemporary philosophical poetry' by 'creating a failed "hero" as his protagonist, who is Keatsian in many of his concerns and in many aspects of his character'.<sup>36</sup> We can see intertextuality, also, in the fifth stanza of William Blake's 'The Tyger':

When the stars threw down their spears  
And watered heaven with their tears:  
Did he smile his work to see?  
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Of these lines Michael Ferber says:

The 'When' clause tells of strange cosmic events but tells of them as if they must already be familiar to us; they are the setting or background to the main business of the stanza. But what are these events? They suggest a war in heaven, and the best-known story of a war in heaven is Milton's in *Paradise Lost*. Are the stars, then, the rebel angels, now defeated and weeping over their loss? Since that rebellion was the prime act of evil in the world, are we to take it as not only simultaneous with, but equivalent to, the creation of the Tyger?<sup>37</sup>

As Ferber suggests this stanza seems to be using *Paradise Lost* as its intertext. He later suggests, also, that Blake's 'The Sick Rose', similarly, alludes to *Paradise Lost*. With this poem Blake 'has reimagined the Fall, when a serpent entered the Garden to seduce Eve, and death entered the world'.<sup>38</sup> Ferber then quotes the speech from *Paradise Lost* (Book IX, lines 900-1) that Adam makes when he learns what has happened to Eve:

How art thou lost, how on a sudden lost,  
Defac't, deflow'r'd, and now to Death devote?<sup>39</sup>

A moral parallel between Eve and Blake's Rose is then suggested: 'We no sooner think of Eve, however, when we wonder if the Rose herself is in any way at fault'.<sup>40</sup>

In the works of Eliot, Pound, Tennyson, Arnold and Blake, intertexts are used as exegetical reference points, recognition of which is required by the reader before there can be a forward movement in aesthetic appreciation. The intertext is made to function metaphorically as an extra-textual referent. However, apart from this usage, intertextuality can also function metonymically.

In the Forrest-Thomson poem cited already, 'The Garden of Proserpine', mythical and literary figures are mentioned. Aphrodite, Zeus, Pleiades, Dis, Sappho, Shakespeare, Swinburne, Tennyson, Eliot,



Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschylus are all brought into play. However, it is unimportant whether the reader knows who they are. It is enough that they appear. They function as intertextual metonymic ciphers to be appropriated by the reader for his or her own personal exegesis. If the reader is aware that Aphrodite is the goddess given by Zeus in marriage to Hephaestus, or that Dis is the Roman name for Hades, the god of the underworld, all well and good. However, it is not essential information.

In another context, Roland Barthes says in ‘The Death of the Author’ that a text is, ‘not a line of words releasing a single [...] meaning but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash’.<sup>41</sup> ‘The reader’, he says, ‘is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination’.<sup>42</sup> In light of this, the use of intertextuality can be seen as the systematic outworking of this more general observation about language and texts.

### **Non-Empirical Identifier No. 3: Incoherent Syntax and Sentence Structures**

In this section, I will use the word “incoherent” to characterize the mainstream evaluation of non-empirical poetry since most readers will understand it in this context.<sup>43</sup> Such poetry displays the presence of ego/s and voice/s in a fragmented and discontinuous form. Incoherent syntax and sentence structure is evidenced in Clark Coolidge’s ‘On Induction of the Hand’: ‘There is a wrench that a certain staring at / while balancing humours we call words in state pours wings / of edgy fondness bound useless in calm of lucidity down the / chute of the sentence’.<sup>44</sup> It is also present in Tom Mandel’s ‘Say Ja’: ‘I wanted to increase / them singing aphasic their / song certain, the turnstiles / left open to leap over / which these gloomy pens / and stalls so full’.<sup>45</sup> Sentences such as these and the phrasal juxtapositions they consist of ‘not only suggest unexpected relations’, as Charles Bernstein says in his essay ‘Semblance’, ‘but induce reading along ectoskeletal and citational lines’.<sup>46</sup> The result of which is that ‘the operant mechanisms of meaning are multiplied and patterns of projection in reading are less restricted’.<sup>47</sup> This would not be so with more grammatical sentence patterns which, as Bernstein says,

allow the accumulating references to enthrall the reader by diminishing diversions from a constructed representation. In this way, each word’s references work in harmony by

reinforcing a spatiotemporal order conventionalized by the bulk of writing practice that creates the 'standard'. 'The lamp sits atop the table in the study'—each word narrowing down the possibilities of each other, limiting the interpretation of each word's meaning by creating an ever more specific context.<sup>48</sup>

#### **Non-Empirical Identifier No. 4: Novel Word Juxtapositions**

Novel Word Juxtapositions can be found in Jack Kerouac's '211th Chorus': 'quivering meat / conception',<sup>49</sup> and in his 'The Thrashing Doves': 'all the balloon of the shroud on the floor';<sup>50</sup> in Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*: 'hydrogen dukebox', 'starry / dynamo in the machinery of night' and 'supernatural darkness';<sup>51</sup> in Tom Clarke's 'You (I)': 'siege / engines';<sup>52</sup> and in John Ashbery's 'Leaving the Atocha Station': 'perfect tar grams nuclear world bank tulip'.<sup>53</sup> They can also be found in Blake's *Milton* ('freezing hunger', 'eternal tables');<sup>54</sup> and his *The Book of Urizen* ('the caverns of his jointed spine').<sup>55</sup> These word combinations result in elliptical breaks between juxtapositions of words not normally collocated and which allows for the possibility of meaning. It operates similarly to Eisenstein's theory of cinematic montage where,

the emphasis is on a dynamic juxtaposition of individual shots that calls attention to itself and forces the viewer consciously to come to conclusions about the interplay of images while he or she is also emotionally and psychologically affected in a less conscious way. Instead of continuity, Eisenstein emphasized conflict and contrast, arguing for a kind of Hegelian dialectic, where each shot was a cell and where a thesis could be juxtaposed by an antithesis, both achieving a synthesis or significance which was not inherent in either shot.<sup>56</sup>

Similarly, William Empson's comment on the juxtaposition of two statements ('Swiftly the years, beyond recall. / Solemn the stillness of this spring morning'.) that are only loosely related. These two statements generate for Empson a discussion of the relationship and interpretation of the words 'swiftly' and 'stillness'. Commenting on their contradictory character, he says:

Lacking rhyme, metre, and any overt device such as comparison, these [...] two statements are made as if they were connected, and the reader is forced to consider their relations for himself. The reason why these facts should have been selected for a poem is left for him to invent; he will invent a variety of reasons and order them in his own mind.<sup>57</sup>

Later on he quotes a newspaper headline: 'Italian Assassin Bomb Plot Disaster'<sup>58</sup> and says that it is,

a very effective piece of writing, quite apart from the fact that it conveys its point in a form short enough for large type. It conveys it with a *compactness which gives the mind several*

*notions at one glance of the eye* (Emphasis added).<sup>59</sup>

This ability of the compactness of Novel Word Juxtapositions to give ‘the mind several notions at one glance of the eye’ is the basic element that distinguishes poetry from prose.

### **Non-Empirical Identifier No. 5: Abstraction**

Another feature of non-empiricist writing is that of abstraction, by which I mean those phrases and image combinations that are too generalised and indeterminate to be strictly referential. These are not to be confused with Empson’s “sleeping” or “subdued” metaphors but are similar to what he refers to as ‘ambiguity by vagueness’, citing an instance of it (‘Brightness falls from the air’) in Thomas Nashe’s *Summer’s Last Will and Testament*.<sup>60</sup> An example of abstraction can be seen in Blake. In ‘To the Muses’ the phrase ‘chambers of the sun’, in the first stanza, do not specifically refer to anything. The phrase ‘chambers of the East’ in the previous line, however, does. It refers to the cavernous areas located near the mythical Mount Ida, (represented in line one as ‘Ida’s shady brow’) the place from which the gods watched the battles around Troy. It could also refer to the mountain in Crete where Zeus was said to have been born. The phrase ‘chambers of the sun’ does not allow for closure in this way. The word ‘sun’ (a source of light) has no connection semantically with the word ‘chambers’ (a source of darkness). Furthermore, the sun is noted for its lack of vacuity, unlike caverns.

Modern instances of this can be found in T. S. Eliot’s ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’: ‘I know the voices dying with a dying fall’; ‘There will be a time to murder and create’; and ‘Time to turn back and descend the stair’.<sup>61</sup> Also, in the following passage from *The Waste Land*:

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow  
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,  
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only  
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,  
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,  
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only  
There is shadow under this red rock  
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),  
And I will show you something different from either  
Your shadow at morning striding behind you  
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;  
I will show you fear in a handful of dust.

(19-30)

Whilst this passage does use concrete nouns (roots, branches, rubbish, rock, etc.) their resultant affect is connotative rather than sensory. Their inclusion within generalized statements allows the reader some leeway in interpretation—hence the many different readings of this poem by critics. Had Eliot intended the passage to be merely a visual and sensory description of objects; such varied readings would not be possible. Indeed, Eliot ensured that readers understood the poem as being non-descriptive by including detailed footnotes explaining the allusions.<sup>62</sup> For example, as is well known, ‘Out of this stony rubbish’ is not a literal description of something he has seen. It is a reference to John Donne’s *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*: ‘[...] and now the whole house is but a handful of sand, so much dust, and but a peck of rubbish, so much bone’ (XVIII). Similarly, ‘And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief’ is from the following verse from Ecclesiastes:

Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets. Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. (12:5-7)

What Eliot has achieved by mixing the concrete with the abstract is to enable the concrete to operate connotatively. Unlike Simon Armitage’s ‘Night Shift’ referred to earlier, the passage is not meant to faithfully represent a world seen through the eyes of one person.

In Edward Dorn’s ‘An Idle Visitation’: ‘the footstep in the flat above’; ‘the girl you left / in Juarez’; and ‘The mission / bells are ringing in Kansas’.<sup>63</sup> This last quotation particularly illustrates the point: the speaker cannot, unless he has psychic abilities, know that the mission bells are ringing in Kansas, therefore, the verity of this statement cannot be derived from sensual experience. This leaves open two possibilities as to how he has acquired this information. The first is that he knows what time the mission bells ring each day (or week) and is therefore able, by looking at his watch, to deduce that they are ringing as he speaks. The second is that he is not referring to the actual mission bells ringing in actual Kansas but to the “idea” of ‘mission bells ringing in Kansas’. In other words, he has conceptualised the

mission, the bells and Kansas: extracted them from their actual geographical, temporal and referential contexts and emptied them of a referential signification. Similarly, in Ashbery's 'The Skaters' the personification of the weather ('The wind points to the advantages of decay' is used to conjoin an image ('the wind points') with abstraction ('the advantages of decay') in such a way that both the image and the abstraction cancel each other out as coherent statements, thus, inhibiting referential signification.<sup>64</sup>

Abstraction is also present in Emily Dickinson. In *Dickinson: The Modern Idiom*, David Porter says of her use of the abstract phrase 'Dome of Abyss' in poem 291:

Abstract expressionist artists since Kandinsky have sought representations of this sort of experience that unknowably is. Materialization of incipient abstract forms occurs in Jackson Pollock's poured paintings, where he abandoned the brush [...], and in the motifless shapes of Robert Motherwell, Franz Kline, and Mark Rothco. [...] With Dickinson's 'Dome of Abyss' we stand at a comparable threshold of both verbal and figurative consciousness. The variant readings show us the poet attempting to haul instinctual feelings into language and thus into consciousness.<sup>65</sup>

The importance of abstraction for non-empirical writing has unfortunately been underemphasized both in mainstream and (even allowing for the poets mentioned) in certain avant-garde poetics: it being considered, perhaps, a sign of stylistic naiveté.

### **Non-Empirical Identifier No. 6: No Distinct Ego or Poetic Persona**

In relation to this point I can do no better than to quote Easthope's observation concerning the presence of an ego in the following excerpt from Eliot's *The Waste Land*:

Unreal City,  
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,  
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,  
I had not thought death had undone so many.  
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,  
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.  
Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,  
To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours  
With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.  
There I saw one I knew, and stopped him crying: 'Stetson!  
'You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!  
'That corpse you planted last year in your garden,  
'Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?  
'Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?  
'Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,  
'Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!

‘You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!’<sup>66</sup>

(60-76)

Of this Easthope says:

Although there is an ‘I’ that ego is a point in a process, not fixed in any definite relation to London, Dante, the Punic wars (during which the battle of Mylae was fought in 260 BC) and Webster’s play, *The White Devil* (from which the warning about the dog is culled); the whole address to Stetson is unexplained and insufficiently motivated; meaning is dislocated across syntactical oppositions. Crucially, a reader is left undecided whether this is said or cited, whether a voice is represented speaking or there is rather a verbal collage from Dante, Vergil (‘Mylae’), Jacobean drama and (in the last line here) Baudelaire. We are forced to become aware of the text as text, the materiality of the signifier based in phonemic difference, which is the necessary prior condition of all meaning.<sup>67</sup>

Eliot himself sought this effect when he said:

The point of view which I am struggling to attack is perhaps related to the metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul: for my meaning is, that the poet has, not a ‘personality’ to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways.<sup>68</sup>

This is almost echoed by Barthes when he says that it is language, ‘which speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality [...] to reach that point where only language acts, “performs”, and not “me”’.<sup>69</sup>

### **Non-Empirical Identifier No. 7: No Philosophical Discursiveness**

Discursiveness (specifically in relation to its poetic manifestation rather than within its philosophical framework) is a mimesis of thought processes and is, therefore, empiricist. Although it could be argued that in much of postmodern poetry these thought processes present themselves as plural and discontinuous, nevertheless, the lexical aspects (abstract nouns etc.) of discursiveness disallow connotation despite the discourse’s fragmented appearance. What can be conveyed via discursiveness in all its forms (recollection, rumination, speculation and confessional) could be rendered more concisely with highly concentrated imagery and Novel Word Juxtapositions. In Eliot’s view poetry is ‘something over and above, and something quite different from, a collection of psychological data about the minds of poets, or about the history of an epoch’.<sup>70</sup>

As earlier chapters have suggested, discursiveness came to full fruition with Wordsworth, as can be seen in this extract from ‘Tintern Abbey’:

That time is past,  
And all its aching joys are now no more,  
And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this  
Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur; other gifts  
Have followed; for such loss, I would believe,  
Abundant recompense. For I have learned  
To look on nature, not as in the hour  
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing often-times  
The still, sad music of humanity<sup>71</sup>

(83-92)

Every phrase is intended to propel the reader’s understanding forward to the next phrase so that enough semantic information can be gathered to enable hermeneutic closure. Meaning is produced retrospectively, i.e. after having read the passage. The “message” of the passage is more important than the individual semantic elements that comprise it and consequently the passage is captive to the logic of uninterrupted statement.

Examples of this can be seen even in more experimental modern works such as in Ashbery’s *The Picture of Little J. A. in a Prospect of Flowers*:

Yet I cannot escape the picture  
Of my small self in that bank of flowers:  
My head among the blazing phlox  
Seemed a pale and gigantic fungus.  
I had a hard stare, accepting  
Everything, taking nothing,  
As though the rolled-up future might stink  
As loud as stood the sick moment  
The shutter clicked. Though I was wrong,  
Still, as the loveliest feelings<sup>72</sup>

This is essentially a Wordsworthian transcription of a memory intermingled with philosophical rumination. Similarly, in Prynne’s ‘Frost and Snow, Falling’ we find this:

So that when the snow falls again the earth  
becomes lighter and lighter. The surface con-  
spires with us, we are its first born. Even  
in this modern age we leave tracks, as we  
go. And as we go, walk, stride or climb  
out of it, we leave that behind, our own

level of contemplation of the world<sup>73</sup>

There is little in this that distinguishes it from the tradition of philosophically reflective poetry.

That discursiveness is so amply evident in experimental works could be regarded as nothing more than the use of it ironically: in the sense that these instances of it are used to defamiliarise the transparency of such discourse as it is presented in poetry that is more conventional. This may be so, but I am not sure whether irony (and, for that matter, defamiliarization) is totally divorced from an empiricist aesthetic, in that its effect is dependent upon readers recognising its presence. That irony can be recognised indicates that ambiguity is absent (or severely limited), and that closure is intended: the poet intends the reader to recognise the irony, and the reader responds by obeying. How else could irony operate without this tacit agreement between poet and reader?

The last three Non-Empirical Identifiers (Unconventional Punctuation, Use of Ellipsis, and No Metaphors) have already been touched upon in previous sections

### Poetry as Mental Activity

In *The Reader, the Text, the Poem* Louise Rosenblatt says, ‘The poem, then, must be thought of as an event in time. It is not an object or an ideal entity. It happens during a coming-together, a compentration, of a reader and a text’.<sup>74</sup> She later elaborates:

The reading of a text is an event occurring at a particular time in a particular environment at a particular moment in the life history of the reader. The transaction will involve not only the past experience but also the present state and present interests or preoccupations of the reader. This suggests the possibility that printed marks on a page may even become different linguistic symbols by virtue of transactions with different readers. Just as knowing is the process linking a knower and a known, so a poem should not be thought of as an object, an entity, but rather as an active process lived through during the relationship between a reader and a text.<sup>75</sup>

For the poem to be experienced as an event in time, the importance of mental activity, or “internalisation”, in the reader cannot be overestimated. By internalisation I mean that part of the reader’s response that is able, through conscious decision, to minimise the relevance of the text in the hermeneutical process.<sup>76</sup> This can be readily achieved with poetry containing Non-Empirical Identifiers but is difficult to achieve with poetry in which the artifice (in the form of certain extra-lexical



ingredients—such as the visual and acoustic) is foregrounded at the expense of semantic elements. Such poetry inhibits internalisation and is ‘concerned only with representing its own mechanisms’.<sup>77</sup>

These elements of artifice are, however, non-empirical but they are so only in the same way as abstract painting and music. Like these, they are non-semantic and, as such, they preclude an exegetical response that is distinct from the hermeneutical procedures employed in the reception of non-representational visual art and music. In ‘The Dollar Value of Poetry’ Charles Bernstein advocates a poetics that is grounded in experiences that are released in the reading: a ‘nongeneralizable residue that is specific to each particular experience’. In this sense, then, poetry is seen as being untranslatable and unparaphrasable for ‘what is untranslatable is the sum of all the specific conditions of the experience (place, time, order, light, mood, position, to infinity) made available by reading’.<sup>78</sup> Bernstein sees this untranslatability as being misunderstood by advocates of ‘certain “concretist” tendencies, who see in radical concrete procedures the manifestation of untranslatability at its fullest flowering’<sup>79</sup>. As Bernstein, stresses ‘what is not translatable is the experience released in the reading’.<sup>80</sup> He goes on to say that ‘in so far as some “visual poems” move toward making the understanding independent of the language it is written in, i.e., no longer requiring translation, they are, indeed, no longer so much writing as works of visual art.’<sup>81</sup> In ‘Words and Pictures’, he emphasises the linguistic and semantic criteria necessary for any aesthetic of viewer/reception theory to be plausible: ‘visual experience is only validated when accompanied by a logico-verbal explanation’.<sup>82</sup> For Bernstein, then, as he says in ‘Thought’s Measure’, ‘there is meaning only in terms of language’.<sup>83</sup>

Furthermore, he is well aware of the dangers of too much foregrounding of artifice when he writes in ‘Artifice of Absorption’:

In my poems, I  
frequently use opaque & nonabsorbable  
elements, digressions &  
interruptions, as part of a technological  
arsenal to create a more powerful  
 (“souped up”)  
absorption than possible with traditional,  
& blander, absorptive techniques. This is a  
precarious road because insofar

as the poem seems  
overtly self-conscious, as opposed to internally  
incantatory or psychically  
actual, it may produce  
self-consciousness in the reader in such a way as to  
destroy his or her absorption by theatricalizing  
or conceptualizing the text, removing  
it from the realm of an experience engendered  
to that of a technique  
exhibited.<sup>84</sup>

Bernstein welcomes internalisation. Without it, it is impossible for poetry to be experienced as an event in time. However, he does tend to view ‘the semantic field as incorporating non-lexical features of a poem’.<sup>85</sup> While I agree with incorporation in principle, in practice it is psychologically problematical for most readers. This is perhaps why such poetry is deemed “difficult”.

The formal qualities of a poem are, of course, important but only indirectly: in that they facilitate the inner ear’s appreciation of the poem’s sonorous qualities. They do not contribute overmuch semantically. The only thing of importance is the mental activity experienced by the reader. The reader’s attention should not be focused on the poem’s structure or its rhetorical devices but, rather, should be concentrated on the resonance produced by the semantic qualities of the lexis. Only in this way, then, can the poem be fully experienced as mental activity. It must be remembered that a poem is “heard” primarily in the mind. All that we are able to glean from a poem is conveyed through the poems semantic operation. To argue that the formal qualities of the text facilitate a semantic response is to rely too heavily on an aesthetic theory that is more appropriate to the visual arts.

### Conclusion

The classification and identification of Empirical and Non-Empirical Identifiers enables readers to become conscious of the procedures used to limit exegesis, and to inhibit reader participation in the interpretive process. Recognising this enables the reader to subvert these mechanisms, thereby, making conscious and controllable, reading strategies that would ordinarily function unconsciously. Such unconscious strategies are outlined as follows:

The reader brings to the text his past experience and present personality. Under the magnetism of the ordered symbols of the text, he marshals his resources and crystallizes out

from the stuff of memory, thought, and feeling a new order, a new experience, which he sees as the poem. This becomes part of the ongoing stream of his life experience, to be reflected on from any angle important to him as a human being.<sup>86</sup>

To use this process consciously enables the creation of individual meaning and significance for the reader. Robert Sheppard touches on this when he writes with regard to the poetry of Lee Harwood:

A poem is not thus primarily self-expressive. It is objective, and only completed by the reader, though here Harwood does not have in mind the ideal reader of recent reader-response theorist, one “constituted” or “implied” by the text, but the multitude of readers who actually do engage with the poem-catalyst; it causes various changes within different readers without itself altering its objective form.<sup>87</sup>

The various reader-response theories that Sheppard alludes to are in actuality only stating more explicitly, and in a more specialist vernacular, what has always been the basic operating procedures of many poets, and even songwriters. With particular regard to the latter, the following statement by the songwriter Neil Young is illuminating:

The way I do things is I give enough facts to make people get a feeling—and then they can associate their own lives with these images that make it seem to apply directly to them. Like the song was written for them. They can’t believe it’s so directly and obviously about their life. That’s because it’s not so specific that it eliminates them.<sup>88</sup>

There is a psychological basis for this reader-oriented approach. Rosenblatt makes this clear when she quotes the psycholinguist Eric Wanner as saying in his article ‘Do We Understand Sentences from the Outside-In or from the Inside-Out?’ that the ‘listener makes an active contribution to what he hears and understands, and it is this contribution which makes the problem of comprehension both difficult and interesting’.<sup>89</sup>

The main thrust of this chapter has essentially been advocating a return to generalization and imprecision in poetic practice. Apart from the artistic reasons that motivate this it can be argued on financial grounds also. The diminishment in poetry volume sales over the past 50 or so years is, I believe, due to the increasingly empiricist mode of writing that has found favour during this period. To obstruct the ambiguity inherent in language is to obviate the natural instincts of human beings to make sense of themselves and their experiences. If one looks at the poetry of children and the so-called “bad” poetry of adults, for instance, one finds it replete with imprecision. Contemporary poetry fails to sell in

vast numbers because it leaves little to the imagination and disallows a personal interpretative interaction with the text. Its prose-like quality, which is excessively similar to prose fiction, leaves the reading public faced with a choice: to read poetry, or to read a novel. They generally opt for the latter because they perceive it as more value for money.

Ideally, each reader should be permitted the fundamental privilege of formulating a meaning which would (for that reader) be the quintessence of the poem's significance. The poem, in and of itself, is of little consequence other than as a cipher for this practice to occur. The words and images of a poem should be looked upon as devices that enable readers to recall their own experiences, reflect present circumstances, and anticipate future desires. Each word should have the potential to enable the reader to derive personal significance from it. By doing this, the reader becomes, in effect, the composer of the poem, and the definer of its limits. It is of minor importance whether the commonly received meaning of the poem is discerned by the reader or not, as the ultimate aim of such a personal response is to enhance the enjoyment value of the work for that reader alone. What the poem is "meant" to mean from an authorial standpoint should not be of paramount concern for readers wishing to gain satisfaction and enjoyment from the work. Such an approach to reading poetry, if widely understood and accepted, could possibly restore poetry to its status as a significant art form.

In summary, then, this chapter has attempted to show how the influence of Wordsworthian empiricism has evidenced itself in twentieth-century poetry and, consequently, limited the hermeneutical value of such poetry. It has also been indicated that Empirical Identifiers, because of the ways in which they encourage exegetical closure through their functioning as referents to phenomena, are a legacy of Wordsworth's poetic theories and, therefore, appropriate for discussion in an examination of Wordsworth's influence on twentieth-century poetry.

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<sup>1</sup> David Trotter, *The Making of the Reader: Language and Subjectivity in Modern American, English and Irish Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p.2.

<sup>2</sup> Trotter, p.2.

<sup>3</sup> Trotter, p.2.

<sup>4</sup> Trotter, p.2.

<sup>5</sup> Trotter, p.2.

- <sup>6</sup> Trotter, p.2.
- <sup>7</sup> Trotter, pp.2-3.
- <sup>8</sup> Trotter, p.3.
- <sup>9</sup> Trotter, p.3.
- <sup>10</sup> Trotter, p.9.
- <sup>11</sup> Trotter, p.9.
- <sup>12</sup> Trotter, p.4.
- <sup>13</sup> J. P. Ward, *Wordsworth's Language of Men* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1984), pp. 22-23.
- <sup>14</sup> Robert C. Holub, *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1984), pp.24-25.
- <sup>15</sup> Quoted in Edward Larrissy, *Reading Twentieth-Century Poetry: The Language of Gender and Objects* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p.2.
- <sup>16</sup> Kate Rhodes, *Reversal* (London: Enitharmon Press, 2005), p.12.
- <sup>17</sup> Anthony Easthope, 'How Good is Seamus Heaney?', *English*, 46. 184, (1997), 21-36 (p.24).
- <sup>18</sup> Easthope, p.24.
- <sup>19</sup> Easthope, p.25.
- <sup>20</sup> Simon Armitage, 'Night Shift', in *The New Poetry*, ed. by M. Hulse, D. Kennedy and D. Morley (Newcastle: Bloodaxe, 1993), p.338.
- <sup>21</sup> *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, ed. by M. Ferguson, M. J. Salter and J. Stallworthy, 5th edn (New York: Norton, 2005), p.740.
- <sup>22</sup> *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by T. Hutchinson and E. de Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), Wordsworth Editions 1994, p.187.
- <sup>23</sup> *Poetical Works*, p.173.
- <sup>24</sup> J. H. Prynne, 'Into the Day', in *A Various Art*, ed. by A. Crozier and T. Longville (Manchester: Carcanet, 1987), p.260.
- <sup>25</sup> I made these lines up myself.
- <sup>26</sup> *Poetical Works*, p.84.
- <sup>27</sup> Helen Kidd, 'Paper City', in *New British Poetries: The Scope of the Possible*, ed. by R. Hampson and P. Barry (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p.156.
- <sup>28</sup> Kidd, p.158.
- <sup>29</sup> *Poetical Works*, p.195.
- <sup>30</sup> Veronica Forrest-Thompson, 'The Garden of Prosperine', in *New British Poetries*, p.118.
- <sup>31</sup> Forrest-Thompson, in *New British Poetries*, p.119. The line, 'I lie alone. I am weary, weary' alludes to the lines in Tennyson's 'Mariana': 'She said, "I am weary, weary, / I would that I were dead!"'.
- <sup>32</sup> Forrest-Thompson, *Poetic Artifice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978), p.41.
- <sup>33</sup> Forrest-Thompson, *Poetic Artifice*, p.16.
- <sup>34</sup> John Ashbery, 'How Much longer Will I Be Able to Inhabit the Divine Sepulcher?', in *Postmodern American Poetry*, ed. by P. Hoover (New York: Norton, 1994), p.168.
- <sup>35</sup> Ashbery, p.168.
- <sup>36</sup> A. H. Harrison, *Victorian Poets and Romantic Poems: Intertextuality and Ideology* (Virginia: Virginia University Press, 1990), pp.2-3. Wordsworth also evinces some intertextuality when he alludes to Milton.
- <sup>37</sup> Michael Ferber, *The Poetry of William Blake* (London: Penguin, 1991), p.40.
- <sup>38</sup> Ferber, p.45.
- <sup>39</sup> Ferber, p.45.
- <sup>40</sup> Ferber, p.45.
- <sup>41</sup> Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern*, ed. by S. Burke (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), pp.125-30 (p.128).
- <sup>42</sup> Barthes, p.129.
- <sup>43</sup> Charles Bernstein says that the absence of conventional syntax rather than producing incoherence

produces new coherences. Email correspondence with the Charles Bernstein dated 26<sup>th</sup> June 2005.

- <sup>44</sup> Carl Coolidge, 'On Induction of the Hand', *Postmodern American Poetry*, p.371.
- <sup>45</sup> Tom Mandel, 'Say Ja', *Postmodern American Poetry*, p.417.
- <sup>46</sup> Charles Bernstein, *Content's Dream: Essays 1975-1984* (Los Angeles: Sun and Moon, 1986), p. 37.
- <sup>47</sup> Bernstein, p.37.
- <sup>48</sup> Bernstein, p.36.
- <sup>49</sup> Jack Kerouac, '211th Chorus', *Postmodern American Poetry*, p.78.
- <sup>50</sup> Kerouac, 'The Thrashing Doves', *Postmodern American Poetry*, p.79.
- <sup>51</sup> Allen Ginsberg, *Howl*, *Postmodern American Poetry*, p.131.
- <sup>52</sup> Tom Clarke, 'You (I)', *Postmodern American Poetry*, p.394.
- <sup>53</sup> John Ashbery, 'Leaving the Atocha Station', *Postmodern American Poetry*, p.170.
- <sup>54</sup> W. H. Stevenson, *William Blake: Selected Poetry* (London: Penguin, 1988), pp.161 & 162.
- <sup>55</sup> Stevenson, p.106.
- <sup>56</sup> Ira Konigsberg, *The Complete Film Dictionary* (London: Bloomsbury, 1987), p.217.
- <sup>57</sup> William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (London: Hogarth, 1953), p.25.
- <sup>58</sup> Empson, p.236.
- <sup>59</sup> Empson, p.237.
- <sup>60</sup> Empson, p.26.
- <sup>61</sup> T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", *Selected Poems* (London: Faber, 1954), p.13.
- <sup>62</sup> However, the use of footnotes in poetry operates to the detriment of ambiguity, and I only mention Eliot's use of them to demonstrate his attitude to the passage's concrete nouns.
- <sup>63</sup> Ed Dorn, 'An Idle Visitation', *Postmodern American Poetry*, p.201.
- <sup>64</sup> John Ashbery, 'The Skaters', *Postmodern American Poetry*, p.174.
- <sup>65</sup> David Porter, *Dickinson: The Modern Idiom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 32.
- <sup>66</sup> T. S. Eliot, *Selected Poems*, p.53.
- <sup>67</sup> Easthope, p.26.
- <sup>68</sup> T. S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, 7th edn (London: Methuen, 1920), p.56.
- <sup>69</sup> Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', Burke, p.126.
- <sup>70</sup> Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, p.ix.
- <sup>71</sup> *Poetical Works*, p.206.
- <sup>72</sup> John Ashbery, 'The Picture of Little J. A. in a Prospect of Flowers', in *Contemporary American Poetry*, ed. by Donald Hall, 2nd edn (London: Penguin, 1972), p.189.
- <sup>73</sup> J. H. Prynne, 'Frost and Snow Falling', *A Various Art*, p.242.
- <sup>74</sup> L. M. Rosenblatt, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), p.12.
- <sup>75</sup> Rosenblatt, pp. 20-21.
- <sup>76</sup> Rosenblatt's attitude to the relevance of the text can be seen in the following quotation where she comments on the titles of literary works: 'But when we try to think of what a title—Hamlet, say, or Moby Dick—might refer to apart from a reader, whether the author himself or another, "the work" disappears. The title then refers simply to a set of black marks on ordered pages or to a set of sounds vibrating in the air, waiting for some reader or listener to interpret them as verbal symbols and, under their guidance, to make a work of art, the poem or novel or play'. See *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*, pp.12-13.
- <sup>77</sup> Charles Bernstein, *A Poetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p.10.
- <sup>78</sup> Bernstein, *Content's Dream*, p.58.
- <sup>79</sup> Bernstein, *Content's Dream*, p.58.
- <sup>80</sup> Bernstein, *Content's Dream*, p.58.
- <sup>81</sup> Bernstein, *Content's Dream*, p.58. It could be argued that visual poetry is, indeed, semantic. I agree to a point. For instance, Ernst Gomringer's 'WIND' (which plays with associations such as the words

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"in" and "win" contained within the word "WIND") and Augusto de Campos's 'CODIGO' (which contains the word "God" as an anagram and alludes to "cogito ergo sum") do, indeed, operate semantically. Nevertheless, their semantic operations are extremely meagre. With 'WIND' the associations come to only two words: "win" and "in" (perhaps also the word "wind", as in to wind a clock). The same limitations can be seen in de Campos's 'CODIGO'. Apart from a reader's fleeting appreciation of the novel aspects of these poems their affects are exhausted as soon as they are recognised.

<sup>82</sup> Bernstein, *Content's Dream*, p.125.

<sup>83</sup> Bernstein, *Content's Dream*, p.62.

<sup>84</sup> Bernstein, *A Poetics*, pp.52-53.

<sup>85</sup> Email correspondence with the Charles Bernstein dated 26th June 2005.

<sup>86</sup> Rosenblatt, p. 12.

<sup>87</sup> Robert Sheppard, 'Lee Harwood and the Poetics of the Open Work', in *New British Poetries*, pp.216-33 (p.220).

<sup>88</sup> Quoted in J. McDonough, *Shakey: Neil Young's Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002), p.11.

<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Rosenblatt, p.41.

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