WORDS WORTH'S EYE: A STUDY OF THE NATURE OF VISION
IN WORDSWORTH'S POETRY IN RELATION TO CONTEMPORARY
CONCEPTS OF VISION

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June Rudrum
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Department of English

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver 8, Canada

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Abstract

Wordsworth's treatment of the eye is discussed in relation to contemporary concepts, especially those of the Neoplatonists, and shown as illuminating the relation of subject and object in perception. His use of philosophic ideas is eclectic. He had some contact, either from his own reading or through Coleridge, with the main thinkers discussed, Newton, Locke, Berkeley, Hartley, Plato, Plotinus, Cudworth, Shaftesbury and Thomas Taylor.

The development of Wordsworth's attitude to his own eye is recorded in The Prelude, the Immortality Ode, "Tintern Abbey," and "Peele Castle." As a child, the games he enjoyed incidentally fostered a close relationship with nature, thus awakening the imagination. Unlike The Prelude, the Immortality Ode describes the child's vision as brighter than the adult's. It also suggests that the child is conscious of life as mind, while the adult loses this insight into the world beyond the senses. The Prelude, which makes no such claims for childhood, also describes experiences of perception as union of perceiver and perceived in a manner reminiscent of Neoplatonism.

The Prelude describes how Wordsworth comes later to love nature for its own beauty. The developing power of his eye guarantees a proper sense of reality. However, his growing visual appetite possibly contributed to the mental crisis of early adulthood, one feature of which was a feverish seeking out of visual pleasure. The eye usurps the dominant role in vision, while the mind becomes excessively
passive. This resembles Neoplatonic discussion of the relation of sense and intellect. This brief crisis taught Wordsworth the value of a true relationship between mind and sense.

"Tintern Abbey," the Immortality Ode and "Peele Castle" all express a sense of loss in connection with visual experience. They record different experiences but a similar pattern: all describe a loss of intense perception and a compensatory deeper understanding of human suffering. "The inward eye" and similar phrases are used of the eye which sees what is not physically present. This phrase is used by contemporary translations of Plotinus and by Shaftesbury: Wordsworth's inward eye has some relationship with Neoplatonic thought, but the inward eye for him has a firm relationship with the bodily eye.

Wordsworth's poetry describes an external power working purposively on the mind through the senses. His thought has affinities with empiricism. "Wise passiveness" is an enlargement into the moral plane of an observation of Locke's, while his accounts of the education of nature have obvious links with Associationism. Yet he understands the external power as forming man's mind intentionally: different versions of The Prelude show this: the description of the power changes, yet it remains purposive. Divine grace operates similarly. Wordsworth's sense that everything moves through the same spirit resembles the classical anima mundi, and similar suggestions in later writers. His though also parallels Berkeley's in important ways. A study of poems explicitly connected with the imagination shows the external power operating through the senses on an independently active mind.
which in organizing sense impressions, transforms them.

Wordsworth's imagery of sight and light suggests the mind's active powers and the mutuality of perception. The artist, imagination, intellect, all are expressed through light imagery. The mind is radiant. Thus vision is an interaction of lights. Neoplatonic writings, too, express intellect as light and see the mind as essentially active and true perception as interchange between perceiver and perceived.

Wordsworth's ideas of vision, inevitably influenced by empiricism, are closer to Neoplatonism. Yet he drew on both to express similar ideas, for he cared, not for a logically consistent philosophy, but rather for communicating his understanding of his own experience.
CONTENTS

Introduction 1

Chapter One: Wordsworth and the Philosophers
   Introductory 12
   i. The Philosophic Wordsworth and the Critics 14
   ii. Wordsworth and Coleridge 19
   iii. Newton 25
   iv. The British Empiricists 27
   v. European Philosophers 32
   vi. Platonism and Neoplatonism 34
   Notes 39

Chapter Two: The History of the Eye
   Introductory 43
   i. Childhood 44
   ii. Beyond the Senses 49
   iii. The Educated Eye 56
   iv. The Eye as Despot 63
   v. The Sense of Loss 78
   vi. Experience Imagined and Realised 84
   vii. The Inward Eye 85
   Notes 92

Chapter Three: The Eye and the Active Principle in Nature: Wordsworth and British Empiricism
   Introductory 96
   i. Wise Passiveness 98
   ii. Locke, Hartley, and the Education of Nature 103
   iii. The External and Purposive Power 115
   iv. Grace 133
v. The Anima Mundi 138
vi. Berkeley and the Language of God 142
vii. The Imagination 153
Notes 167

Chapter Four: The Eye and the Active Mind: Wordsworth and the Neoplatonists

Introductory 171
i. Imagery of Sight and Light 172
ii. Light in Neoplatonic Writings 183
iii. The Active Mind 186
iv. Reciprocity in Perception 194
Notes 217

Conclusion 219

List of Works Cited 227
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Notes on the Editions Used

The main body of work on this thesis was completed before the publication in December, 1972, of The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, edited by W.J.B. Owen and J.W. Smyser, by the Oxford University Press. Therefore all references to Wordsworth's prose are to Grosart's edition of 1876.

All references to The Prelude are to the 1850 version, unless otherwise stated.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used:


**Exc:** The Excursion
I.F.: Notes dictated by Wordsworth to Isabella Fenwick.


TWS: Transactions of the Wordsworth Society.
Introduction

A vital impulse of early Romantic poetry is to establish a new relationship between the intellect and the senses. Certainly in the poetry of Wordsworth, and consequently in the criticism of that poetry, one central theme is the relation of nature to mind, of object to subject. The following study attempts to contribute to the already lengthy discussion of this matter by concentrating on just one of the senses, namely sight, the sense generally understood as most important and as typical of all the senses: it examines Wordsworth's imagery of sight and light, his references to the nature of sight, and his attitudes to his own visual experience. In order to understand this material properly in the context of contemporary assumptions about sight, it also explores the relevant writings of those philosophers whose works possibly contributed to the formation of Wordsworth's ideas on these subjects. In thus placing Wordsworth's thought more precisely in relation to the history of ideas, it may help towards a clearer understanding of the originality, as well as the meaning, of his poetry.

Sight is of particular importance to Wordsworth's poetry. The mind of man was the main region of his song, as he claimed in the Prospectus to The Excursion, and for him, sense experience and especially visual experience, was an essential part of intellectual activity and growth, as is apparent from the early books of The Prelude. His attitude to the eye is ambiguous, and this ambiguity is evident both in his attitude to his own visual experiences, as I shall show at length in
chapter II, and in the epistemological assumptions underlying his work: the activity of object and subject in vision are discussed in chapters III and IV respectively. Wordsworth's own eye was to him a source of delight and intellectual growth throughout his life, and yet it was also potentially a barrier to delight and intellectual growth by its tendency to become the medium of an obsessive sensuous pleasure, enslaving the mind. The Prelude (Books XII and XIII) records a period of impaired imagination and taste

When the bodily eye, in every stage of life
The most despotic of our senses, gained
Such strength in me as often held my mind
In absolute dominion.

(XII, 127-31)

This mental suffering was the result of the mind's excessive passivity in the act of perception. For Wordsworth, the poetic act of perception is essentially a matter of reciprocal action between subject and object, between man and nature, and thus for him moments of vital understanding came with those "spots of time" which enable him to understand

    to what point, and how,
    The mind is lord and master—outward sense
    The obedient servant of her will.

(Prelude XII, 221-23)

Wordsworth's belief in the reciprocal nature of the act of perception is also apparent in his imagery of sight and light, which is of vital importance to much of his best work; it is clear from the nature of the imagery that the eye is seen both as shedding and as receiving light. This assertion is supported, and its implications studied, in chapter IV.
Wordsworth's attitude to vision was peculiarly his own. Yet vision, and indeed the senses in general, were a matter of equal importance to his great contemporaries. Wordsworth suggests in the figure of the Wanderer the feverish interest with which as a youth he himself "scanned the laws of light," while for Coleridge, too, as John Beer shows, light was the most interesting scientific phenomenon. Coleridge shared, and indeed perhaps reinforced, Wordsworth's sense of the despotism of the eye, as I will show in chapter II, while for Blake, the eye, like all the senses, fettered the imagination and restricted intellectual activity. In this, the poets were the (rather forward) children of their generation, and thus grandchildren of an earlier generation. Ever since the publication of Newton's Opticks in 1704, the eye had been a matter of intense interest, while Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding (1690) had of course made all later thinkers very much aware of the role of the senses in knowledge, through his stress on empirical as opposed to innate knowledge. Locke's views were popularized by The Spectator, and especially by Addison's essays on "The Pleasures of the Imagination," which emphasized the importance of the reception of ideas through sight. Throughout the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, all philosophers treated sight as first among the senses, as typical of them all, and as parallel to the intellect. For Locke, "the perception of the mind" is "most aptly explained by words relating to the sight." Ernest Tuveson writes that for Locke "only sight [amongst the senses] is significant for the understanding faculty, for thought is seeing." Hartley wrote that "in all Cases of Magnitude, Distance,
Motion, Figure, and Position, the visible idea is so much more vivid and ready than the tangible one, as to prevail over it, notwithstanding that our Information from Feeling is more precise than that from Sight, and the test of its Truth.\(^4\)

The great popular interest in optics partly accounted for the success of Berkeley's Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision. Marjorie Hope Nicolson stresses the importance of sight in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, writing that "Sight, to Locke, as to Descartes, was 'the most comprehensive of all our senses, conveying to our minds the ideas of light and colours, which are peculiar only to that sense....' To Berkeley, sight was 'the most noble, pleasant, and comprehensive of all the senses.' To Addison it was the one essential sense on which imagination rests ... Philosophers, scientists, laymen, all showed great interest in the problem of a 'man born blind' which William Molyneux raised, and which became a commonplace of the generation."\(^5\) These writers had a strong influence, both negative and positive, on Wordsworth's poetry, as several writers have tried to show. A study of the precise nature of their ideas on sight, which are very important in themselves, is likely to illuminate the assumptions and arguments about vision, and the act of perception in general, in Wordsworth's works.

The theories of vision under discussion naturally epitomize the entire view of man in relation to the universe. A study of the empiricist attitudes to the eye brings into clear focus the concept of mind which was commonly accepted by Wordsworth's contemporaries. The influence of these writers on the discussion
of such matters was enormously important and indeed their works are still the basis of much twentieth century epistemological discussion: "Since the time of Locke and Berkeley philosophical discussion of perception, of 'our knowledge of the external world,' has been unceasing. It has been prosecuted with enormous industry and ingenuity, but also with a certain lack of originality—a lack which is itself a striking tribute to the power of our seventeenth- and eighteenth-century predecessors. Their terminology has been abandoned . . . but the questions they asked have continued to be asked and even their answers (with more or less modification) adopted." The empiricist world picture was the established world picture in Wordsworth's lifetime: to the ordinary man it was a matter of assumption rather than of discussion. Current beliefs about the eye of man assumed that it looked on objects which had form but no intrinsic colour, as this was a secondary quality, not inherent in the object itself, but merely the reaction of the eye to reflected light. The eye received images passively, according to these doctrines, and all human knowledge and ideas were based on the experience of the external world imprinted on the mind through its agency and that of the other senses. The mind and the universe were thus radically divided.

This concept of the mind and the universe was obviously not accepted without question even in the eighteenth century. Leibniz was an early critic of empiricist concepts. Gian Orsini notes that "to the empiricist maxim that 'there is nothing in the mind that does not come through the senses,' he affixed in 1765 the clause 'with the exception of the mind itself' . . . a clause which Coleridge was fond of
Berkeley, of course, reacted strongly to Locke's concept of the material universe, as Warnock shows: "the idea that we inhabit a blankly unthinking, 'inert' and 'stupid' universe, and hence that facts are in the end to be merely accepted; that there comes a point at which explanations can no longer be given because it no longer even makes sense to ask for explanations--this idea he not only detested, but genuinely found incomprehensible, 'repugnant' (as he said) in more senses than one" (pp.120-21). There was a strong reaction to the commonly accepted world picture in France too, which was expressed by Diderot, in the *Rêve d'Alembert* and *De l'Interpretation de la Nature*, and was furthered by the extreme materialism of Holbach's *Systeme de la Nature* with its pantheistic implications. The great eighteenth century partisan of the mind as opposed to the senses was of course Kant who "presented a view of the human mind in knowledge which was radically different from those of his predecessors; and in general this radical difference consists in his regarding the mind, not as essentially passive in the face of a world communicating itself to mind, but as essentially active in exercising certain powers, which, he held, are a necessary condition of knowledge, and of knowledge of a world of objects." These writers, and Kant's successors, Schelling and Fichte, were of great importance to the development of theories of mind, but their influence had not made itself felt in England while Wordsworth's mind was developing; thus this thesis, which is concerned with the possibly influential contemporary climate of opinion discusses their influence only minimally.
Another way in which the reaction to empiricism manifested itself, and one which I believe was more important to Wordsworth's development, was in the growing interest in intellectual circles in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, in Platonic and Neoplatonic ideas of the mind and the universe, an interest paralleled in the Neoclassicism of the visual arts in the period. This aspect of the reaction to empiricism is probably the most important for the development of the early Romantic poets, and I believe that an understanding of Neoplatonism is of especial importance to the understanding of Wordsworth's ideas of perception. Here again, a study of the eye is particularly relevant. There are remarkable and suggestive similarities between certain aspects of Wordsworth's ideas of these matters and those of the Neoplatonists, and these similarities are most striking in the treatment of sight and light. Sight was of especial importance to the Neoplatonists because of their doctrines concerning light, which they understood as intellect, both in symbol and in fact. Thomas Taylor, who devoted his life to the translation and interpretation of the Neoplatonic writers, believed that "sight corresponds to intelligence, and this is the same with that which is both intelligible and intellectual" and that "light . . . is nothing more than the sincere energy of an intellect perfectly pure, illuminating in its proper habitation the middle region of the heavens: and from this exalted situation scattering its light, it fills all the celestial orbs with powerful vigour, and illuminates the universe with divine and incorruptible light."  

Nevertheless, despite all this questioning of empiricism it was still the
generally accepted viewpoint in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and was powerful enough to goad the great early Romantic poets, Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge, to strong reaction against it, in various ways and intensities. Indeed, this reaction is one of the sources of the poetic inspiration of all three writers. They are all poets of the mind. The subject of their poetry is not, of course, as it was for the philosophers, the nature of the ordinary, inevitable act of perception, but the nature of the act of perception for the extraordinary man, the artist or prophet or for the ordinary man in moments of artistic or prophetic insight. They distinguish, each in his own way, between the world as seen by the indifferent and the world as seen by the artist. Wordsworth knows that there are men who, like Peter Bell, see primroses as yellow primroses and nothing more, who see "the heavens/ A blue vault merely and a glittering cloud." 11 Blake knows that for some the sun is merely a "round disk of fire somewhat like a guinea" though to the imagination it is "an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host crying 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty'" (Vision of the Last Judgment, 95). Coleridge knows that there is a "cold world allowed/ To the poor loveless everanxious crowd" as well as a world illuminated with joy ("Dejection," 51-52). For all three poets an important object was to communicate the reality and the value of the world of imagination and joy that comes through the reciprocal action of subject and object in heightened perception. Their poetry is a rejection of the passive mind and a celebration of the active mind, and the imagination.
Both Coleridge and Blake identified their rejection of the concept of the mind as passive with a rejection of empiricism. Their rejection went to the lengths of disparagement of Newton (whom they saw somewhat unjustly as the epitome of empiricism) which shows some intellectual bravado as Newton was then the great embodiment of intellect, learning and science. Coleridge wrote to Thomas Poole on 23 March, 1801, (blaming Newton himself for the influence which his work had had on the thinking of others) "Newton was a mere materialist—Mind in his system is always passive—a lazy Looker-on on an external World. If the mind be not passive, if it be indeed made in God's Image, & that too in the sublimest sense—the image of the Creator—there is ground for suspicion, that any system built on the passiveness of the mind must be false, as a system." Bacon, Newton, and Locke epitomized empiricism to Blake, and he saw them as denying "a conscience in man, and the communion of saints and angels,/ Contemning the Divine Vision and fruition, worshipping the deus/ Of the heathen, the god of this world, and the goddess Nature" (Jerusalem, plate 93).

Wordsworth is equally concerned to express the mind as essentially active. Yet his reaction to empiricism is less apparent and more complex. The assumptions underlying Wordsworth's poetry, the ideas which he uses as a means of organizing his experience and insights shows both a partial acceptance and dependence on British empirist theories of the mind and an ultimate rejection of the mental universe which it puts forward.

An examination of Wordsworth's language and ideas about the eye and the
act of vision makes his position in the Romantic rejection of empiricism more clear. A study of the main relevant empiricist writings is necessary for a proper understanding both of what he assimilated and what he rejected. And in a study of the relevant and available Neoplatonic writers I have found parallels to Wordsworth's own thought which suggest that, as with Blake and Coleridge, this was one of the sources of Wordsworth's alternative to empiricism.

The eventual aim of this thesis is critical and thus some parts of it are purely concerned with the poetry. It is not its purpose merely to link Wordsworth with the development of theories of vision, but to establish what he thought and felt about sight, and to show how these thoughts and feelings affected his poetry.
Notes


Chapter One : Wordsworth and the Philosophers

Introductory

Wordsworth's poetry deals with the whole human intellectual experience of seeing and feeling and thinking; he is an independent and powerful thinker. Yet his work is not concerned with philosophical argument, or with the expression of one philosophic viewpoint. However, because of Wordsworth's concern with the process of mental growth, of the transformation of experience into intellect, he necessarily employs those concepts which philosophers treat in their epistemological writings. At times he consciously uses the concepts of one particular philosophy to communicate his own understanding, as he did with the Platonic notion of pre-existence in the Immortality Ode. At other times, philosophical concepts are less explicitly used, but are implied in image, vocabulary, or the very choice of subject. At these times, it is difficult to know the status of these ideas, that is, to know whether Wordsworth is using them as a convenient vehicle for the expression of his own particular meaning through an accepted pattern of ideas, or whether he is writing of his own beliefs. In any case, it is necessary first of all to discover the nature of these ideas.

This thesis, therefore, will attempt to describe Wordsworth's ideas of the senses and especially of vision, in terms of those concepts which were certainly available to him, and to establish an appropriate vocabulary for the discussion of
those ideas in relation to his poetry. However, it is not intended as an attempt
to establish a close relationship between his poetry and any one philosopher or
school of philosophy, and it is in no sense a source study. Indeed, I believe it is
seriously misleading to say for instance that the key to the Immortality Ode lies in
Proclus, or to see The Prelude as an elaboration of Hartley. Wordsworth's use
of ideas is likely to be eclectic and synthetic, for he did not write philosophical
treatises pursuing one idea through each logical stage, but poems uniquely
combining idea, sensation, and emotion. The most serious implication of his best
poetry surely is that vital experience involves the whole person and not the
intellect in isolation. In The Prelude, when Wordsworth contrasts his early life
with that of Coleridge, he writes with pity for his friend who has had to piece
together his images of greatness from ideas and books because his young mind was:

Debarred from Nature's living images,
Compelled to be a life unto herself,
And unrelentingly possessed by thirst
Of greatness, love, and beauty.

(The Prelude VI, 302-05)

The same stress on personal experience is felt throughout Wordsworth's work; one
may compare for instance "Expostulation and Reply," and "The Tables Turned."
Mental energy should be directed towards the shaping of personal experience,
rather than the mere assimilation of other people's concepts and arguments.

Obviously Wordsworth recognized that the mind and mental activity were
vitally important, and if he was not concerned with philosophical argument as
such, he was certainly interested in ideas. In later chapters I shall attempt to
show how some of his ideas relate to contemporary or available ideas; in the present chapter, which merely forms a base for this later discussion, I discuss the kind of contact and the extent of the contact which Wordsworth had with those works which contain the most important discussion of the nature of the eye and of vision. As far as it is possible to establish Wordsworth's actual contact with these works, this can be done by consulting the following documents: Wordsworth's works and correspondence; the catalogue of the sale of Wordsworth's Rydal Mount library, published in Transactions of the Wordsworth Society 6 (1884); the catalogue of the contents of two bookcases, which were at Racedown Lodge, Dorset in 1795-97, while Wordsworth lived there, now among the Pinney Papers in the Bristol University Library; records of those books which were recommended for study at Hawkshead school and Cambridge at the relevant time; Coleridge's works, correspondence and notebooks for the evidence they give of his own particular interests during the years of active friendship between Wordsworth and Coleridge; the correspondence and reminiscences of Wordsworth's other friends and acquaintances. This chapter collects all the external evidence of Wordsworth's contacts with the relevant and influential works of philosophy.

1.

i. The Philosophic Wordsworth and the Critics

Such a catalogue of external evidence is important because Wordsworth's attitude to philosophy has been much debated and because much criticism suffers from false assumptions about this. Therefore it is necessary to establish briefly the
extent and nature of Wordsworth's interest in ideas and indicate briefly the assumptions about Wordsworth and the philosophers on which this thesis is based. It has been said that "Wordsworth was not a philosopher, either by inclination or natural ability; and we can allow for confusion in whatever of philosophical theories he undertook to present" (James, p. 141). This modern view has the authoritative backing of Matthew Arnold, who wrote of Wordsworth that "his poetry is the reality, his philosophy,—so far, at least, as it may put on the form and habit of 'a scientific system of thought,' and the more it puts them on,—is the illusion... we cannot do him justice until we dismiss his formal philosophy." Arnold's argument was directed against that "ardent Wordsworthian" Leslie Stephen, who wrote of Wordsworth as "a true philosopher," saying that "his poetry wears well, because it has solid substance. He is a poet and a moralist, as well as a mere singer. His ethical system, in particular, is as distinctive and capable of systematic exposition as that of Butler." Several scholars have followed Stephen's lead and have claimed Wordsworth for various schools. They might, indeed, have cited in support of their assumption, that Wordsworth was a philosophical poet, the words of the first and best Wordsworthian. "What Mr. Wordsworth will produce it is not for me to prophesy," wrote Coleridge, "but I could pronounce with the liveliest convictions what he is capable of producing. It is the FIRST GENUINE PHILOSOPHIC POEM." Yet these apparently quite different ways of viewing Wordsworth are divided only by the excessive dogmatism of their followers. Wordsworth makes no attempt
in his poetry to present an abstract and systematic philosophic argument. Nor do his prose works suggest much concern with philosophic problems although they show a lively interest in politics, education and poetic theory.

His correspondence, too, discloses little concern with philosophy, although occasionally he writes with passion about politics or religion; of course, only part of his correspondence survives. What evidence we have of his tastes in reading also seems negative or inconclusive. Throughout his life he seems to have preferred poetry and ancient history to volumes of philosophy, and Hoxie Neale Fairchild argues that Wordsworth must therefore have "derived his most characteristic philosophical and religious ideas largely, though not of course entirely, from poetry." He undoubtedly did prefer imaginative works to philosophy, as the fifth book of The Prelude shows; he refers there to "the ape Philosophy" (525-26). In later life, he cared mainly for religious works: in 1824, he speaks of himself as having "little relish for any other" though he says later "but all great poets are ... powerful Religionists, and therefore among many literary pleasures lost, I have not yet to lament over that of verse as departed."

Yet this same letter also indicates the way in which he was interested in ideas for he writes that "even in poetry it is the imaginative only, viz., that which is conversant (with), or turns upon infinity, that powerfully affects me ... I mean to say that, unless in those passages where all things are lost in each other, and limits vanish, and aspirations are raised, I read with something too much like indifference." Now Wordsworth's own poetry is certainly rich in that which
"turns upon infinity" and as such necessarily involves the questions which have concerned serious philosophers as well as theologians of all ages and cultures: the relationship of God, man and the natural universe; the nature of the senses and the mind which they inform. In this sense, Coleridge's assertion cannot be doubted: Wordsworth's poetry does show that he was capable of writing a great philosophic poem.

Wordsworth's independent, observant, and very persistent interest in ideas, and especially those concerned with mental processes, is shown, for example, by his treatment of the formation of deep impressions. "There was a boy" shows how natural beauty impresses itself on a mind which was at first quite unconscious of it: he comments further on the process demonstrated in this poem in his 1815 Preface: "Guided by one of my own primary consciousnesses, I have represented a commutation and transfer of internal feelings, cooperating with external accidents to plant, for immortality, images of sound and sight, in the celestial soil of the Imagination. The Boy, there introduced, is listening, with something of a feverish and restless anxiety, for the recurrence of the riotous sounds which he had previously excited, and, at the moment when the intenseness of his mind is beginning to remit, he is surprised into a perception of the solemn and tranquillizing images which the poem describes" (Prelude, p.547). Wordsworth discussed the same process with de Quincey in relation to these lines: "I have remarked, from my earliest days, that, if under any circumstances the attention is energetically braced up to an act of steady observation or of steady expectation, then, if this intense
condition of vigilance should suddenly relax, at that moment any beautiful, any impressive visual object, or collection of objects upon the eye, is carried to the heart with a power unknown under other circumstances.\textsuperscript{10} This process is Wordsworth's original discovery, observed in action in his own mind, worked out carefully, and described exactly. Such discoveries are the result of a keen concern with the nature of the mind's activity. Other mental processes are shown in other poems: in "Peter Bell" the arousing and thus regenerative effect of sense impressions on a blunted sensibility; in "Michael" (21–23) the growth of love for mankind through tales such as that which the poem tells. But it is misleading to list separate poems, for the whole of Wordsworth's work shows this powerful interest in the nature and development of the mind. As an educated man, and one with such strong interests in this area, it is certain that he will have been aware of all the concepts discussed in this thesis, even if he had not himself read all the works in which they are discussed, just as an educated person today is aware of the principal concepts of the existentialists and linguistic analysts even though he may not have read a word of Sartre or Ayer. A man indifferent to the systematic argument and narrow application of most philosophical works, and yet with a vital interest in ideas, is unlikely to have checked his own concepts against those of others and adopted them consciously into a system; he would rather have seized on and used in his own work those parts of other men's systems which were sympathetic and relevant to him. His poetry shows that this was indeed Wordsworth's usual procedure in dealing with other people's ideas. Of all the scholars who have...
 discussed Wordsworth's approach to philosophy, Melvin Rader seems to express most accurately the poet's peculiar mentality: "as I interpret Wordsworth, he was a bold and romantic thinker, gathering ideas from many sources and adapting them freely to his own purposes. His direct experience of life was by far the most important source of his ideas; next to this was the living presence of Coleridge; finally there was the influence of books, and among these he roamed far and wide."  

In discussing the extent of Wordsworth's contact with the philosophers, I shall often use as evidence of a kind, if not the clearest kind, Coleridge's known interest in certain philosophers during the time of his active friendship with Wordsworth, 1796-1810. The quotation above suggests my reasons, and yet this kind of evidence has been used rather rashly by some writers as indicating Wordsworth's undeniable and intimate acquaintance with various works of philosophy. So I should state my view of Coleridge's influence on Wordsworth, and the problem of how much knowledge of current philosophical ideas Wordsworth is likely to have absorbed from conversation with Coleridge.

We know that during the fourteen years of close friendship the two poets influenced each other deeply. Wordsworth's extreme anxiety to have Coleridge's notes for "The Recluse" shows clearly his belief in the importance of Coleridge's ideas for his own work. On 6 March, 1804, he wrote: "I am very anxious to have
your notes for the Recluse. I cannot say how much importance I attach to this, if it should please God that I survive you, I should reproach myself forever in writing the work if I had neglected to procure this help." Later, hearing that Coleridge had been seriously ill, he wrote: "... I cannot say what a load it would be to me, should I survive you and you die without this memorial left behind. Do for heaven's sake, put this out of the reach of accident immediately" (EY, p.464: 29 March, 1804). Two years later, he wrote to Sir George Beaumont, "Within this last month I have returned to the Recluse, and have written 700 additional lines. Should Coleridge return, so that I might have some conversation with him on the subject, I should go on swimmingly." The importance of Coleridge's ideas to Wordsworth in this case must surely have been paralleled by the influence of his ideas on the poems written for their joint production, the *Lyrical Ballads*, and in the poem addressed to Coleridge, *The Prelude*, though for reasons of space it is impossible to discuss in detail Coleridge's influence on Wordsworth's poetry here. It seems likely that the reason why he found Coleridge's ideas so important is that Coleridge was not only a great but a trained and informed thinker—he was familiar with the coin of philosophic thought. This view of their intellectual relationship surely suggests that Wordsworth and Coleridge did discuss philosophical ideas, and that Wordsworth found Coleridge's intimate knowledge of philosophical writings useful to himself.

Another reason for supposing that Wordsworth could have acquired information about relevant philosophical works from Coleridge is that both were interested in...
the same ideas during the early years of their friendship; Coleridge is likely to have contributed to their conversation his knowledge of the philosophical treatments of these ideas. It is obvious that the two poets were drawn together in 1796, because, while their beliefs were not identical, their deepest interests were shared. They both cared profoundly for the "one life" in man and nature. In 1796, in "The Aeolian Harp" Coleridge wrote:

O! the one Life within us and abroad,
Which meets all motion and becomes its soul,
A light in sound, a sound-like power in light,
Rhythm in all thought, and joyance everywhere--
Methinks it should have been impossible
Not to love all things in a world so fill'd,
(26-31)

while a year later, Wordsworth was to write:

Wonder not
If such his transports were; for in all things
He saw one life and felt that it was joy.

A connected matter is the relationship of the mind and the external world, another question of the deepest concern to both poets. In "Dejection" Coleridge wrote:

O Lady, we perceive but what we give,
And in our life alone doth Nature live;
Ours is her wedding garment, Ours her shroud!

Although Wordsworth came to different conclusions, his preoccupation, the preoccupation of most of his best work, is the same, and so is his relating of joy to these matters:
Paradise, and groves
Elysian, Fortunate Fields—like those of old
Sought in the Atlantic Main—why should they be
A history only of departed things,
Or a mere fiction of what never was?
For the discerning intellect of Man,
When wedded to this goodly universe
In love and holy passion, shall find these
A simple produce of the common day.
— I, long before the blissful hour arrives
Would chant, in lonely peace, the spousal verse
Of this great consummation:— and, by words
Which speak of nothing more than what we are,
Would I arouse the sensual from their sleep
Of Death, and win the vacant and the vain
To noble raptures; while my voice proclaims
Now exquisitely the individual Mind
(And the progressive powers perhaps no less
Of the whole species) to the external World
Is fitted:— and how exquisitely, too—
Theme this but little heard of among men—
The external World is fitted to the Mind;
And the creation (by no lower name
Can it be called) which they with blended might
Accomplish.

(Prospectus to The Excursion, 47-71)

In the course of this thesis the differences and similarities in their views of such matters should become evident. Their views on lesser matters were sometimes identical: Crabb Robinson reports of Coleridge's lectures on education in 1808 that he disparaged the "improving" kind of children's books as teaching "not virtue but vanity" and said "I infinitely prefer the little books of The Seven Champions of Jack the Giant-Killer, etc., etc., for at least they make the child forget himself."15 Wordsworth expressed identical views in The Prelude, Book V. Such deep common interests, resulting occasionally in identity of opinion, make it at least extremely probable that what one read the other would soon hear of; especially when, as in
the case of the works to be discussed, the subject matter touched on topics of the greatest importance to both.

There is, in any case, clear evidence that the poets did discuss philosophical works. Conversations about Spinoza, for instance, are recorded in *Biographia Literaria* X, (I, 126-27), no doubt with a little garnish, when Coleridge is writing about the government agent who spied on them, when because of their sympathies with the French Revolution and acquaintance with radicals like John Thelwall, the two poets were suspected of sedition: "At first he fancied we were aware of our danger; for he often heard me talk of one Spy Nozy, which he was inclined to interpret of himself, and of a remarkable feature belonging to him, but he was speedily convinced that it was the name of a man who had made a book and who lived long ago. Our talk ran most upon books and we were perpetually desiring each other to look at this and to listen to that." It seems that they also discussed the British empiricists, Hobbes, Locke and Hume, and that Coleridge valued Wordsworth's judgment of such writers, for he wrote of them to Thomas Poole on 16 March, 1801, "I am confident, that I can prove that the Reputation of these three men has been wholly unmerited, & I have in what I have already written traced the whole history of the causes that effected this reputation entirely to Wordsworth's satisfaction" (CL II, 707). The two friends were naturally informed of each other's intellectual history. Writing in September 1817 of his independent arrival at conclusions similar to Schelling's, he says: "As Wordsworth, Southey, and indeed all of my intelligent friends can attest, I had formed it during the study of
Plato, and the Scholars of Ammonius, and in later times of Scotus (Joan.
Erigena), Giordano Bruno, Behmen and the much calumniated Spinoza . . ."
(CL IV, 775: To C.A. Tulk). Indeed, Coleridge was so communicative about
his philosophical interests to the Wordsworths that he was prepared to joke with
Dorothy about Fichte: (CL II, 673: 9 February, 1801).

It seems quite certain that Coleridge did discuss his philosophical interests
with Wordsworth; that because of their great sympathy in their most serious
interests each will have wanted to communicate to the other anything which
related to these interests; that these interests included the problems of the senses
discussed here; and also that either poet much admired and was much influenced
by the other, and that Wordsworth would therefore have been prepared to accept
ideas and information from Coleridge in the years of their closest friendship,
which of course correspond with the period in which he produced most of his best
work. Newton P. Stallknecht writes with some truth that

Knowing what we do of Coleridge's habits of torrential conversation and
of the many hours of conversation that Wordsworth and Coleridge shared
when they were almost constantly together in 1797 and 1798, I do not think
it illegitimate to suppose that Wordsworth gained what we might call an
intensive survey of the thought of Coleridge's philosophical heroes.
These included Plato and the Neoplatonists, Bruno, Spinoza, Boehme;
of course Hartley and Berkeley, after whom Coleridge named his boys;
and George Fox and William Law; and in later conversations, the
Germans, Kant, Schiller, Schelling, and Fichte must have appeared.
There is no reason to suppose that Wordsworth had retained or further developed an acquaintance with each of these writers; but when we find doctrines or phrases appearing in Wordsworth's work which closely resemble those belonging to any one of the above-mentioned philosophers we have no reason to reject the possibility of such an influence on the grounds that external evidence is lacking to show that Wordsworth was in any way acquainted with the author in question. 16

For these reasons I have been prepared to evince Coleridge's knowledge of certain philosophic works as evidence of Wordsworth's contact with these works, though, of course, like most of the other evidence it only shows possible or probable contact.

iii. Newton

In writing of the external evidence of Wordsworth's familiarity with the works and ideas of the most important philosophers who have treated the nature of the senses and sense-objects, I shall consider first the British Empiricists, then modern European philosophers, and finally Plato, and the Neoplatonists. But before discussing the British Empiricists, it is necessary to discuss Newton, whose _Opticks_ was the most influential work in forming eighteenth century ideas of the eyes and the senses. It is wrong to identify Newton with the British Empiricists, for in fact they tended to seize upon those parts of his work which supported their
concepts, and thus acquire his authority for their ideas, although the actual implications of his work are often rather different. 17 Yet as his discoveries did so influence their thought it is natural to consider him with them.

Wordsworth evidently had a deep respect for Newton, and moreover his imagination was stirred by thoughts of Newton’s intellectual adventures, as his account of his Cambridge days records:

And from my pillow, looking forth by light
Of moon or favouring stars, I could behold
The antechapel where the statue stood
Of Newton with his prism and silent face,
The marble index of a mind for ever
Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone.

(Prelude III, 58-63)

It is likely that Wordsworth read the Opticks as an undergraduate at Cambridge. It was one of the works assigned by St. John’s College when he was an undergraduate there in 1789, although as he had decided not to read for a place in the tripos, there is no certain evidence that he did read the work then. 18 As for the Principia, B.R. Schneider says (p.168), quoting The Prelude, VI (1805), 144-46, "in his excursions into geometry Wordsworth used to ponder 'Upon the alliance of these simple, pure Proportions and relations with the frame And laws of Nature.' When a graduate of eighteenth-century Cambridge speaks of an alliance between natural law and geometry we are bound to assume that he refers to the famous alliance between these two subjects which is Newton's Principia." Another way in which he could have become familiar with Newton’s ideas, in an eighteenth-century version, is through Martin’s Introduction to the Newtonian Philosophy, which was among the books at Racedown when Wordsworth lived there,
from 1795-1797. But almost certainly by this period his Cambridge education will have ensured an adequate knowledge of Newton's work.

iv. The British Empiricists

Locke's work, too, will certainly have been familiar to Wordsworth. He was the most generally popular and influential philosopher of the eighteenth century, and no educated person could have avoided some acquaintance with his works. As Schneider shows (p.110), his influence was particularly strongly felt at Cambridge, and even as a non-reading man, Wordsworth would have been required to show knowledge of the Essay concerning Human Understanding at the Senate House examinations. Schneider concludes that "certainly at Cambridge, where Locke was the starting point of so much that was thought and said, Wordsworth could not have escaped its [the Essay's] influence" (p.111).

Wordsworth is recorded as having said that "the best of Locke's work, as it seems to me, is that in which he attempts the least—his Conduct of the Understanding," which makes it fairly certain that he had read this work and some others. He also comments on Locke's influence, saying that the success of his work "was not due to its own merits, which are considerable; but to external circumstances. It came forth at a happy opportunity and coincided with the prevalent opinions of the time." Coleridge seems to assume not only that Wordsworth knew Locke's work but that he shared his own low opinion of it: in a letter explaining his disappointment with The Excursion he writes, "I supposed you first to have meditated the faculties of Man in the abstract, in their correspondence with his
Sphere of action . . . to have laid a solid and immovable foundation for the edifice by removing the sandy Sophisms of Locke, and the Mechanic Dogmatists, and demonstrating that the Senses were living growths and developments of the Mind & Spirit in a much juster as well as higher sense, than the mind can be said to be formed by the Senses" (CL IV, 574: 30 May, 1815). Whether Coleridge was right in assuming that Wordsworth shared his opposition to Locke's notion of the mind as being formed by the senses is a matter which must be discussed elsewhere. Coleridge certainly knew Locke's work closely and opposed his views consistently: his four philosophical letters to Josiah Wedgwood in February 1801 demonstrate this (CL II, 677 ff.). But it is clear that Wordsworth knew the works of Locke fairly well, without supposing a stimulus through Coleridge.

About Berkeley the case is less clear. Wordsworth did own one of Berkeley's works. This was Alciphron, or the Minute Philosopher (TWS, 6, 223), the work of Berkeley's which is least concerned with the nature of vision and the general nature of sense impressions, being, as the title says, An Apology for the Christian Religion. Nevertheless it is by no means totally irrelevant, for the fourth dialogue discusses these matters, and indeed summarizes the main drift of Berkeley's argument, which is developed more fully in A New Theory of Vision, The Principles of Human Knowledge and the Three Dialogues. A letter of Southey's may suggest that he had discussed Alciphron with Wordsworth and that they had agreed that they shared Berkeley's concept of Christianity. But this may be reading too much between the lines. Southey writes: " . . . I want you, and pray you to read
Berkeley's Minute Philosopher: I want you to learn that the religious belief which Wordsworth and I hold, and which—I am sure you know in my case, and will not doubt in his—no earthly considerations would make us profess if we did not hold it, is as reasonable as it is desirable . . .”21 Coleridge is well known to have been keenly interested in Berkeley's thought in the years in which his friendship with Wordsworth began. In December 1796, he wrote of himself as "Berkleian," and this enthusiasm lasted, as John Beer notes (pp. 106-07), at least until his departure for Germany in September 1798. In May of that year, his son, who was to die in infancy, was christened Berkeley. It is probable that Berkeley's concept of sense perceptions as the language of God influenced the lines from "Frost at Midnight;" when he wrote that his son, Hartley, should live amidst natural beauty:

So shalt thou see and hear
The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
Of that eternal language, which thy God
Utters, who from eternity doth teach
Himself in all, and all things in himself.

When sending the manuscript of "This Lime-tree Bower my Prison" to Southey, Coleridge again referred to himself as a "Berkleian," in a note which he made to the word "view" in the following lines, which are related to the same concept:

So my friend
Struck with joy's deepest calm, and gazing round
On the wide view, may gaze till all doth seem
Less gross than bodily, a living Thing
That acts upon the mind, and with such hues
As clothe the Almighty Spirit, when he makes
Spirits perceive His presence:

(CL I, 335)
Berkeley may have influenced Wordsworth's writings in two ways, both through his earlier, empiricist works (see chapter three) and through his later, more Platonic writings (see chapter four). Coleridge knew and was influenced by both the empirical writings and *Siris*, though finally he preferred the latter, calling Berkeley "a Platonist in his riper and better years" (CL V, 13-14 January, 1820).

Wordsworth's relationship to Hartley was much discussed by critics thirty or forty years ago, following the publication of Arthur Beatty's dogmatic but unconvincing treatment of the subject. As one of Hartley's commentators observed, there is no direct evidence that Wordsworth read the *Observations*, but it seems most probable that he did, for in a letter of 1808 he counts Hartley as being among the "men of real power" whose work is not immediately valued properly, saying "Take for instance in philosophy, Hartley's book upon Man, how many years did it sleep in almost entire oblivion" (MY, Part I, 266: to Richard Sharp, 27 September, 1808). Coleridge was much influenced by Hartley in his early life, and told Southey in December 1794 "I am a compleat Necessitarian—and understand the subject as well almost as Hartley himself—but I go further than Hartley and believe the corporeality of thought—namely, that it is motion" (CL, I, 137). "Religious Musings" written in the same year also shows his involvement with Hartley's thought for Coleridge, who also praises Milton, Newton and Priestley, speaks of him there as "he of mortal kind/ Wisest, he first who marked the ideal tribes/ Up the fine fibres through the sentient brain" (364-76). Coleridge's eldest child, born in 1796, was named after the philosopher: Coleridge wrote to
Thomas Poole: "It's name is DAVID HARTLEY COLERIDGE. I hope, that ere he be a man ... his head will be convinced of & his heart saturated with truths so ably supported by that great master of Christian Philosophy" (CL, I, 236: 24 September, 1796). Coleridge gradually discarded his Hartleian ideas; this process probably began in 1797 and by 1801 he was able to write to Poole: "If I do not greatly delude myself, I have not only completely extricated the notions of Time and Space, but I have overthrown the doctrine of Association as taught by Hartley, and with all the irreligious metaphysics of modern Infidels" (CL, II, 706: 16 March, 1801). By the time of writing Biographia Literaria he was of course quite convinced of the falseness of Hartley's position. During the period when Coleridge was speculating about Hartley's theories it is again extremely probable that he discussed them with Wordsworth. However, as Rader points out (p. 51), if Wordsworth had been a confirmed Hartleian, as Beatty tries to depict him, surely Henry Crabb Robinson would have referred to this, as would Coleridge have done in the Biographia Literaria, which both attacks Hartley and criticizes Wordsworth on several points.

Despite Hume's immense current prestige amongst at least English philosophers, he seems to have had no influence on either Wordsworth or Coleridge; Coleridge never writes of him with respect. Wordsworth must have had some contact with his writings, for he wrote to Crabb Robinson in May, 1846, that he and Professor Forbes, a geologist, "talked a good deal about David Hume, and a recent publication referring to him" (Crabb Robinson and the Wordsworth Circle, II, 623).
vi. The European Philosophers

It is probable that any contact Wordsworth had with the ideas of perception of European philosophers came largely through English sources. Therefore I have merely indicated briefly the more likely contacts. There was in Wordsworth's library at Rydal Mount a copy of Descartes' *Principia Philosophiae* (TWS, 6, 210). Coleridge's interest in Descartes was not particularly intense, but he was among the first to recognise Locke's debt to Descartes (CL, II, 677-78). This may have been discussed with Wordsworth, as it was exercising Coleridge's thoughts before 1801.

Important as German Idealism is to the development of thought about perception, it is discussed only briefly and in passing in this thesis. What I am concerned with is the climate of opinion likely to have influenced Wordsworth, as I have said, and the great German philosophers had little influence in England until the nineteenth century, by which time Wordsworth's ideas were formed. There is little indication of a new strain of idealism at any period after the beginning of Wordsworth's poetic career. E.D. Hirsch, though he devotes a book to the similarities between Wordsworth and Schelling, demonstrates that it is unlikely that Wordsworth was influenced at all by German Idealism, and writes specifically that "it seems reasonable to assume that Schelling's philosophy in no way influenced Wordsworth's fundamental attitudes and ideas." 24 At the age of seventy, Wordsworth declared proudly that he had "never read a word of German metaphysics." 25 Crabb Robinson, who surely should have known, certainly thought that Wordsworth was ignorant of German philosophy,
at least as far as the imagination was concerned: he wrote that Wordsworth "represented . . . much as, unknown to him, the German philosophers have done—that, by the imagination the mere fact is exhibited as connected with that infinity without which there is no poetry." There is further evidence that Wordsworth denied any knowledge of Kant's work, although he had once shown some interest in it: Coleridge's letters from Germany, published as "Satyrane's Letters," quote some notes which Wordsworth made of his conversations with the German poet, Klopstock, which record that Wordsworth asked Klopstock what he thought of Kant (BL XXII: II, 179). He will probably have been asking for Coleridge's sake. Coleridge's interest in Kant was shown as early as 1796 (CL I, 209: to Thomas Poole, 5 May, 1796), and he was certainly reading Kant by 1801: he writes "I turn at times half-reluctantly from Leibniz or Kant even to read a smoking new newspaper, such a purus putus Metaphysicus am I become" (CL II, 676: to Thomas Poole, 13 February, 1801).

Newton P. Stallknecht (p.23) is convinced that Wordsworth's works show signs of Spinoza's influence. As external evidence he evinces Wordsworth's own denial that there are Spinosistic elements in The Excursion (MY, Part 2, 188: to Catherine Clarkson, January, 1815), as this, he feels, shows that he grasped Spinoza's main concepts, and that after all the more Spinosistic parts of Wordsworth's work are not in The Excursion. He also refers to the "Spy Nozy" story, mentioned above. De Quincey also felt that Wordsworth could be "Spinosistic" and applies this epithet to "Nutting." Coleridge was certainly interested in Spinoza during the years of his closest friendship with Wordsworth,
and announced in September, 1799, that he was "sunk in Spinoza" (Orsini, p. 23). None of this evidence seems very strong.

vi. Platonism and Neoplatonism

Amongst the Platonists I shall consider some who are only loosely connected with that movement of thought. Rader (p. 40) points out that in the Rydal Mount Library sale, there were a considerable number of works on Platonism, compared with only a few on empiricism. He comments that "either Wordsworth never possessed the works of the empiricists, or he was not sufficiently attached to them to keep them until his death, or the books were withheld from the sale. At any rate, it is surprising that no philosophical work of Hobbes, Hume, Godwin or Priestley appeared in the catalogue." Such evidence is very inconclusive, however. In discussing Platonism, one must first consider Plato. Amongst Wordsworth's books were Schleiermacher's introduction to the dialogues of Plato, and also Thomas Taylor's translation of the Cratylus, the Phaedo, the Parmenides, and the Timaeus, and another edition of five dialogues of Plato (TWS 6, 234). A volume described as "Plato on the soul" was among the books at Racedown (no. 660). Wordsworth quite certainly had read Plato; indeed it is unlikely that any serious and educated man would not have read at least the more famous dialogues. In "Dion" (8-9) he writes of the "lunar beam/ Of Plato's genius," while in his "Answer to the Letter of Mathetes," he says that "... in the persons of Plato, Demosthenes, and Homer, and ... of Shakespeare, Milton and Lord Bacon, were enshrined so much of the divinity of intellect as the
inhabitants of this planet can hope will ever take up its abode among them" (Grosart I, 312). He is also reported to have said: "... the English, with their devotion to Aristotle, have but half the truth; a sound philosophy must contain both Plato and Aristotle." In the sonnet "I heard (alas! 'twas only in a dream)," he refers to this world as "the uncongenial Hollow/ Of the dull earth" and in a note explains "See the 'Phaedo' of Plato, by which this sonnet was suggested." Coleridge's interest in Plato is well established. He wrote that Plato's theology was one of the two subjects "which have in the very depth of my Nature interested me" (CL II, 866: to William Sotheby, 10 September, 1802).

Wordsworth possessed a copy of Paracelsus' Of the Chymical Transmutations Genealogy and Generation of Metals and Minerals, etc., with Experiments, and the way of making the Great Stone of the Philosophers (TWS 6, 210). Coleridge's early interest in the Neoplatonists is well known, and was certainly known to Wordsworth, who wrote of his friend's "toils abstruse/ Among the Schoolmen, and Platonic forms/ of wild ideal pageantry ..." (Prelude, VI, 297-99). Coleridge was likely to have been reading some of these obscure thinkers in the early period of his friendship with Wordsworth. Among the books which he asked John Thelwall to send him from London, in 1796, were works of lamblichus, Porphyry, Proclus and Plotinus, (CL I, 262: 19 November, 1796), and many of his writings demonstrate his familiarity with Neoplatonic writings. J.D. Rea's attempt at proving Wordsworth's dependence on Proclus for the Platonic elements in the Immortality Ode seems overstrained, however.
Plotinus was partially available to Wordsworth in the translations of Thomas Taylor. *Concerning the Beautiful* (a translation of Ennead I, vi) was published in 1787, and a second edition appeared in 1792. In 1794, a translation of *Five Books of Plotinus* was published, while in 1817 and 1834 translations of further books appeared. (A complete English Plotinus was not available until Stephen MacKenna published his translations in this century). Coleridge studied Plotinus at an early stage (BL I, 94), and his interest did not fade. His notebook for November, 1803, makes it clear that he had been rereading the *Enneads*. He quotes from the *Enneads* in *Biographia Literaria*, and discusses Plotinus in the same work (I, 166-67). His treatment of the nature of art in "On Poesy or Art" is influenced by Plotinus, as John Shawcross points out (BL II, 318).

It seems possible that Wordsworth was acquainted with the work of Jacob Boehme, the seventeenth century theosopher. Not only did he own a copy of *De Signatura Rerum* (perhaps Boehme's most important work), but also a work of one of Boehme's early exponents, *The Theosophick Philosophy Unfolded*, by Edward Taylor, "with Life, etc., of that divinely-instructed Author" (TWS, 6, 217). Coleridge's comment in *Biographia Literaria* IX (I, 98) on Boehme, Fox, and Law is well-known: "If they were too often a moving cloud of smoke to me by day, yet they were always a pillar of fire throughout the night, during my wanderings through the wilderness of doubt, and enabled me to skirt, without crossing, the sandy deserts of utter unbelief." Coleridge's interest in Boehme was early and had certainly been formed by the time of his friendship with
Wordsworth. He speaks of Boehme's *Aurora* as a work which he had "conjured over at school" and says that it had probably influenced his ideas before his visit to Germany in 1798 (CL IV, 751: to Ludwig Tieck, 4 July, 1817).

The Cambridge Platonist, Ralph Cudworth, was very probably read by Wordsworth. A copy of Cudworth's principle work, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, was in the Rydal Mount library (TWS, 6, 219). Wordsworth could also have read this as a young man, for there was a copy at Racedown (719 in the catalogue). Coleridge's *Notebooks* show that he was reading this work closely in the years 1796-97, probably while Wordsworth was at Racedown, and while his friendship with Wordsworth was growing. He both quotes from Cudworth and also notes that one of Cudworth's own references (from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*) can be used against the theories of "Sir Isaac Newton and other material theists" in an essay on Berkeley which he was planning at the time (Notebooks, I, 200 G196/99 and note; I, 203, G199 and note). Rader (p.75) thinks it "a safe inference, that Wordsworth imbibed the ideas of Cudworth from Coleridge," because of his use of the word "plastic" in Book II of *The Prelude* (362), in what seems like Cudworth's sense as possibly adopted by Coleridge.

Wordsworth certainly did read the Earl of Shaftesbury's *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*. It was among the books which he owned (TWS 6, 266), and in the *Essay Supplementary to the Preface* (1815), writing of the peculiarities of taste in the Restoration period, he notes that "Shaftesbury, an author at present unjustly depreciated, describes the English Muses as only yet lisping in their cradles" (Grosart, II, 116).
The matter of Thomas Taylor is uncertain. Taylor, of course, not only translated Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Porphyry and others, but also popularized the ideas of these writers and commented on them at length. He was so prolific, that nobody at all interested in Platonic thought could ignore his work; his numerous translations and commentaries were extremely important in reawakening interest in Plato and the Neoplatonists in nineteenth-century England. Coleridge's notes on Taylor's translation of volume I of Proclus' Commentaries on Euclid are in the British Museum (Notebooks I, Appendix B). Of course, he was not dependent on Taylor's translations, nor did he esteem them highly. He described Taylor as "a thorough blind Bigot, ignorant of all with which he is intoxicated—rather with the slang of which he is bewitched" (Notebooks I, Appendix B, 458-59). Of Proclus' Platonic Theology, he comments that "A part of it has been translated by Taylor; but so translated that difficult Greek is transmuted into incomprehensible English" (CL III, 279: to Lady Beaumont, 21 January, 1810). However, incomprehensible or not, Wordsworth did own two volumes of Taylor's translations, the dialogues of Plato mentioned above, and Pausanias' Description of Greece (TWS, 6, 213), and no doubt used them and read Taylor's comments. Emerson made a rather ambiguous comment on Wordsworth's ignorance of Taylor: "Wordsworth knew little or nothing of him." This is probably an expression of distress at the difficulty in finding new information about Taylor in England, for possessing as he did two of Taylor's works, and having been in contact with one most acutely interested in Neoplatonism, Wordsworth knew something of Taylor. Kathleen Raine is, however, far too
dogmatic in her assertion that "the gleam from Plotinus that illuminates Wordsworth's most famous Ode (and other of his poems) certainly comes through Taylor" (Raine and Harper, p. 8). Plotinus' influence on the Immortality Ode is by no means established, nor if it were could we be sure that it came through Thomas Taylor.

The foregoing surely indicates that Wordsworth's contact with the available writings concerned with the senses and the nature of perception is likely to have been greater than many critics would have us believe. Wordsworth's formal education, his library, the nature of his interests, his friendship with Coleridge, all make it very likely that he will have been familiar with the concepts discussed here, and will have been prepared to use or discard them as they fitted with his personal experience. In general, the philosophical works quoted below are those with which I believe he was most likely to have some acquaintance. On this basis, one can proceed to discuss the nature of Wordsworth's view of the senses in general and the eye in particular, and the relationship of these views with these philosophical writings. The following chapters suggest that the internal evidence of Wordsworth's knowledge of certain philosophical works is considerably stronger very often than the external evidence.

Notes

1 See J. D. Rea, "Coleridge's Intimations of Immortality from Proclus," Modern Philology, 26 (1928), 201-213.

3 B.R. Schneider, Wordsworth's Cambridge Education (Cambridge, 1957), gives an excellent account of Wordsworth's school and university careers.


9 Yet other statements about "The Recluse" suggest that for all his powers and for all his intimate knowledge of Wordsworth, Coleridge perhaps expected a "GENUINE PHILOSOPHIC POEM" of a kind which Wordsworth was unlikely to produce. See CL IV, 574: to William Wordsworth, 30 May, 1815.


17. See Nicolson, Newton, pp. 75, 144.

18. A catalogue of the contents of these book-cases, made in 1793, is among the Pinney Papers, which are on permanent loan to Bristol University Library. This volume is numbered 409.


20. Grosart, III, 461, quoting Memoirs. It is interesting that Coleridge's comments on the causes of Locke's reputation are similar, though less vague. Crabb Robinson (Blake, Coleridge . . . p. 36) says of Coleridge "the popularity of Locke's Essay he ascribed to his political position—he was the advocate of the new dynasty against the old and as a religious writer, against the Infidel, tho' he was but an Arian." A more detailed discussion of the same subject can be found in a letter to Josiah Wedgwood of February, 1801. See CL II, 701.


22. Huguelet's introduction to the facsimile of the Observations, XVI.

23. However, they would have known only the Enquiry, a work popularized and reduced in scope, and not the earlier and more radical Treatise, according to Gian Orsini, (p. 90).


Chapter Two: The History of the Eye

Introductory

Before discussing in detail the various philosophical implications of Wordsworth's treatment of sight, it is necessary to establish Wordsworth's developing attitudes towards his own eye. The role of the eye in his mental life naturally changed as he grew older, and the stages of these changes are expressed variously in the various poems which touch on the history of the eye—sometimes as crises of the eye in particular and sometimes more generally as changes in Wordsworth's attitude towards sense experience. The principal poems which describe the history of Wordsworth's eye are "Tintern Abbey," the Immortality Ode, the "Elegiac Stanzas" ("Peele Castle") and The Prelude. Of these The Prelude is probably the most important and certainly the most complex account, not only because of the greater length and elaboration of the history of the eye in this poem, but because its account is synthesized. Wordsworth included in it passages written as early as 1795, and worked on it intermittently until 1838, so that the poem not only tells of his changing attitudes towards sight during the years he writes of, but also reflects his different attitudes at the various periods at which it was written. It is difficult to correlate perfectly the accounts in these various sources: John Bard MacNulty points out that Wordsworth's autobiographical passages, though reconcilable in some cases, are inconsistent, while Jonathan Wordsworth considers that "Wordsworth
rationalized the stages of his development very differently at different times" (Music of Humanity, p. 217), which is true enough.

Despite the differences, however, and whatever their causes, a coherent pattern can be traced, although some problems of dating may remain insoluble. Indeed, it is foolish and uncomprehending to attempt to outline too rigid a schedule of development, as it were; Wordsworth himself does not attempt it and his remarks are a warning to students of his poetry:

But who shall parcel out
His intellect by geometric rules,
Split like a province into round and square?
Who knows the individual hour in which
His habits were first sown, even as a seed?
(Prelude, II, 203-07)

I shall attempt in this chapter to describe the development of Wordsworth's attitude to his eye chronologically rather than by treating each poem separately, for a chronological treatment shows up more distinctly both the similarities and the differences between the various poems concerning the same stage. Moreover, it seems valuable to compare the imaginative recreation of this development with the recorded facts, and to link the poetry with the available biographical information.

i. Childhood.

Wordsworth was born with extraordinary powers, and extraordinarily powerful senses. A poet, he says in the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads (Grosart, II, 82), "is possessed of more than usual organic sensibility," and he was a born poet. De Quincey noted that Wordsworth's "intellectual passions
rested upon a basis of preternatural animal sensibility diffused through all the
animal passions (or appetites)" (Works, II, 246: quoted by Havens, p.92).
The first book of The Prelude shows how, for a child with the advantages of such
a natural disposition and of such exceptionally beautiful and impressive
surroundings, the ordinary games and sports of childhood—snaring woodcocks,
birdsnesting, rowing, skating, fishing, sailing kites—all brought him
incidentally into a close relationship of fear and love with the natural objects,
sky, lake, brook and mountain, which were their background. (The
implications of the Ministry of Nature are discussed in the next chapter). At
this stage, the child's eye was feeding his unconscious spirit. Yet, even at the
age when his conscious mind was concerned almost entirely with sports and games,
"even then," he writes:

I held unconscious intercourse with beauty
Old as creation, drinking in a pure
Organic pleasure from the silver wreaths
Of curling mist, or from the level plain
Of waters coloured by impending cloud.

(I, 562-66)

Thus, at the age of ten, he was already becoming aware of the delight which
the close scrutiny of the natural world can bring:

Y 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.

(I, 576-80)

His eye begins to awaken to a sense of its own power, to feel its capacity for
delight, and amidst the exuberant activity of a healthy childhood he feels
the first stirrings of the imagination:

'mid that giddy bliss,
Which, like a tempest, works along the blood
And is forgotten; even then I felt
Gleams like the flashing of a shield;—the earth
And common face of Nature spake to me
Rememberable things.

(I, 88)

In these "gleams like the flashing of a shield," with its undertones of powerful enchantment from the Orlando Furioso and The Faerie Queen, the child is shown in a flash of recognition of his own dormant powers of intellect and perception through a brief sharp revelation of nature's powers. The commonplace pleasures of childhood, all-absorbing at the time, fade from the memory, but the glimpses of forms of beauty and terror remains a living force—truly living for they remain present to the eye:

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.

(I, 597-602)

In The Prelude, as in the Immortality Ode, the child's life is shown to be full of joy and vitality, but unlike the Immortality Ode, The Prelude shows the intensity of his experience rather from the quality of the verse and the close and intense impressions which it records, than from any explicit suggestion that the vision of the child is brighter and clearer than that of the adult. The emphasis in Book One of The Prelude is not on the loss of power in after-life, but on the beginnings of the growth of power, and the richness of the soil in which that
power began to grow: it is a description of a "Fair Seed-time" and the implication of The Prelude as a whole is that the harvest is poetry. The sense of the adult's loss is, however, the inspiring feeling behind the Immortality Ode: "This poem rests entirely upon two recollections of childhood: one that of a splendour in the objects of sense which is passed away; and the other an indisposition to bend to the law of death, as applying to our own particular case. A reader who has not a vivid recollection of these feelings having existed in his mind in childhood cannot understand that poem." (MY, Part 2, 189: to Catherine Clarkson, January, 1815). Indeed, Wordsworth believed that everyone if he would consider it would assent to "that dream-like vividness which invests objects of sight in childhood."  

This lost splendour in the vision of childhood is also seen in the last stanza of "Composed upon an Evening of Extraordinary Splendour and Beauty":

Such hues from their Celestial Urn 
Were wont to stream before mine eye,  
Wher'er it wandered in the morn 
Of blissful infancy.  

(61-64)

Now the first book of The Prelude, though it communicates "the glory and the freshness of a dream" in its account of such experiences of childhood as skating, never suggests that for the adult "there hath past away a glory from the earth." The child there is a creature of rapture and abandon, and childhood is "that tempestuous time" (550), but his pastimes are largely "vulgar joy" (581 and 597) and much of his happiness is "that giddy bliss/ Which like a tempest, works along the blood/ And is forgotten" (583-85). Yet again, in the Immortality
Ode, in a passage which Coleridge found senseless (BL XXII: 11), the child is seen as:

Thou best Philosopher, who yet dost keep
Thy heritage, thou Eye amongst the blind,
That, deaf and silent, read'st the eternal deep,
Haunted forever by the eternal mind—
Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!
On whom those truths do rest
Which we are toiling all our lives to find,
In darkness lost, the darkness of the grave.

(111-18)

The child in his joy is at one with the noblest part of the world; he is not diminished by the ordinary adult mortal anxiety and sensuality, which is "the darkness of the grave." Without recognising or communicating his knowledge, he understands his own being, and his part in the larger being. The beginning of The Prelude communicates the joy of the child, but does not show him as endowed with such profound nobility. The work as a whole expresses the extreme fertility of the period largely from the strength of the remembered incidents of childhood scattered throughout the work (besides Book I and II passim; see also V, 364-88, 426-59 and XII, 225-61, 287-335), and later on there is a more explicit acknowledgement of the power of childhood, and the declining vision of progressing years:

Oh! mystery of man, from what a depth
Proceed thy honours. I am lost, but see
In simple childhood something of the base
On which thy greatness stands; but this I feel,
That from thyself it comes, that thou must give,
Else never canst receive. The days gone by
Return upon me almost from the dawn
Of life; the hiding places of man's power
Open; I would approach them, but they close.
I see by glimpses now; when age comes on,
May scarcely see at all.5

(XII, 272-82)
Nevertheless, where The Prelude is primarily concerned with the child and his eye, he is presented not as a "Seer blest" but a boy whose wild games lead him unaware to fostering Nature.

ii. Beyond the Senses

In relation to the Immortality Ode, Wordsworth wrote of his schooldays:

I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence, and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from but inherent in, my own immaterial nature. Many times while going to school have I 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. In later periods of life I have deplored, as we have all reason to do, a subjugation of an opposite character, and have rejoiced over the remembrances, as expressed in the lines—

Obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings; etc.

Thus in the Ode the child experiences not only the glory of the objects of the senses but also a feeling of disbelief in the objects of the senses as objective, a direct consciousness of life as mind. The loss which man experiences in growing out of childhood into adult life is not merely the lessening of an intense pleasure in the world of the senses; it is also a lessening of awareness of the world beyond the senses, of the world which is the true home of our souls.
and minds, but not of the bodily sense. The sense that man is an alien in this world is expressed in terms of the Platonic notion of pre-existence, for man having experienced pure intellectual existence is in exile in the material world. The child unconsciously recognizes that it is "God, who is our home" and not this earth; that his proper place is "that imperial palace whence he came"; that

The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar.

This feeling is echoed in The Prelude (VI, 603-05):

whether we be young or old,
Our destiny, our being's heart and home,
Is with infinitude, and only there.

It is part of the Christian Neoplatonism which looks on the material world as essentially alien to the human soul. It is through the sense of this world of intellect and spirit that the natural world is seen "apparelled in celestial light" and a truly "visionary gleam"; and it is in this sense that "Heaven lies about us in our infancy." For the adult, the mere memory of this consciousness is the truest source of joy and spiritual refreshment, and therefore Wordsworth writes in praise and gratitude

for those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings;
Blank misgivings of a Creature
Moving about in worlds not realised,
High instincts before which our mortal Nature
Did tremble like a guilty Thing surprised:
But for those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain light of all our day,
Are yet a master light of all our seeing;
Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make
Our noisy years seem moments in the being
Of the eternal Silence: truths that wake,
To perish never;
Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,
Nor Man nor Boy,
Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
Can utterly abolish or destroy!

(142-61)

Thus the child's riches and the adult's loss are twofold; the intense glory
in the objects of the senses and an intense awareness of a supersensual existence.
This twofold nature of the motivating sense of loss behind the poem is presumably
Geoffrey Hartman's basis for writing that "There are, if we look closely two quite
different 'intimations of immortality,'" Whereas one implies the mortality of
nature:

questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings,
Blank misgivings of a Creature
Moving about in worlds not realised . . .

the other implies its immortality:

the primal sympathy
Which having been must ever be."

The doubleness of the intimations exists: paradoxically it is the radiant
consciousness of the supersensual that invests the sensuous with its glory.

Now, there are in The Prelude passages which describe Wordsworth's
experience of life in a mode beyond the senses, in a mode described by some
critics, improperly, I believe, as "mystical." When Wordsworth writes of
moments "when the light of sense/ Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed/
The invisible world" (Prelude VI, 600-02), he is, I think referring to a similar
kind of experience to the "obstinate questionings" of the Immortality Ode, although rather than presenting questionings of the sense, they convey a mood in which through the intensity of their own experience, the senses are laid to sleep, and the external world seems merged into the internal world through the extreme delight or disturbance of the senses so that there is a movement through the sense world to the spiritual world. The normal sense of separation between subject and object is lost and the mind becomes one with what it beholds. This merging of perceiver and perceived is not always described as the same kind of experience, and that what is felt is the fading of the sense of distinctions and barriers. In The Prelude it is generally the awareness of the senses which is lost, as in the famous moment of understanding the imagination:

That awful Power rose from the mind's abyss
Like an unfathered vapour that enwraps,
At once, some lonely traveller. I was lost;
Halted, without an effort to break through;
But to my conscious soul I now can say—
'I recognise thy glory:' 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.

(Prelude, VI, 594–603)

The imagination blinds one to the normal sensuous contact with natural objects, as a mountain mist does. The world becomes entirely the world of the intellect where perceiver and perceived are one. In a passage from The Excursion, originally written some years earlier than the lines quoted above, consciousness of both physical and mental activity disappear, and the poet's (or the Wanderer's) awareness of his own life becomes awareness of the life that he beholds, so that
his real experience is of life as a unity:

his spirit drank
The spectacle: sensation, soul, and form,
All melted into him; they swallowed up
His animal being; in them did he live,
And by them did he live; they were his life.
In such access of mind, in such high hour
Of visitation from the living God,
Thought was not; in enjoyment it expired.

(Exc., I, 206-13)

In fragments connected with the earliest version of Book I of The Excursion in the "Alfoxden Notebook" (Written between late January and early March, 1798) it is the awareness of the mind which is said to be lost:

To gaze
On that green hill and on those scattered trees
And feel a pleasant consciousness of life
In the impression of that loveliness
Until the sweet sensation called the mind
Into itself, by image from without
Unvisited, and all her reflex powers
Wrapped in a still dream of forgetfulness.

(PW V, 341: Appendix B, II, iv)

Geoffrey Hartman (p. 177) analyses this passage carefully: "The poet passes beyond specific place (object) or an emotion that has fixed him to it. The word 'gaze' and the demonstratives of the second line suggest his visual and trance-like adhesion, but 'gaze' becomes 'feel' and the particulars ('green hill . . . scattered trees') merge as 'the impression of that loveliness.' The syntax then relaxes, suggests a turning inwards, and the poet remarks explicitly that the object—cause the 'image from without,' is no longer felt. A moment of intense unselfconsciousness ensues: 'I lived without the knowledge that I lived.' In another fragment from the "Alfoxden Notebook," is is again the mind which fades
out of consciousness, while the senses are explicitly at least sporadically awake:

... long I stood and looked,
But when my thoughts began to fail I turned
Towards a grove, a spot which well I knew,
For oftentimes its sympathies had fallen
Like a refreshing dew upon my heart;
I stretched myself beneath the shade
And soon the stirring and inquisitive mind
Was laid asleep; the godlike senses gave
Short impulses of life that seemed to tell
Of our existence, and then passed away.

(PW V, 344: Appendix B, IV, vii)

A similar experience is communicated in all these passages (and many others, especially in The Prelude), the basis of which is a loss of consciousness of the various divisions between self and non-self. This is most explicit in a third "Alfoxden Notebook" fragment, when the poets writes of such moments that

in external things
No longer seem internal difference
All melts away, and things that are without
Live in our minds as in their native home.

(PW V, 343: Appendix B, IV, iii)

In this way it differs from the "obstinate questionings of sense" for when the senses are unrecognised they are unquestioned; it is similar in that there is a loss of belief in the separate existence of the common external material universe.

Experience is one.

In these passages, Wordsworth communicates the actual experience of what the Neoplatonists believed in theory to be the true mode of perception. They believed that perception is a union of perceiver and perceived. Plotinus wrote that "in the Intellectual-Principle itself, there is complete identity of Knower and Known, and this not by way of domiciliation, as in the case of even the highest
soul, but by Essence, by the fact that, there, no distinction exists between
Being and Knowing: we cannot stop at a principle containing separate parts;
there must always be a yet higher, a principle above such diversity." He
believed that "in proportion to the truth with which the knowing faculty knows,
it comes to identification with the object of its knowledge . . . the idea must
not be left to lie outside, but must be made one identical thing with the Soul
of the novice, so that he finds it really his own" (Enneads III, viii, 6: p.244).
This is a formulation of an idea expressed by Wordsworth in terms of intense though
brief experience; and experience is organized, understood and communicated
through ideas. The correspondence between Wordsworthian and Neoplatonic
thought will be discussed more fully in the last chapter of this thesis. Meanwhile
it should be indicated that Wordsworth, having experienced such feelings, will
certainly have been alert and interested when Coleridge discussed this subject; and
that Coleridge did so, interested as he was in both Neoplatonism and in the
relationship between subject and object, is beyond doubt, as it is beyond proof.

In The Prelude, these passages in which the sense of distinctions and boundaries
disappears are not connected with early childhood, as are the obstinate questionings
of the Immortality Ode. The earliest seems to refer, as will be shown, to the
time when the poet was at about the age of sixteen. Thus the accounts of the eye
in the earliest years show a child whose vision was stirred through his boyish
games, but was capable of recognising the intense delight which his eye gave
him; a child to whom the visible world was transcendentally lovely, and yet who was,
either then, or soon afterwards, capable of a consciousness of a world beyond
that of the eye, or rather of the world as one being which includes and
transcends the eye.

iii. The Educated Eye

Wordsworth's narration of his boyhood in Book II of The Prelude shows a
growing tranquillity in his pleasures, and perhaps a growing consciousness that
their true delight springs from the beauty of the external and internal world.
He tells of how he would rest in his boat on the lake while a schoolfriend on a
nearby island played the flute:

oh, then, the calm
And dead still water lay upon my mind
Even with a weight of pleasure, and the sky,
Never before so beautiful, sank down
Into my heart, and held me like a dream!
Thus were my sympathies enlarged, and thus
Daily the common range of visible things
Grew dear to me.

(Prelude II, 170-77)

Eventually there is a complete transition from the period when beauty was
incidental to boyish adventure to a love of natural beauty for its own sake:

Those incidental charms which first attached
My heart to rural objects, day by day
Grew weaker, and I hasten on to tell
How Nature, intervenient till this time
And secondary, now at length was sought
For her own sake.

(II, 198-203)

After this passage there is a digression about the dangers of excessive rational
analysis, and in reaction to this a description of the spontaneous and dynamic
growth of the baby's awareness; but when Wordsworth returns to his own
development, he returns also to this theme of learning to love the world for its own beauty and not for the sake of the sport which it affords:

... a trouble came into my mind
From unknown causes. I was left alone
Seeking the visible world, nor knowing why.
The props of my affection were removed,
And yet the building stood, as if sustained
By its own spirit!

(II, 276-281)

The earlier lines about the weakening of the "incidental charms" of his childhood games, which is demonstrably discussing the same phenomenon, makes it clear that Wordsworth is here describing a period of sudden development in his boyhood, and not, as some critics have supposed, the time after the death of his mother. Some difficulty remains in these lines: why should what seems to be an understandable development be seen as a "trouble . . . From unknown causes"? Nevertheless, when read carefully in context, it is obvious that "the gist of the testimony . . . is in fact that as a young boy, before the age of adolescence, he was learning to love Nature for herself, by way of various 'props' such as sports, adventures, and the pursuit of prey, with which his perception of the beauty and mystery of things was at first associated, but which soon ceased to be essential either to perceptions or delight" (Moorman, I, 44).

The pattern so far recorded of the changing and strengthening nature of his attachment to the visible world in the period from boyhood to early manhood is reiterated in Book VIII (342-54):
Nature herself was, at this unripe time,
But secondary to my own pursuits
And animal activities, and all
Their trivial pleasures; and when these had drooped
And gradually expired, and Nature, prized
For her own sake, became my joy, even then—
And upwards through late youth, until not less
Than two-and-twenty summers had been told—
Was Man in my affections and regards
Subordinate to her, her visible forms
And viewless agencies; a passion, she,
A rapture often, and immediate love
Ever at hand.

This love of "visible forms" fostered the "power of a peculiar eye" (Exc. I, 157)
and made the young Wordsworth more alert to the subtleties of vision, more open
to

gentle agitations of the mind
From manifold distinctions, difference
Perceived in things, where, to the unwatchful eye,
No difference is, and hence, from the same source,
Sublimer joy.

(Prelude, II, 298-302)

The acute perceptiveness of the eye at this stage of development is elaborated on
in a passage from manuscript Y of The Prelude which gives a unique insight into
the combination of intellectual and sensuous energy which formed the act of
seeing for the youthful poet:

As his powers advance,
He is not like a man who sees the heavens
A blue vault merely and a glittering cloud,
One old familiar likeness over all,
A superficial pageant, known too well
To be regarded; he looks nearer, calls
The stars out of their shy retreats, and parts
The milky stream into its separate forms,
Loses and finds again, when baffled most
Not least delighted; finally he takes
The optic tube of thought that patient men
Have furnished with the toil
Without the glass of Galileo sees
What Galileo saw; and as it were
Resolving into one great faculty
Of being, bodily eye and spiritual need
The converse which he holds is limitless;
Not only with the firmament of thought,
But nearer home he looks with the same eye
Through the entire abyss of things.

(Prelude, p. 575)

The acuteness and vitality of his eye in connecting him with the nobility
of everyday reality saved him from the worst effects of the sentimental and
fantastic excesses which, like any other creative adolescent, he found
attractive. A citybred child, like Coleridge, without the freedom to develop
his eye, could have no such anchor in the romantic storm; his vital works must
be that of "the firmament of thought" rather than of "the abyss of things."

Wordsworth describes the stories which he constructed out of odd sights and
incidents, but acknowledges with gratitude that for him they were harmless:

Yet, mid the fervent swarm
Of these vagaries, with an eye so rich
As mine was through the bounty of a grand
And lovely region, I had forms distinct
To steady me; each airy thought revolved
Round a substantial centre, which at once
Incited it to motion and controlled. 12
I did not pine like one in cities bred,
As was thy melancholy lot, dear Friend!
Great Spirit as thou art, in endless dreams
Of sickliness, disjoining, joining things
Without the light of knowledge.

(Prelude, 426-37)

This is thus a period of intense and fertile visual activity, yet it is, as I
have said before, at about this period that Wordsworth first records in The Prelude
his experience of a state of being in which he has no sense of distinction
between the internal and the external worlds, and all that he experiences seems
like part of his own mind. For him, such experiences give "a superadded soul,
a virtue not its own" to the power in nature which moves the mind to delight,
and this surely is the power of the poet's mind reflected back through natural
objects in such intense moments of experience. Such moments would come
when at dawn he sat alone above the lonely valley:

How shall I seek the origin? where find
Faith in the marvellous things which then I felt?
Oft in these moments such a holy calm
Would overspread my soul, that bodily eyes
Were utterly forgotten, and what I saw
Appeared like something in myself, a dream,
A prospect in the mind.

(II, 346-52)

Thus the eye, at this stage of his development, was the source of a newly
awakened pleasure and yet was felt perhaps as merely the intermediary on the
path to a higher experience. As the eye grew more and more keen in the
perception of fine distinctions, it led him towards a deeper experience in which
even the largest distinctions, those between the subject and the object, were lost.
And the other senses, in the same way, were both the source of noble pleasure
and the stepping-stone towards a nobler, "fleshly ear" as well as "bodily eye."
All things to him at this time threw back his own delight to him, and he felt
the community of joy in all things. In 1798 he wrote of this experience that
"in all things/ He saw one life and felt that it was joy": 13 this was eventually
changed (though not until some time after 1839) to express a more Christian
interpretation of the experience, clearly differentiating between the life of
the created and the uncreated. However, the experience of moving beyond the
senses is communicated in the same way in all versions, so that the final version
reads:

Wonder not
If high the transport, great the joy I felt,
Communing in this sort through earth and heven
With every form of creature, as it looked
Towards the Uncreated with a countenance
Of adoration, with an eye of love.
One song they sang, and it was audible
Most audible, then, when the fleshly ear,
O'ercome by humblest prelude of that strain,
Forgot her functions, and slept undisturbed.
(II, 409-18)

Up to 1797, the development of Wordsworth's eye and mind unfolded
naturally, fostered by an unhampered interaction between himself and the
natural world. It is apparent from the tone in which he writes of Coleridge's
less fortunate schooldays in London (Prelude VI, 297-305) that he believed that
this was the most favourable soil for growth. But inevitably this interaction was
eventually broken: the seventeen-year-old Wordsworth left his mountains and
lakes for the social and scholastic world of the Cambridge undergraduate. This
change made no immediate difference to his essential intellectual growth, and
indeed his separation from the sights which he loved at first merely made him
more conscious of the fundamental independence of his mind, and its ability to
exercise its powers even among the "level fields" (III, 93)
let me dare to speak
A higher language, say that now I felt
What independent solaces were mine,
To mitigate the injurious sway of place
Or circumstance, how far soever changed
In youth, or to be changed in manhood’s prime.

(III, 99-104)

His eye and mind, and the intensity of his own feelings, are shown in this
passage originally written in 1798, working together to fill him with belief
in the feeling and consciousness of all things, a belief which in various forms
threads through much of his poetry up to about 1800:

... I was mounting now
To such community with highest truth
A track pursuing, not untrod before,
From strict analogies by thought supplied
Or consciousneses not to be subdued,
To every natural form, rock, fruit or flower,
Even the loose stones that cover the high-way,
I gave a moral life: I saw them feel,
Or linked them to some feeling.

(III, 125-33)

Just as the eye is acknowledged as the anchor of reason in the turbulence of
adolescent fantasy, so it is the guarantee of sanity throughout intense motions
of the imagination. The eye here again works with the mind, and with
external nature in the conscious seeking of natural distinctions and of what is
particular and special. Wordsworth writes:

It was no madness, for the bodily eye
Amid my strongest workings evermore
Was searching out the lines of difference
As they lie hid in all external forms,
Near or remote, minute or vast, an eye
Which from a tree, a stone, a withered leaf,
To the broad ocean and the azure heavens
Spangled with kindred multitudes of stars,
iv. The Eye as Despot

However, the distractions of university life did quite soon take effect on the young Wordsworth, so that these "quiet and exalted thoughts/Of loneliness gave way to empty noise/And superficial pastimes" (III, 210-12). Yet it was a time of "submissive idleness" (632) rather than one of real mental disturbance. It was after all during these years as an undergraduate that Wordsworth made his impressive and important walking tour of France and the Alps, and at that time he could write with naive sincerity to his sister: "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 increasing 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" (EL, p.35: 6 and 16 September, 1790). *An Evening Walk*, which he wrote during the Cambridge period, and completed the year before he went to the Alps, shows the clear traces of this enthusiasm, despite the extremely literary quality of its diction and sentiment. At the age of seventy-three, Wordsworth noted that every image in the poem had been based on his own close observation, and indeed remembered the time and place where most of them were observed. Geoffrey Hartman (p.92) writes of the strong emphasis on the visual
in this poem: "An incredible visual appetite is at play: the poet relies mainly on
sight . . . or on a strong reduction of the visual to alternations of high and low,
stasis and motion, and, above all, light and shade."

Now it seems likely that the very keenness of the eye, valuable though it was
to him, was beginning to overreach itself, and that his "incredible visual appetite"
was a contributing cause of that diseased attitude to life which afflicted him a
few years later. From 1791-1792, Wordsworth was working on Descriptive Sketches
and according to Hartman's extremely interesting discussion of this poem, it
shows both the sickness and its intrinsic cure: he writes that in this poem "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 intuitions of 'powers
and presences' yet nature itself seems opposed to this process, and leads the
eye relentlessly from scene to scene. Through this restless movement the poet
always nears yet avoids total imaginative commitment" (pp.107-08). Hartman
sees the period of crisis over the eye thus:

In waking to his own power he passes through a curious moment of blindness
to it, which forces him to go out (i.e. to nature) rather than in. Wordsworth
later interprets this error as providential, but Descriptive Sketches no more
than records it. A result of this inner blindness is, of course, too much
sight: the eyes defeat themselves by looking everywhere, 'Still craving
combinations of new forms,/ New pleasure, wider empire for the sight.'
And by thus putting the eye against itself, nature helps the poet eventually
to confront his own 'separate fantasy', the autonomous power in his mind
that makes him a poet, though deeply, perhaps inextricably involved with
an idea of nature . . . if we respect the style of *Descriptive Sketches*,
especially verse-form and syntax, we see how faithfully the poet records a
defeat of the eye which eventually leads him through nature beyond it.

(p. 110)

While *Descriptive Sketches* may reflect this crisis in its style, it is
consciously recorded in two works, those books of *The Prelude* concerned with
"Imagination and Taste, how Impaired and Restored," and "Tintern Abbey,"
though in the latter, the nature of the crisis is the subject of allusion rather than
discussion. It is impossible to date the period of crisis precisely, as the evidence
is contradictory, no doubt because sickness and cure worked together at the same
time. Yet it is clear that the worst time was after Wordsworth's involvement
with the French Revolution, and the shocks he had undergone through Britain's
declaration of war against revolutionary France in 1793, and through the decline
of the revolutionary regime into oppression and aggression. The degree of
Wordsworth's political involvement at this period is shown by his vehement but
unpublished Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff, who had written in illiberal
opposition of the French Revolution. In the obstinacy arising from the general
opposition to his ideas:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{did opinions every day} \\
\text{Grow into consequence, till round my mind} \\
\text{They clung, as if they were its life, nay more} \\
\text{The very being of the immortal soul. }
\end{align*}
\]

(XI, 219-22)

This drove him to such distraction that eventually he "yielded up moral questions
in despair" (XI, 305), and tried to console himself with the fixed and measureable in scientific studies (mathematics, according to the 1805 version X, 904). In this state, his relationship with the external universe was also tainted, for his new habits of political and logical analysis undermined his sense of mystery and sympathy:

What wonder, then, if to a mind so far Perverted, even the visible Universe Fell under the domination of a taste Less spiritual, with microscopic view Was scanned, as I had scanned the moral world. (XII, 88-92)

From what has been said of the extraordinary appetite and vigour of the eye in the years immediately before the crisis, it seems likely that it was basically as much a visual as a moral crisis, and that the causes lay as much in his old relationship with the natural universe, as in his new relationship with man and society.

The effect of this change in the focussing of the eye, this willed scrutiny of natural objects, was to make his pleasure in nature less spontaneous; to some extent he was infected by the modish appreciation of landscape of the kind that was to enable Catherine Morland a few years later to dismiss the whole city of Bath as unworthy of inclusion in the composition of a landscape:

even in pleasure pleased Unworthily, disliking here, and there Liking; by rules of mimic art transferred To things above all art. (XII, 109-12)
But he was more inclined by temperament:

To a comparison of scene with scene,
Bent overmuch on superficial things,
Pampering myself with meagre novelties
Of colour and proportion; to the moods
Of time and season, to the moral power,
The affections and the spirit of the place,
Insensible.

(XII, 115-21)

Thus, while he had not lost contact with the natural world, nor pleasure in it,
his eye and his mind were working separately and thus in isolation from
complete experience, so that his pleasure in nature tended to become merely
the sensuous pleasure of passivity:

Vivid the transport, vivid though not profound.
I roamed from hill to hill, from rock to rock,
Still craving combinations of new forms,
New pleasures, wider empire for the sight
Proud of her own endowments, and rejoiced
To lay the inner faculties asleep.

(XII, 142-47)

This is very much like the state of mind described in "Tintern Abbey," when
Wordsworth writes of his first visit to the Wye Valley in 1793, when he was
rushing after the beauties of the scene:

more like a man
Flying from something that he dreads than one
Who sought the thing he loved.

(70-72)

Mary Moorman (I, 232) usefully reminds us that "it was nearly two years since
he had been alone with the English landscape. Coming in the midst of a
period of conflict and doubt about the validity of his own experience, this
tour brought him back once more to solitude and to all that had formerly given
him his deepest delight." This was the time when "nature to me was all in all," when

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; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye.

(76-83)

The essential relationship of eye to mind is the same as in The Prelude: the eye has usurped the dominant role in vision, and its pleasures at this period are not deepened by thought or by the "inner faculties." The tone however is different: there is a great difference between "pampering myself with meagre novelties/ Of colour and proportion" and "the tall rock,/ The mountain and the deep and gloomy wood,/ Their colours and their forms." The Prelude conveys an unrelieved distaste for the poet's mental condition at this period, while the attitude shown in "Tintern Abbey" is more ambivalent. The states of mind described in the two poems are similar but not identical. In "Tintern Abbey" Wordsworth writes that Dorothy Wordsworth is now strong in delights which he has lost in the intervening five years: "In thy voice I catch/ The language of my former heart, and read/ My former pleasures in the shooting lights/ Of thy wild eyes." (116-119) Now Dorothy Wordsworth had not undergone the kind of mental crisis which is described in The Prelude; it just so happened that she was at that stage of development, and Wordsworth recognized that it would be a transitory phase for her as it had been for him, and spoke of the days "when these
ecstasies shall be matured/ Into a sober pleasure" for her as they were for him. Thus in "Tintern Abbey" this state of mind is not thought of as a crisis induced by a particular combination of circumstances and mental attitudes, as it is in The Prelude, but as a normal stage of development. Moreover, the crisis in The Prelude is seen as a barren time, when the eye's activity was sterile, while in "Tintern Abbey," the very existence of the poem is based on the fertility of his experience when first he saw the Wye: from this has come the "tranquil restoration" of "sensations sweet" in "hours of weariness," feelings which have made him more kindly and loving; these experiences may even have contributed to

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 affections gently lead us on,—
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion 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.

(37-49)

Apparently, while in 1798 Wordsworth could look on this past period of disturbance with some regret, believing in the partial benevolence of the feverish activity of the eye, by the time he came to write his account of the period in The Prelude, he separated more rigidly the symptoms of health and of disease in his mental condition, and looked on the purely sensuous activity of the eye with less tolerance.
In both these poems, the worst of this experience is seen to lie in the dominance of the eye, which seemed to Wordsworth to be almost an innate fault in the composition of the human psyche:

A twofold frame of body and of mind.  
I speak in recollection of a time  
When the bodily eye, in every stage of life  
The most despotic of our senses, gained  
Such strength in me, as often held my mind  
In absolute dominion.  

(Prelude, XII, 126-31)

Through Wordsworth's works there runs this vein of mistrust of the eye as a potential despot, concurrent with the sense of gratitude for the gifts brought through the eye. The Immortality Ode, as we have seen, shows an intense concern with these two paradoxically interrelated attitudes, with the love it expresses for "fountains, meadows, hills and groves," and its thankfulness for "those obstinate questionings/ Of sense and outward things." What is written of the eye may be extended to all the senses, for they can all be the means of enslavement; yet certainly for Wordsworth the eye was the most dangerous and the most assertive, no doubt because it was so strong in him. He wrote of sight that "As we grow up, such thraldom of that sense/ Seems hard to shun" (XII, 150-51). The eye is a fine servant but a humiliating master; the mind needs the enrichment given by the senses, but even more than this it needs its own intellectual world: In "Personal Talk," Wordsworth writes:

Children are blest, and powerful; their world lies  
More justly balanced, partly at their feet,  
And part far from them:- Sweetest melodies  
Are those that are by distance made more sweet;  
Whose mind is but the mind of his own eyes,  
He is a Slave; the meanest we can meet!  

(23-28)
The eye is looked upon as a possible source of confusion and misunderstanding, as is indicated in a rather obscure passage from The Excursion:

Look forth, or each man dive into himself;  
What sees he but a creature too perturbed;  
That is transported to excess; that yearns,  
Regrets, or trembles, wrongly, or too much;  
Hopes rashly, in disgust as rash recoils;  
Battens on spleen, or moulders in despair?  
Thus comprehension fails, and truth is missed;  
Thus darkness and delusion round our path  
Spread, from disease, whose subtle injury lurks  
Within the very faculty of sight.  

(V, 505-14)

All in all, as Geoffrey Hartman says, "Wordsworth's later thought is constantly busy with the fact that the eye is or should be subdued" (p.114). In fact, the disturbance of this period which Wordsworth deplores, is largely caused by a loss of the "questionings of sense" ascribed to childhood in the Immortality Ode. It is a time of unquestioning, passive dependence on the senses, and especially the eye. Wordsworth shares this mistrust of the eye with Coleridge: both describe the eye as despotic. Coleridge, indeed, was less likely by nature to experience intensely the despotism of the eye, for on the whole his poetry shows a less close and passionate activity of the eye than does Wordsworth's; he is more likely to fly away into the world of his own intellect. Indeed, he wrote to Thomas Poole: "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 . . ." (CL, 1, 354: 16 October, 1797). And because of this temperamental difference, while the young Wordsworth experienced himself how the despotic eye prevents the proper functioning of the imagination, Coleridge had a strong intellectual
awareness of the way in which our human dependence on sight confuses our ideas. He writes in *Biographia Literaria*, VI: "Under that despotism of the eye . . . under this strong sensuous influence we are restless because invisible things are not the objects of vision; and metaphysical systems, for the most part, become popular not for their truth but in proportion as they attribute to causes a susceptibility of being seen, if only our visual organs were sufficiently powerful" (I, 74). The same concern over the distortion of truth through the strength of the common human over-dependence on the eye is also shown in the much later *Treatise on Logic*: "To emancipate the mind from the despotism of the eye is the first step towards its emancipation from the influences and intrusions of the senses, sensations and passions generally."  

Incidentally, in this as in so many other respects Coleridge was at variance with Locke, who believed that the perception of the mind was most aptly explained by words relating to the sight.

This strong distrust of sense is in part an orthodox Christian phenomenon although to the Christian the emphasis is different, for the senses are distrusted rather because they lead to the indulgence of passions than because they mislead the mind in its search for truth, or because they lead to the alienation of man from both the natural and the human world. In their distrust of sense, Wordsworth and Coleridge show a closer connection with the Neoplatonic school which commonly insists that all real truth and beauty are intellectual, and therefore depreciates the bodily senses. Thomas Taylor, for instance, exhorts his readers thus: "Let us build for ourselves the raft of virtue, and departing
from this region of sense, like Ulysses from the charms of Calypso, direct our
course by the light of ideas, those bright intellectual stars, through the dark
ocean of a material nature, until we arrive at our father's land" (note to
Taylor's trans. of The Hymns of Orpheus, London, 1787; in Raine and
Harper, pp.292-93). It is understood that true insight will never come through
the senses, but will involve overcoming them: "when she [the soul] advances
into the more interior recesses of herself, and as it were into the sanctuary of
the soul, she will be enabled to contemplate, with her eyes closed to corporeal
vision, the genus of the gods, and the unities of beings."17 Throughout the
Enneads, Plotinus insists on the low place of the senses in true perception: "it
is now time, leaving every object of sense far behind, to contemplate, by a
certain ascent, a beauty of a much higher order: a beauty not visible to the
corporeal eye, but alone manifest to the brighter eye of the soul, independent of
all corporeal aid."18

Among the English Neoplatonic writers, Shaftesbury too, despite his
enthusiastic love of natural beauty, looked on the senses as inadequate: "how,"
he asked, "can the rational Mind rest here, or be satisfy'd with the absurd
Enjoyment which reaches the Sense alone."19 Cudworth equally recognized
and deplored the dangers of a "fond and sottish dotage upon corporeal sense,"
which divides its subjects from God because "the chief of his essence, and, as
it were his inside, must by these be acknowledged to consist in mind, wisdom;
and understanding, he could not possibly as to this, fall under corporeal sense
(sight or touch) any more than tought can."20 This underlying belief of the
Neoplatonists in the inessential and even intrusive quality of sense experience in true experience is thus paralleled in Coleridge's belief that sense and particularly sight interfere with the apprehension of intellectual truth and Wordsworth's belief that sight can interfere with the mind's apprehension of natural beauty and human sympathy. Yet again I would suggest that these three parallel lines are in fact indicative of the transmission of ideas: that the Neoplatonic view of the senses certainly transmitted to Coleridge was thus transmitted to Wordsworth. Because Wordsworth himself had experienced these difficulties in the relation of sense to truth, he was naturally sensitive to such ideas, and both willing to use them and unable to use them without adaptation to his own particular understanding, arrived at through personal experience.

Wordsworth's suffering through the despotism of the eye was not long-lasting. Besides the influence of his sister, with whom he was able to live from 1795 onwards, and Coleridge, his friend from 1796 on, and the legacy from Raisley Calvert in 1795, which relieved him from anxiety about money, the enrichment which his mind had already undergone in contact with the forms of nature aided his eye's recovery. When he was left in unbroken contact with his "native hills"

I felt, observed, and pondered; did not judge,
Yea, never thought of judging, with the gift
Of all this glory filled and satisfied.
(XII, 188-90)

When he visited the Alps, his feelings were still the same, and fortified as he was in this way, the disease of judging soon left him:
In truth, the degradation—howso'er
Induced, effect, in whatso'er degree,
Of custom that prepares a partial scale
In which the little oft outweighs the great;
Or any other cause that hath been named;
Or lastly, aggravated by the times
And their impassioned sounds, which well might make
The milder minstrelsies of rural scenes
Inaudible—was transient; I had known
Too forcibly, too early in my life,
Visitings of imaginative power
For this to last; I shook the habit off
Entirely and for ever, and again
In Nature's presence stood, as now I stand,
A sensitive being, a creative soul.

(XII, 193-207)

The poet eventually benefited from this period of feverish seeking out delights for the passive eye, for he became conscious of the necessity for calming the eye and of understanding it as part of the whole intellect.

In "Tintern Abbey" the seeking eye is made tranquil by the profound experience of both the inner and outer worlds, that is, by the "deep power of joy" and the "power of Harmony," and it is through this quiet eye that true insight is reached:

that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,—
Until ... 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.

(41-49)

Similarly in "A Poet's Epitaph" the combination of inward and outward experience leads to a quiet eye, and genuine understanding:
The outward shows of sky and earth,
Of hill and valley, he has viewed;
And impulses of deeper birth
Have come to him in solitude.

In common things that round us lie
Some random truths he can impart,--
The harvest of a quiet eye
That broods and sleeps on his own heart.

(45-52)

The Prelude too suggests, though rather confusingly, a changed and enlarged consciousness growing out of this experience of a crisis of vision. It seems to be after suffering this crisis that he comes to an understanding, to a knowledge born from experience, that the highest perception can be best understood as the contact between two vitalities, of interaction between internal and external.

The very passivity of the eye during his period of mental distress brings about a new consciousness that the mind must be active in its dealings with external nature, not only in those moments when the senses are laid asleep and the whole world becomes a projection of the mind, but throughout experience. All the implications of the structure and ordering of Book XII of The Prelude of 1850 suggest that the disturbance of the mind in the feverish search for new pleasures for the eye grows from the passivity of the mind in the activity of the sense.

Wordsworth's description of his sickness and his recovery, when once more he stands in Nature's presence as "a creative soul" is followed by the very carefully structured discussion of the "spots of time," which fills the rest of the book (207-335); and these spots of time are totally relevant to the diseased eye for in them lies its cure. For those suffering as the young Wordsworth suffered:
By false opinion and contentious thought,  
Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight,  
In trivial occupations, and the round  
Of ordinary intercourse.  

(211-14)

there is regeneration in the understanding welling from

those passages of life which give
Profoundest knowledge to what point, and how,
The mind is lord and master--outward sense
The obedient servant of her will.

(220-23)

Between his accounts of two such scattered moments, Wordsworth writes of
the understanding arising from these memories

Oh! mystery of man, from what a depth  
Proceed thy honours. I am lost, but see  
In simple childhood something of the base  
On which thy greatness stands; but this I feel,  
That from thyself it comes, that thou must give,  
Else never canst receive.

(272-77)

And at the conclusion of his two books on the impairing and restoration of
imagination and taste, it is clear that he sees his restoration to mental health
as bringing him into a stage of loving interaction between an active mind and
an active universe. (The question of reciprocity is discussed more closely in
relation to its philosophic background in chapter four). Of his life immediately
after his recovery, which he associates with the period when he was working
on "Guilt and Sorrow," he writes:

in life's everyday appearances  
I seemed about this time to gain clear sight  
Of a new world--a world, too, that was fit  
To be transmitted, and to other eyes  
Made visible; assruled by those fixed laws  
Whence spiritual dignity originates,  
Which do both give it being and maintain
A balance, an ennobling interchange
Of action from without and from within;
The excellence, pure function, and best power,
Both of the object seen, and eye that sees.
(XIII, 368-78)

v. The Sense of Loss

Despite this restoration to healthy sight and a proper relationship with
the external world, at the beginning of his career as a serious and a
committed poet, there is in several of the most important writings of the
"great decade" which followed, and occasionally in works of the later years,
a sense of loss, a loss which is particularly connected with the eye. The
sense of loss is not really present in The Prelude, which is overtly concerned
with the years up to about 1797, although much of it was written at the time
when he was most acutely aware of change and loss; and it is communicated in
different ways as a different loss; in 1798 in "Tintern Abbey," in 1802-4 in
the Immortality Ode, and in 1806 in "Peele Castle." Curiously enough, the
first suggestion that this is to be a pattern in Wordsworth's understanding of his
own experience and his consequent generalizing about human experience, comes
in An Evening Walk, which he wrote as a boy, from the ages of seventeen to
nineteen, looking back with nostalgia to his youth:

Fair scenes! with other eyes, than once, I gaze,
The ever-varying charm your round displays,
Than when, erewhile, I taught, 'a happy child,'
The echoes of your rocks my carols wild:
Then did no ebb of cheerfulness demand
Sad tides of joy from Melancholy's hand.
In youth's wild eye the livelong day was bright
The sun at morning and the stars at night. 22
(16-24)
This sounds very much like the prescribed blending of melancholy and nostalgia of the eighteenth-century descriptive poem of which in some ways An Evening Walk is so typical a specimen. Yet this poem presents under a disguising veil of conventional poetic diction, many themes and images which were to be richly developed in the later poems, and here it also reflects a genuine sense of glory in the past. This could not be developed properly in this poem, for Wordsworth at this stage necessarily lacked the required experience, both poetic and human, but it seems very probable that although the sense of loss communicated in "Tintern Abbey," the Immortality Ode, and "Peele Castle" refers to a genuinely newly-felt bereavement, the sense of loss was a constantly recurring experience throughout Wordsworth's articulate life, which was expressed in different forms at intervals when particular occasions had aroused the poet, and enabled him to formalize and organize this general awareness into a pattern and an explanation. Thus it is in a way misleading to discuss this sense of loss here, as if it were connected with one particular period of Wordsworth's life. Throughout his poetic life he was aware of the vigour and spontaneity of youth, and equally he was aware throughout his poetic life that youth in this sense was in the past: "For youth has its own wealth and independence; it is rich in health of body and animal spirits, in its sensibility to the impressions of the natural universe, in the conscious growth of knowledge, in lively sympathy and familiar communion with the generous actions recorded in history, and with the high passions of poetry; and above all, youth is rich in the possession of time, and the accompanying consciousness of freedom and
power" (Grosart 1, 315: Answer to the Letter of Mathetes). In The
Excursion too, this sense of the past powers of youth is expressed: the
Wanderer says "What visionary powers of eye and soul/ In youth were mine"
(IV, 111-12).

"Tintern Abbey" is the first of the great poems of loss, though loss is not
its central theme, but merely one aspect of the theme of man's relationship
with nature. As we have seen, Wordsworth writes of his feverish state as
a young man in 1793 in search of beauty, and although there is some recognition
that this was a period of disturbance and over-excitement, it is regretted as a
period of joy and rapture, though these are qualified:

That time is past
And all its aching joys are now no more,
And all its dizzy raptures.

(83-85)

The later gifts are looked on as "abundant recompense" for this loss: and these,
the gifts of maturity and the fruit of suffering, are the ability to look on
nature in the awareness of the "still sad music of humanity," and then a higher
experience of nature which unites man with her in his sense of their one life:

A sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused . . .

(95-96)

Because of this new insight, despite the loss of joy, the mature poet still
loves "the mighty world/ Of eye and ear,—both what they half create/ And
what perceive; well pleased to recognize/ In nature and the language of the
sense/ The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,/ The guide, the guardian
of my heart, and soul/ Of all my moral being" (105-111). So that his love
for nature has now become more intense and more dedicated: he returns to
the Wye Valley "with far deeper zeal/ Of holier love."

Herbert Lindenberger believes that in each of the three major philosophical
poems of the great decade, that is, Tintern Abbey, the Immortality Ode, and
The Prelude, there is a transition from "pathos" to "ethos," that is, from a
delight in sensation to a dependence on moral values. Certainly in
"Tintern Abbey" there is a movement from the ecstatic seeking of the pleasures
of nature to a more sober and serious love of nature for the understanding which
it brings. And the Immortality Ode shows a similar development, though the
loss here is different; it is not the aching joy and the dizzy raptures of the most
disturbed period of youth which is lost, but the child's vision of glory in the
natural world and beyond it. The sense of this more painful loss is expressed
more certainly and strongly:

What though the radiance which was once so bright
Be now forever taken from my sight
Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower.
(176-79)

And the compensation for this loss does not lie entirely in the new growth of
maturity but also in the memories of the child's vision of an independence of
the senses which can bring

truths that wake
To perish never;
Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,
Nor Man nor Boy,
Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
Can utterly abolish or destroy.
(156-61)
Yet maturity has its own peculiar rewards although they are not spontaneously and heedlessly joyful, but grave and sober, the appropriate rewards of suffering and contemplation:

We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind;
In the primal sympathy
Which having been must ever be;
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering;
In the faith that looks through death
In years that bring the philosophic mind.

(180-87)

The eye which is chastened still enriches the objects it beholds, though with a darker shade:

The Clouds that gather round the setting sun
Do take a sober colouring from an eye
That hath kept watch o'er mankind.

(197-99)

There is, however, certainly a deeper sense of loss in the Immortality Ode and a stronger sense of the dreariness of the preoccupations and anxieties of adult life, "our noisy years"

Full soon thy Soul shall have her earthly freight,
And custom lie upon thee with a weight,
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!

(127-29)

The pattern shifts again in the "Elegiac Stanzas" ("Peele Castle").

The loss is shown, but it is no longer regretted in the same way; the commonplace obscuring and distracting anxieties of adult life are not mentioned, while the anguish of human experience is positively welcomed as uniting the artist with his fellow men. In strong contrast with the Immortality Ode, where the good
dwell in and springs from childhood, maturity represents the good in this poem, which surely Jonathan Wordsworth must have overlooked in asserting that "as Wordsworth became obsessed by declining poetic powers, he tended to place more and more emphasis on childhood as the source of inspiration and less and less on the value of wisdom gained by experience" (Music of Humanity, p. 217). "Peele Castle" is concerned with the changing nature of his poetic powers, and it values most highly the wisdom which is gained by experience. To the young Wordsworth, the proper business of art was to create a world of eternal beauty; the older poet has learnt through suffering that he is man as well as poet, and that art is concerned with the transient and painful, as well as the eternal and beautiful. The shock of the contrast between Beaumont's painting of the storm, with its ship in distress in the foreground, reminding the poet of his brother, drowned in a shipwreck, and his own memory of the unbroken calm of the scene which he had witnessed in 1794, makes him consider his own earlier vision to be false. "A power has gone," and from the context it could be either the power of unthinking joy in art or in life or maybe both. The qualities which he welcomes, "fortitude and patient cheer," are not, as in "Tintern Abbey" and the Immortality Ode qualities most conducive to the writing of poetry, though here, as there, we find a greater sympathy with human troubles. He resigns himself to perpetual suffering from his brother's death:

The feeling of my loss will ne'er be old;
This, which I know, I speak with mind serene.

(39-40)
The eye in this poem is no longer the source of delight which it has once been, nor the indirect means of moral awakening which it is by implication in much of the poetry of about 1800. It is an eye experienced in painful and ugly sights, and capable of beholding such sights and drawing from them both strength and the poetry of experience, the kind of poetry of which these "Elegiac Stanzas" are themselves a fine example.

vi. Experience imagined and realised.

During the years when he was apparently most aware of the sense of loss, Wordsworth expressed further doubts of the validity of the visual experience. The physical eye needs to be fed with noble images, for the sake of the heart, but it can be overfed; Wordsworth felt that it is desirable that something should be left to the mind's eye. Some spectacles, long contemplated by the imagination because of their fame, whether owing to their beauty, or to story or history, can be experienced more vitally by the imagination than by the bodily eye. Such a spectacle is Mont Blanc:

From a bare ridge we also first beheld Unveiled the summit of Mont Blanc, and grieved To have a soulless image on the eye That had usurped upon a living thought That never more could be.  

(Prelude, VI, 524–28)

The Yarrow poems record similar feelings: the Yarrow was originally unvisited in 1803 because:
We have a vision of our own;
Ah! why should we undo it?
The treasured dreams of time long past
We'll keep them, winsome Marrow!
For when we're there, although 'tis fair,
'Twill be another Yarrow.

Yet in this case eventually the imagined experience is able to enhance the actual experience, so that despite sadness at the disappearance of a dream, the combined experience is profitable:

I see—but not by sight alone,
Loved Yarrow, have I won thee;
A ray of fancy still survives—
Her sunshine plays upon thee!
Thy ever youthful waters keep
A course of lively pleasure;
And gladsome notes my lips can breathe,
Accordant to the measure.

As an old man Wordsworth discussed this question in a note to the sonnet "At Rome" ("Is this, ye Gods, the Capitolian Hill") which records a similar kind of experience: "Sight is at first a sad enemy to imagination and to those pleasures belonging to old times with which some exertions of that power will always mingle . . . Ability to recover from this disappointment will exist in proportion to knowledge, and the power of the mind to reconstruct out of fragments and parts, and to make details in the present subservient to more adequate comprehension of the past (I.F. Note: PW, III, 494).

vii. The Inward Eye

The eye of the imagination, the inward eye, is a vitally important aspect
of Wordsworth's attitude to the eye, for, as has been shown, the bodily eye can be understood either as stifling the inward eye or as giving it life. The "inward eye" and various similar phrases are frequently used, with a fundamental similarity, but nevertheless with differences, so that the meaning is somewhat elastic. The basic meaning is "the eye that sees what is not present to the bodily senses." The inward eye can see through a powerfully retained memory: this is how the phrase is used in "To a Painter," when the poet says that the painter could only portray Mary Wordsworth to her husband's satisfaction.

Couldst thou go back into far-distant-years,
Or share with me, fond thought! that inward eye.

"That inward eye" is so strong in Wordsworth that it has overcome the bodily eye, and he cannot recognize that Mary has become faded. Possibly his use of this phrase here is intended as a tribute to his wife, whom he said had given him the two famous lines in which it occurs in "I wandered lonely as a cloud":

They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude.

Here too the inward eye is an organ dependent on memory, but the memory has a curious energy of its own. The poet is not shown as arousing the inward eye through his own mental activity; on the contrary, he is "in vacant or in pensive mood," when the daffodils "flash" upon his inward eye. They have retained the vital joyful energy which they had when first seen "fluttering and dancing," "tossing their heads in sprightly dance," outdoing "the sparkling waves in glee." Indeed, this is a poem of doubled experience; the unfocussed lonely wandering of the first stanza is the "vacant or pensive mood" of the last stanza; the image
of the daffodils breaks into this state with the same suddenness and energy each time. The poet's own energy and power of memory have opened the inward eye forever to that experience.  

The inner eye is the organ of the imagination, in the common sense of that word, in Book V of The Prelude, where Wordsworth who is writing about the value of works of romance to the child's mind, describes his own experience as a small boy when he saw the body of a drowned man hauled out of the lake, and was able to see actual experience with the transforming power of imagined experience:

no soul-debasing fear,
Young as I was, a child not nine years old,
Possessed me, for my inner eye had seen
Such sights before, among the shining streams
Of faeryland, the forest of romance
Their spirit hallowed the sad spectacle
With decoration of ideal grace;
A dignity, a smoothness, like the works
Of Grecian art and purest poesy.
(451-59)

It is not only the imaginary and the past worlds on which the inward eye looks, but also the intellectual, the world of existences which we know or believe to be real, but cannot experience through the physical senses. Here the bodily eye and the inward eye work together (as indeed they must also do in different ways when the inward eye looks at a memory given by the outer eye, or the outer eye looks at a scene imagined by the inward eye). The intellectual eye is seen taking over from the educated bodily eye in the following passage, from manuscript additions to An Evening Walk, which shows Wordsworth's deep respect for both faculties:
those favoured souls who, taught
By active Fancy or by patient Thought,
See common forms prolong the endless chain
Of joy and grief, of pleasure and of pain;
But chiefly those to whom the harmonious doors
Of Science have unbarred celestial stores,
To whom a burning energy has given
That other eye which darts thro' earth and heaven,
Roams through all space and ( ) unconfined,
Explores the illimitable tracts of mind,
And piercing the profound of time can see
Whatever man has been and man can be,
From him the local tenant of the shade
To man by all the elements obeyed.
With them the sense no trivial object knows,
Oft at its meanest touch their spirit glows,
And proud beyond all limits to aspire
Mounts through the fields of thought on wings of fire.

(PW, I, 12-13)

When Wordsworth writes of the "intellectual eye" in his description of his own restoration, he is referring not to the "inward eye" precisely, but to the physical eye as it is informed by the intellect, and as it acts in cooperation with it. This seems likely because of the context, for Wordsworth describes his new sense of Nature's power in the lines immediately preceding these. The eye and the intellect, which had passed through a period of barren and unhappy separation, are reunited, so that the eye's experience is no longer pure sensation, nor the intellect's pure theory, but either faculty reinvigorates the other. Wordsworth writes that after his period of darkness

'Twas proved that not in vain
I had been taught to reverence a Power
That is the visible quality and shape
And image of right reason.

This power is Nature, which gives to fevered man "a temperate show of objects that endure." More particularly he remembers his early lessons, teaching him:
To look with feelings of fraternal love
Upon the unassuming things that hold
A silent station in this beauteous world.

It is by this means "thus moderated, thus composed" that he is able to feel that

I found
Once more in Man an object of delight,
Of pure imagination, and of love;
And, as the horizon of my mind enlarged,
Again I took the intellectual eye
For my instructor, studious more to see
Great truths, than touch and handle little ones.

(Prelude, XIII, 1-63)

It is important to understand the true relationship between the "inward eye"
and the bodily eye, and to recognize that the latter for Wordsworth though
acknowledged as a potential despot, was also honoured as a source of intellectual
well being. I disagree with Melvin Rader, who, when rightly pointing out
Wordsworth's similarity to Shaftesbury over the concept of "the inward eye,"
states that "Re [Wordsworth] uses such phrases as 'my inward eye,' 'the eye of
love,' 'an: eye which spake perpetual logic to my soul,' 'a quiet eye That
broods and sleeps on his own heart'; and he contrasts this spiritual faculty with
the 'bodily eye', 'outward sense', and the 'fleshly ear'" (p.54). There is no
real contrast here, for except for the "inward eye," the other phrases all refer
to the bodily eye which Wordsworth knew to be a means of enlargement and
enrichment of intellectual experience. It is quite wrong to assume that whenever
the eye is spoken of in connection with the heart, soul or mind, it must be
understood to mean the inward eye, for one of the insistent themes of Wordsworth's
poetry is that the eye can give sustenance to the intellectual capacities of man.
The similarity in this matter of the inward eye with Shaftesbury, whose work Wordsworth knew and respected (see chapter one) is real enough; but it is a similarity which also exists between Wordsworth and other Neoplatonic thinkers, for Shaftesbury in his treatment of this matter is at his most Neoplatonic. His "inward eye" and that of the Neoplatonists is less closely related to the physical eye than is Wordsworth's, for while Wordsworth's beholds visions remembered or fancied, Shaftesbury's views a more abstract moral or intellectual beauty: "No sooner the Eye opens upon Figures, the Ear to Sounds, then straight the Beautiful results and Grace and Harmony are known and acknowledg'd. No sooner are ACTIONS view'd, no sooner the Human Affections and Passions discern'd . . . than straight an inward EYE distinguishes and sees the Fair and Shapely, the Amiable and Admirable apart from the Deform'd, the Foul, the Odious or the Despicable." (Characteristicks II, 14: The Moralists, Part 31, Sect. 2). At his most Neoplatonic, Shaftesbury, deeply though he loved natural beauty, asserts all beauty to be intellectual: "it should appear from our strict Search that there is nothing so divine as BEAUTY: Which belonging not to Body, nor having any Principle or Existence, except in MIND and REASON, is alone discover'd and acquir'd by this diviner part when it inspects itself, the only Object worthy of itself. For Whate'er is void of Mind, is Void and Darkness to the Mind's EYE. This languishes and grows dim, whene'er detach'd on foreign subjects; but thrives and attains its natural vigour when employed in the contemplation of what is like itself" (Characteristicks, II, 426: The Moralists, part 3, sect. 2). This has strong echoes of Plotinus, who also saw beautiful deeds
as the proper object of the inward eye: "... having now closed the corporeal eye, we must stir up and assume a purer eye within, which all men possess, but which is alone used by a few. What is it then this inward eye beholds? Indeed, suddenly raised to intellectual vision, it cannot perceive an object exceeding bright. The soul must therefore be first accustomed to contemplate fair studies, and then beautiful works; not such as arise from the operations of art, but such as are the offspring of worthy men: and next to this, it is necessary to view the soul which is the parent of this lovely race." Thomas Taylor, in a note to his translation of Plotinus, comments on this passage that "this inward eye is no other than intellect, which contains in its most inward recesses, a certain ray of light, participated from the sun of Beauty and Good, by which the soul is enabled to behold and become united with her divinely solitary origin" (Raine and Harper, p. 157). Elsewhere in this same sixth tractate of the first Ennead, so much beloved by the young Coleridge, Plotinus refers in a similar sense to "the intellectual eye" (p. 158), a phrase which Wordsworth uses, as has been noted, and the "brighter eye of the soul" (p. 149). I believe that Wordsworth is likely to have picked up this Neoplatonic notion and adapted it to suit his own experience. This should be remembered when the relationship between patterns of thought in the works of Wordsworth and in those of the Neoplatonists is considered more closely in chapter four.

This chapter has attempted to show the development of Wordsworth's ideas about the eye, and how these arise from his own visual experience. It may be noted that in several ways Wordsworth's mode of expressing his own visual
experience seems to have a decidedly Neoplatonic ring to it. The sense that it is "God, who is our home" echoes Christian Neoplatonism; the communication of the most intense moments of perception as a union of intellect and object is also much like that expressed by the Neoplatonists. Wordsworth's crisis in his early years can be seen partly in Neoplatonic terms, for this made him conscious, as they are, of the evil in a reliance on sense which ignores and suffocates the intellect. The "inward eye," too, is a Neoplatonic notion. However, this strain must not be overemphasized. All these ideas were very much Wordsworth's own, the product of his personal experience. And he did not see vision or perception as being pure intellect. The object was of great importance to him, and in this he has a close relationship with empiricist thought. The following chapters will show how matters arising from a study of the eye in Wordsworth's poetry relate to connected trends in various schools of philosophy.

Notes

1"Autobiographical Vagaries in Tintern Abbey," Studies in Philology, 42 (1945), 81-86.

2In The Faerie Queen, Prince Arthur's sword is so dazzlingly bright that it could blind his enemies. With it he defeated the giant Orgoglio. FQ 1, 7, xxxii-xxxvii, 8; compare Atlanta's shield in the Orlando Furioso, 2, 55-56, xxiv.


4Wordsworth says in a note to this poem that "allusions to the Ode entitled 'Intimations of Immortality' pervade this stanza" (PW, IV, 12-13).
As Stephen Gill notes in his revision of the de Selincourt edition of the 1805 Prelude (Oxford, 1970), p.313, this passage was composed only when the poem was being completed in 1804-05, while the childhood episodes in this book are taken from the work of 1799 and 1800.

This I.F. note and other external evidence for Wordsworth's occasional descent into an "abyss of idealism" in childhood is given in PW, IV, 463 and 467.

G.H. Durrant points out, in William Wordsworth (Cambridge, 1969) p. 21, that in "I wandered lonely," "in all creation man seems to be the only creature capable of feeling not at home, of 'wandering lonely as a cloud.'"

MS. L includes the following two lines at this point: "Throw off from us, or mitigate, the spell/ Of that strong frame of sense in which we dwell" (PW, IV, 283: app. crit.)

Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1814 (New Haven, 1964), p.276. Hartman continues more arguably: "In stanza IX especially, when Wordsworth says that his thanksgivings are less for the visionary gleam than for the visionary dreariness, and goes on to describe the latter as:

those first affections
Those shadowy recollections,
Which be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain light of all our day
Are yet a master light of all our seeing

it is hard to follow him. He seems to be wilfully confusing moments of darkness and fear in which nature seems alien to the child with moments of splendour and beauty which first developed the child's affections and drew them to nature in a more intimate way" (p.276). It is surely misleading to connect the "shadowy recollections" which are surely just faint memories, expressed in the very common image, of experiences not of darkness, fear and alienation, but of mental power, with "visionary dreariness," a quite different concept.

See, for instance, Havens, pp. 155-76.


At this point, the 1805 Prelude continues: "And whatsoever shape the fit might take,/ And whencesoever it might come, I still/ At all times had a real solid world/ Of images about me" (601-14).


15. II, 403-04, quoted by Owen Barfield in What Coleridge Thought (London, 1972), p. 21. Barfield also quotes (p. 20) from a note of Coleridge's on Milton's difficulty with the concept of creation ex nihilo: "this difficulty arises wholly out of that Slavery of the Mind to the Eye and the visual Imagination or Fancy under the influence of which the Reasoner must have a picture and mistakes surface for substance."

16. See Essay Book II, ch. xxix, 2: I, 486-87. Ernest Tuveson (p. 21) says that of all the senses "only sight is significant [to simple ideas of sensation] for thought is seeing."

17. Thomas Taylor, quoting Proclus in a note to his translation of Plotinus' "Concerning the Beautiful" in Raine and Harper, p. 146.


21. This makes any attempt at dating the period of crisis difficult, for "Guilt and Sorrow" was conceived in the summer of 1793 and finished in 1794, and it is in these years that some of the principle events associated with the crisis took place, such as the declaration of war against France and the writing of the "Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff" in 1793 and the death of Robespierre in 1794. Thus these years are associated with the disease rather than the cure. In any case, as de Selincourt notes (p. 618), it is certainly not "Guilt and Sorrow" but Descriptive Sketches which Coleridge read and admired before he had met Wordsworth. It is not uncommon for Wordsworth to confuse dates; and it is most understandable here, as his recovery is not likely to have been immediate and sudden, or linked with some particular date. Hartman (p. 247) says "there is no evidence, from Wordsworth's poetry, that the period of dejection was unbroken, and the recovery sudden. The poet's retrospective mingling of crisis and cure may have its basis in fact."

22. The revised version of 1820 reads: "The spirit sought not than in cherished sadness./ A cloudy substitute for failing gladness./ In youth's keen eye the livelong day was bright/ The sun at morning and the stars at night" (15-18).
In view of other parallels between Wordsworth's thought and Neoplatonism, it is worth noting that John Beer comments (p. 58) that "running through Swedenborgianism and Neoplatonism there is the sense of lost glory—which is what appealed to the Romantics."


PW II, 507: the I.F. note says that "The two best lines in it are by Mary," and an added pencil note identifies the two lines as 21 and 22.

"The inward ear" in "Yes it was the Mountain Echo" is not understood in the same way as the organ of memory. Rather it is the organ of the spirit, and brings intuitions and presentiments: "Echoes from beyond the grave,/ Recognized intelligence!" Yet it too is not consciously exercised but rather receives "flashes."


Introductory

Wordsworth's poetry is frequently concerned with a force which is outside the mind, and which works on it, through the medium or inlet of the senses, and especially the eye. This force should not be understood as a material and mechanical external nature operating upon an essentially passive mind, in the manner of the empiricists, for although such theories are of course relevant, one of Wordsworth's most important poetic problems is how to place and name this external and natural force as an intellectual or spiritual power, a problem manifestly important and troubling to him, as several possible solutions are discarded. It must not be forgotten that Wordsworth is all the time aware of another and co-operative power, namely the active mind. He saw both mind and nature not as static and material, but as full of process and working, although there is a development through the years from a stress on nature's working in the earlier verse, to the stress on the mind's working in the later verse. The very importance of the ministry of fear in the early books of The Prelude shows this process, for fear involves two parties, the frightened subject and the object of fear, which if not always external to the mind is always external to the will.

For the orthodox Lockean, such as Addison or Young, created nature was essentially static, for the external world was "dead matter,"¹ and man, though in perception he endowed matter with its secondary characteristics of colour and
sound, was not properly creative, for he absorbed passively the inevitable impressions made by matter. Wordsworth's whole world was creative; in that world the intellect of man was particularly creative, and amongst men the poet is peculiarly creative. A rather aridly theoretical passage of *The Excursion* expresses this feeling for process explicitly enough:

> 'To every Form of being is assigned;'...  
> An active Principle:- howe'er removed  
> From sense and observation, it subsists  
> In all things, in all natures; in the stars  
> Of azure heaven, the unenduring clouds,  
> In flower and tree, in every pebbly stone  
> That paves the brooks, the stationary rocks,  
> The moving waters, and the invisible air  
> Whate'er exists hath properties that spread  
> Beyond itself, communicating good,  
> A simple blessing, or with evil mixed;  
> Spirit that knows no insulated spot,  
> No chasm, no solitude; from link to link  
> It circulates, the soul of all the worlds,  
> This is the freedom of the universe;  
> Unfolded still the more, more visible,  
> The more we know; and yet in reverenced least,  
> And least respected in the human Mind,  
> Its most apparent home.

*(Excursion IX, 1-20)*

But it is implicit throughout much of his work, and frequently more vitally when less theoretically expressed. What concerns me in this chapter, however, is not the active principle as such, nor its operation in the mind of man, nor nature in itself as active, as "living and rejoicing" (*Exc. III, 943*), but the active principle as an exterior power working on and with the mind of man through the eye's agency.
i. Wise Passiveness

The last chapter shows that Wordsworth actually experienced the eye both as despot and as benefactor. It is one aspect of the power of the external world that the eye is presented as a means of moral understanding and of a proper relationship with the world. Coleridge, in his famous account of the plan for the *Lyrical Ballads* in *Biographia Literaria* XIV, said that Wordsworth's object was "to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure but one for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude, we have eyes yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand" (II, 6). The world before us is an "inexhaustible treasure" largely because it is not the world within us. The fancy and the reason in isolation from the external can be merely solipsistic. The eye and the other senses when exercised properly communicate the world of the non-self and thus make possible sympathy and love. It is for this reason that the Wanderer says:

The estate of man would be indeed forlorn  
If false conclusions of the reasoning power  
Made the eye blind, and closed the passages  
Through which the ear converses with the heart.  
(Exc. IV, 1152-55)

The contrast between the Moralist and the Poet, in "A Poet's Epitaph," is based largely on this perception of the external world working on the mind simply by being other to it: the poet is capable of love and of true intellectual
creativity, because of his consciousness of the self in a world: the Moralist is capable of neither, for his consciousness is of the self as a world:

A Moralist perchance appears;
Led, Heaven knows how! to this poor sod:
And he has neither eyes nor ears;
Himself his world, and his own God;

One to whose smooth-rubbed soul can cling
Nor form, nor feeling, great or small;
A reasoning, self-sufficing thing,
An intellectual All-in-all!

... But who is He, with modest looks,
And clad in homely russet brown?
He murmurs near the running brooks
A music sweeter than their own.

... The outward shows of sky and earth,
Of hill and valley, he has viewed;
And impulses of deeper birth
Have come to him in solitude.

In common things that round us lie
Some random truths he can impart, —
The harvest of a quiet eye
That broods and sleeps on his own heart.

(25–52)

It is, as was suggested in chapter two, the combination of inward and outward experience which leads to a quiet eye and genuine understanding. As Geoffrey Hartman (p. 327) writes in relation to The White Doe of Rylstone "the great virtue of nature... is to lead from self to other, or to remind the self of its power for relationship."

To be open to this power of otherness, man must not be constantly preoccupied with his own intellectual development, for such preoccupation involves self-
consciousness to a degree which naturally shuts the consciousness off from the external world. This implies, not that the mind should be inactive, but that it should be unanxious, for, acknowledging the essential benevolence of this external power ("Nature never did betray/The heart that loved her"), it can afford to trust it, knowing that its own activity may come at a later stage and that it may be equally unwilled. Thus apparent mental inactivity can be more fruitful than the most energetic intellectual activity:

There is a holy indolence
Compared to which our best activity
Is oftimes deadly bane.
They rest upon their oars
Float down the might stream of tendency
In the calm mood of holy indolence
A most wise passiveness in which the heart
Lies open and is well content to feel
As nature feels and to receive her shapes
As she has made them.

(Prelude, p.566)

It seems that Wordsworth on this subject had a sympathetic listener in Coleridge, who six years after Wordsworth wrote these lines in the "Alfoxden Notebook" commented in his own notebook that: "the dignity of passiveness to worthy Activity when men shall be as proud within themselves of having remained an hour in a state of deep tranquil emotion, whether in reading or in hearing or in looking, as they now are in having figured away one hour/ O how few can transmute activity of mind into emotion, yet there are who active as the stirring Tempest playful as a May blossom in a Breeze of May, can yet for hours together remain with hearts broad awake, & the Understanding asleep in all but its retentiveness and receptivity/ yea, & the Latter evinces as great Genius as the
Former" (Notebooks I, 1834 16 217). At the time when Coleridge wrote this (in January 1804) he was staying with the Wordsworths at Town End and may well have been thinking of Wordsworth. (Kathleen Coburn notes the connection between this passage and "Expostulation and Reply").

Nature is regarded as a teacher in several poems of 1798, not in the sense that she fills the mind with precise aphoristic teaching, but in that through the eye and the other senses, she spontaneously enlarges the mind. Lines such as

One moment now may give us more
Than years of toiling reason:
Our minds shall drink at every pore
The spirit of the season,

("To My Sister," 25-28)

illuminate others which have been stumbling blocks to some readers:

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

("The Tables Turned," 21-24)

It is understandable that an enlarged sympathy contributes more to an understanding of man than does a reading of Aristotle's Ethics. For this reason Wordsworth rejects the "seeking" activity of constant study and waits to be sought, recognizing that there is potential good in the physically passive or involuntary nature of the eye:

The eye--it cannot choose but see;
We cannot bid the ear be still;
Our bodies feel, where'er they be,
Against or with our will.

Nor less I deem that there are powers
Which of themselves our minds impress
That we can feed this mind of ours
In a wise passiveness.
Think you, 'mid all this mighty sum
Of things forever speaking,
That nothing of itself will come,
But we must still be seeking?

("Expostulation and Reply," 17-25)

This aspect of Wordsworth's thought obviously owes much to Locke, in that such a view of the mind is only possible after Locke's own work and his influence on the development of thought throughout Europe in the eighteenth century. Indeed, the stanzas just quoted are strongly reminiscent of Locke, who wrote: "But yet what he [man] does see, he cannot see otherwise than he does . . . . Just thus is it with our understanding: all that is voluntary in our knowledge is the employing or withholding any of our faculties from this or that sort of objects, and a more or less accurate survey of them: but, they being employed, our will hath no power to determine the knowledge of the mind one way or another; that is done only by the objects themselves so far as they are clearly discovered" (Essay IV, ch.xiii, 2). The similarity is that both Wordsworth and Locke show that one important feature of perception is that it is not controlled, except in the most limited way, by the will. Locke makes this point, which is essential to his concept of perception, again in his discussion of the difference between remembered and perceived images:

Because sometimes I find I cannot avoid the having those ideas in my mind . . . . And therefore it must needs be some exterior cause, and the brisk acting of some objects without me whose efficacy I cannot resist, that produces those ideas in my mind whether I will or no. Besides there is nobody who does not perceive the difference in himself between
contemplating the sun, as he hath the idea of it in his memory, and actually looking upon it . . . . And therefore he hath certain knowledge that they are not both memory, or the actions of his mind, and fancies only within him; but that actual seeing hath a cause without.

(Essay IV, ix, 495: II, 328-9)

While the involuntary nature of perception is merely reported by Locke, it is welcomed by Wordsworth, as a way in which the inevitable process of knowledge leads man beyond himself, and forces him to make relationships and connections.

ii. Locke, Hartley, and the Education of Nature

This view of the essentially benevolent and enlarging process involved in an unhampered relationship with external nature was the basis of Wordsworth's theories of formal education. These theories changed very little over the years; Wordsworth always considered learning through experience more important than formal education, and increasing the powers of the imagination and the sympathies as more important than increasing the number of accomplishments and of remembered facts, "the dead lore of schools" (PW, V, 388): the eye and the other senses thus are vitally important in education. In 1797, Dorothy Wordsworth described the methods which she and her brother were using in bringing up little Basil Montagu, then six years old: "We teach him nothing at present but what he learns from the evidence of his senses. He has an unsatiable curiosity which we are always careful to satisfy to the best of our ability. It is
directed to everything he sees, the sky, the fields, trees, shrubs, corn, the
making of tools, carts, &c &c &c. He knows his letters, but we have not
attempted any further step in the path of book learning (EL, p.180: to Mrs.
John Marshall, 19 March, 1797). Nearly fifty years later, Wordsworth was
still voicing the theories on which this practice was based:

Is not the knowledge inculcated by the teacher, or derived under his
management, from books, too exclusively dwelt upon, so as almost to
put out of sight that which comes without being sought for, from intercourse
with nature and from experience in the actual employments and duties which
a child's situation in the country, however unfavorable, will lead him to or
impose upon him. How much of what is precious comes into our minds in
all ranks of society, not as knowledge entering formally in the shape of
knowledge, but as infused thro' the constitution of things and by the grace
of God . . . . It struck me also that, from the same cause, too little
attention is paid to books of imagination which are eminently useful in
calling forth intellectual power. We must not only have knowledge but
the means of wielding it, and that is done infinitely more thro' the
imaginative faculty assisting both in the collection and the application
of facts than is generally believed. (LY, III, 1268-69: to Seymour
Tremenheere, 16 December, 1845)

This high value placed upon knowledge "infused through the constitution of things
and by the grace of God," causes him to rejoice that he was spared the over-
anxious education fashionable in some circles at this period, which Wordsworth
saw as a foolish and irrevent interference in the freedom of interaction between the child and his world, leading inevitably to a barren and self-destroying self-consciousness, a self-consciousness which will inevitably cut him off from all possibility of real interaction with his world. The victim of the educational theorist

must live
Knowing that he grows wiser every day
Or else not live at all, and seeing too
Each little drop of wisdom as it falls
Into the dimpling cistern of his heart:
For this unnatural growth the trainer blame,
Pity the tree.—Poor human vanity,
Wert thou extinguished, little would be left
Which he could truly love; but how escape?
For, ever as a thought of purer birth
Rises to lead him toward a better clime,
Some intermeddler too is on the watch
To drive him back, and pound him, like a stray,
Within the pinfold of his own conceit.
Meanwhile old grandame earth is grieved to find
The playthings, which her love designed for him,
Unthought of: in their woodland beds the flowers
Weep, and the river sides are all forlorn.
Oh! give us once again the wishing cap
Of Fortunatus, and the invisible coat
Of Jack the Giant-killer, Robin Hood,
And Sabra in the forest with St. George!
The child whose love is here, at least doth reap
One precious gain, that he forgets himself.

(The Prelude V, 323-46)

The child reading fantastic stories, like the child playing or working amidst natural objects, must be constantly drawn outside the radius of his own achievements, abilities and comforts, and, what is more, led into the power of a force that is not his own conscious will, nor that of any other person:
A gracious spirit o'er this earth presides,
And o'er the heart of man: invisibly
It comes, to works of unreproved delight,
And tendency benign, directing those
Who care not, know not, think not what they do.
(Prelude, V, 491-95)

The operation of this force in educating the child is seen most clearly
in the early books of The Prelude which show how the poet developed
"fostered alike by beauty and by fear." Natural objects are regarded as
having in their activities a positive benevolence towards human life. For
instance, Wordsworth deplores his own lack of direction thus:

Was it for this
That one, the fairest of all rivers, loved
To blend his murmurs with my nurse's song?
(Prelude I, 269-71)

The Derwent's murmurs are directed towards mankind, are intended, it is
suggested, as a part of the formation of the mind of a poet, of one whose role
will be to murmur "near the running brooks/ A music sweeter than their own."

All the more intensely realised episodes from Book I, the snaring of woodcocks,
the boat-stealing, the skating, are intended to show

How Nature by extrinsic passion first
Peopled the mind with forms sublime or fair
And made me love them.
(Prelude I, 545-47)

Nature moulds and serves man; her processes are beneficent when they are
allowed to work, through the eye and ear, unhindered by the unnatural
surroundings and strains of city life. The contrast at the Helvellyn Fair between
the size of the people and the size of the mountain makes Wordsworth see them
as babies with a nurse:
Through utter weakness pitiable dear,
As tender infants are; and yet how great!
For all things serve them: them the morning light.
Loves, as it glistens on the silent rocks;
And them the silent rocks, which now from high
Look down upon them; the reposing clouds;
The wild brooks prattling from invisible haunts;
And old Helvellyn, conscious of the stir
Which animates this day their calm abode.

(Prelude VIII, 61-69)

Such passages show man in an ideal relationship with his world; they are an idyllic glimpse of a relationship which is possible, but rarely actual. The claims made for the power of natural objects over the mind of man are enormous. Nature does not merely delight or terrify or awaken artistic powers, it actually forms, or helps to form, moral powers and achievements:

    ye mountains and ye lakes
    And sounding cataracts, ye mists and winds
    That dwell among the hills where I was born.
If in my youth I have been pure in heart,
If mingling with the world, I am content
With my own modest pleasures, and have lived
With God and Nature communing, removed
From little enmities and low desires,
The gift is yours... if, in this time
Of dereliction and dismay, I yet
Despair not of our nature, but retain
A more than Roman confidence, a faith
That fails not, in all sorrow my support,
The blessing of my life; the gift is yours,
Ye winds and sounding cataracts! 'tis yours,
Ye mountains! thine, O Nature! Thou has fed
My lofty speculations; and in thee
For this uneasy heart of ours, I find
A never-failing principle of joy
And purest passion.

(Prelude II, 424-51)
The virtues are formed by the awakening of strength and power in man through the deep impressions of fear and love imprinted by Nature's forms, and by the early contemplation of noble objects:

So the foundations of his mind were laid.
In such communion, not from terror free, While yet a child, and long before his time, Had he perceived the presence and the power Of greatness; and deep feelings had impressed So vividly great objects that they lay Upon his mind like substances whose presence Perplexed the bodily sense.

(Exc. I, 132-39)

And as was observed in chapter two, this early contact with natural beauty prevented him from being misled too far by the fancy: (Prelude VIII, 426-32).

The same belief in the efficacy of contact with Nature in forming the virtues is seen in a simpler form in the "Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle:"

Love had he found in huts where poor men lie; His daily teachers had been woods and rills, The silence that is in the starry sky, The sleep that is among the lonely hills.

In him the savage virtue of the Race, Revenge, and all ferocious thoughts were dead: Nor did he change; but kept in lofty place The wisdom which adversity had bred.

"Ruth," too, shows Wordsworth's belief in the strong effect which natural objects could have on the formation of the mind and consequently on behaviour, but this poem is unique in that it shows that natural objects can help to corrupt, can indeed bring harm even to the innocent. Both Ruth and the Georgian youth are shown as formed by their surroundings; Ruth is "almost an infant of the woods," tranquil and good, but without any protective experience of human
relationships; the youth is by nature more prone to evil passions, and this potential evil is actually fostered by the forces and forms of nature in his native land:

The wind, the tempest roaring high,
The tumult of a tropic sky,
Might well be dangerous food
For him, a Youth to who was given
So much of earth—so much of heaven,
And such impetuous blood.

Whatever in those climes he found
Irregular in sight or sound
Did to his mind impart
A kindred impulse, seemed allied
To his own powers, and justified
The workings of his heart.

Nor less, to feed voluptuous thought,
The beauteous forms of nature wrought,
Fair trees and gorgeous flowers;
The breezes their own languor lent;
The stars had feelings, which they sent
Into those favoured bowers.

Yet in his worst pursuits I ween
That sometimes there did intervene
Pure hopes of high intent!
For passions linked to forms so fair
And stately needs must have their share
Of noble sentiment.

But ill he lived, much evil saw,
With men to whom no better law
Nor better life was known;
Deliberately, and undeceived,
These wild men's vices he received
And gave them back his own.

His genius and his moral frame
Were thus impaired, and he became
The slave of low desires.

(121-53)
The English landscape has for a short time a more happy effect on his mind and consequently upon his actions:

Before me shone a glorious world—
Fresh as a banner bright, unfurled
To music suddenly:
I looked upon those hills and plains,
And seemed as if let loose from chains,
To live at liberty.

(169-74)

It is these same forms which eventually comfort Ruth when he deserts her, both as they are remembered in her cell, and as they are known in her wanderings. Still, these consolations "rocks and pools,/ And airs that gently stir the vernal leaves" are described as "the engines of her pain, the tools/ That shaped her sorrow." The whole poem is an attempt to show how surroundings and circumstances can work to mould not only a person's mind, but his whole fate and that of others. It is not possible to understand the landscapes entirely as mere imagery, the tropics reflecting the youth's passions, the English hills Ruth's innocence. It is not entirely successful: we never fully understand the Georgian youth, for the explanation of his impaired genius only confuses, especially in the general context of Wordsworth's poetry about the influence of nature on the mind. There seems to be no reason why the passions aroused by Georgian winds and tempests should be more harmful than those stirred by English weather.

Wordsworth's treatment of the formation of the mind by nature is obviously strongly influenced by Locke and his successors, though it is essentially different from theirs. There is no need for more than the briefest account of Wordsworth's debt to Locke and Hartley in this matter, for this work has been done or overdone before, by such scholars as Arthur Beatty. Locke asserted that all our knowledge is
founded on experience, and that "our observation employed either about
external sensible objects or about the internal operations of our minds perceived
and reflected on by ourselves, is that which supplies our understandings with
all the materials of thinking. These two are the fountain of knowledge, from
whence all the ideas we have, or can naturally have, do spring" (Essay II,
ch. i, 2: 1, 122). In the fourth edition of the Essay (1700) Locke added a
chapter "Of the Association of Ideas," it being evident that mental reactions to
experience are not as static as his earlier treatment would suggest. Hartley's
Observations on Man . . . (1749) elaborated Locke's treatment, explaining
association as the exciting through the recalling of one already experienced
stimulus of a chain of reactions already experienced in connection with that
stimulus; memory operates thus: "When objects and ideas, with their most common
Combinations, have often been presented to the Mind, a Train of them, of a
considerable Length, may, by once occurring, leave such a Trace, as to recur
in Imagination and in Miniature, in nearly the same Order and Proportion as in
this single Occurrence. For since each of the particular Impressions and Ideas
is familiar, there will want little more for their Recurrency, than a few
connecting Links; and even these may be in some measure, supplied by former
similar instances" (i, 78). The pleasure or pain associated with certain patterns
of association naturally leads to the formation of moral principles, according
to Hartley's doctrine, though these can be encouraged and fostered by the
exercise of reason:
It is of the utmost consequence to Morality and Religion, that the Affections and Passions should be analysed into their simple compounding parts, by reversing the Steps of the Associations which concur to form them. For thus we may learn how to cherish and improve good ones, check and root out such as are mischievous and immoral, and how to suit our Manner of Life, in some tolerable Measure, to our intellectual and religious Wants . . . . The World, is, indeed, sufficiently stocked with general precepts for this Purpose, grounded on Experience; and whosoever will follow these faithfully, may expect good general success. However, the Doctrine of Association, which traced up to the first Rudiments of Understanding and Association, unfolds such a scene as cannot fail both to instruct and alarm all such as have any Degree of interested Concern for themselves, or of a benevolent one for others. (i, 81)

Now Wordsworth is evidently concerned to show how a man's moral being is fostered through the associations of his contact with external nature. The early books of The Prelude show the origin of certain powers and feelings of adult life in the remembrance of childhood incidents; they certainly show the influence of Associationism in their assertion and demonstration of how through the child's pleasure in games and sports he is impressed with fear and love by the beauty of nature, which he later comes to love for its own sake, while a later stage shows how the love of nature in its turn leads to the love of man. A similar process is recorded in "Michael":
... It was the first
Of those domestic tales that spake to me
Of shepherds, dwellers in the valleys, men
Whom I already loved;—not verily
For their own sakes, but for the fields and hills
Which was their occupation and abode.
And hence this tale, while I was yet a Boy
Careless of books, yet having felt the power
Of Nature, by the gentle agency
Of natural objects, led me on to feel
For passions that were not my own, and think
(At random and imperfectly indeed)
On man, the heart of man, and human life.

(21-33)

The role of the eye is naturally particularly important in this process as
the principle medium for the awful or beautiful in the external world;
Wordsworth included in MS. Y of The Prelude a very Hartleyan account of
the role of the eye in the formation of faith:

Then everyday appearances, which now
The spirit of thoughtful wonder first pervades,
Crowd in and give the mind its needful food;
Nature's unfathomable works, or Man's
Mysterious as her own,— a ship that sails
The seas, the lifeless arch of stones in air
Suspected, the cerulean firmament:
. . . with these combine
Objects of fear yet not without their own
Enjoyment,— lightning and the thunder's roar,
Snow, rain and hail, and storm implacable.
In turn these also slacken in their hold,
And the world's native produce, as it meets
The sense with less habitual stretch of mind,
Is pondered as a miracle, and words
By frequent repetition take the place
Of theories, repeated till faith grows
Through acquiescence, and the name of God
Stands a fix'd keystone in the mighty arch.

(Prelude, pp. 572-73)
With this may be compared Hartley's own account of the relation of ideas and the understanding and the role of the eye:

In Adults, the Pleasures of mere Colours are very languid in comparison of their present aggregates of Pleasure, formed by Association. And thus the Eye approaches more and more, as we advance in Spirituality and Perfection to an inlet for mental Pleasure, and an Organ suited to the Exigencies of a Being, whose Happiness consists in the Improvement of his Understanding and Affections. However, the original Pleasures of mere Colours remain, in a small Degree, to the last, and those transferred upon them by Association with other pleasures (for the Influence is in these Things reciprocal, without Limits) is a considerable one. So that our intellectual Pleasures are not only at first generated, but afterwards supported and recruited, in part from the Pleasures affecting the Eye: which holds particularly in respect of the Pleasures afforded by the Beauties of Nature, and by the Imitations of them, which the Arts of Poetry and Painting furnish us with. (i, 208)

The processes of association which Wordsworth describes certainly follow a Hartleyan pattern; yet they are not those described by Hartley. The "needful food" provided by the eye according to Wordsworth, is a very different concept from the "pleasure" which is the key note in Hartley's discussion. Wordsworth cannot be thought of as a versifier of Hartley.
The Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) clearly shows Wordsworth's use and assumption of Associationist principles:

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, our feelings will be connected with important subjects, till at length, if we be originally possessed of much sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced, that, by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of these habits, we shall 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. (Grosart, II, 82)

The mainstream of English Empiricism, as represented by Locke and Hartley, was thus obviously important in helping form Wordsworth's understanding of the process of growth in the mind, and his concept of the relationship of the mind with the external universe.

### iii. The External and Purposive Power

Yet, for all this, any empiricist or materialist account of Wordsworth's poetry concerning man and nature is inadequate. Basil Willey asserts that "to animise the 'real' world, the 'universe of death' that the mechanical
system of philosophy had produced, but to do so without either using an exploded mythology or fabricating a new one, this was the special task and mission of Wordsworth. This mis-states the case: Wordsworth's was not a "universe of death"; he actually perceived the universe as essentially active. His problem was to find an intellectually acceptable means of communicating the nature of the life outside the mind. He understood both the principles concerned in perception quite differently from the empiricists: he saw both the mind and the natural objects which it beholds as less mechanical and more energetic in their operations. Man is not merely a passive mind formed by the various contingencies of outward circumstances, but an active power in relation to another purposive active power. It is the force of the natural objects which are perceived by the eye which concerns us here. The essential difference between the normal contemporary understanding of the role of the natural universe which was basically Lockean, and Wordsworth's understanding, is shown by the reaction of the contemporary reviewers to The Excursion, as Herbert Piper has shown. The favorable Quarterly Review notes that "To a mind constituted like that of Mrs. Wordsworth, the stream, the torrent and the stirring leaf . . . seem not merely to suggest associations of deity, but to be a kind of speaking communication with it . . . in his poetry nothing in Nature is dead. Motion is synonymous with life." The Monthly Review, commenting upon the same ideas, expresses the outrage felt at the questioning of the current empiricist assumptions:
The prevailing doctrine of Mr. Wordsworth's poetical system is that of a soul animating and informing all nature; and not content with this generalised exposition of the creed in question, he extends it to every individual object, with such constant and unvarying minuteness that not a stream sparkles in the sun, not a torrent descends from the hills, not a cloud settles on the brow of a mountain, but stream, sun, leaf, breeze, torrent, hill, cloud, and mountain's brow are sure to be animated at once, as with the touch of Harlequin's wand, and endued with powers of sensation and reflection equal to those enjoyed by the poet, or by the most refined and intellectual of his readers. Mr. Wordsworth disdains metaphor and fable. That which he describes is set forth in the colours of reality, not fiction;--like the honest Swedenborgian who would stop short in the middle of the street in order to make a bow to St. Paul. It is most unfortunate for the reader who is not prepared by a similar process of conversion for a similar mysticism.

This may be a false description of The Excursion, but it certainly indicates what Wordsworth's contemporaries found new in his work, and one startling feature was an active nature, a nature therefore totally different from the mechanical nature of Locke and Hartley.

Wordsworth, while feeling convinced of the existence of some kind of active power outside the mind, apparently found great difficulty in elaborating its precise nature, for at different stages of his career what is essentially the same power of external nature working on the mind is formulated in different terms,
suggesting different systems of belief. The consistent alterations of all relevant passages in the early books of The Prelude show how important it was for Wordsworth that the expression of such ideas should be as exact as possible.

It seems likely that all of these formulations were merely approximations which varied in the degree of their success. Wordsworth was evidently moving towards his later understanding of an active nature by 1794, in his revisions of An Evening Walk:

A heart that vibrates evermore, awake
To feeling for all forms that Life can take,
That wider still its sympathy extends
And sees not any line where being ends;
Sees sense, through Nature’s rudest forms betrayed,
Tremble obscure in fountain, rock and shade,
And while a secret power those forms endears
Their social accents never vainly hears.

(PW I, 10; app. crit.)

Yet at this point the poet is merely moving towards his later position.

Jonathan Wordsworth is right in saying that these lines are "unquestionably important, but their resemblance to Wordsworth’s later thought can easily be overstressed. Both Meyer’s ‘essential spirit pervading all reality and making it dynamic’ and Piper’s more ambiguous ‘life in Nature’, gloss over the basic distinction between a quasi-scientific belief in animated matter on the one hand, and on the other, a belief in a universe permeated by the one Life" (Music of Humanity, p.186). "Sense, through Nature’s rudest forms betrayed" is a very different matter from that force in external nature which acts purposively on the mind and life of man. Piper reads far too much into these lines, and bases on them his surely false belief that "it seems tolerably
certain that he actually adopted these beliefs between October 1792 and April 1794" and his consequent assumption that the formative influence of these ideas was the pantheistic materialism popular in republican circles in France and England, in which Wordsworth moved on the 1790s. These lines should not be read as more than a sign of the direction in which Wordsworth's mind was already moving in 1794.

By 1798, Wordsworth describes himself as

well pleased to recognize
In nature and the language of the sense
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the muse
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.

("Tintern Abbey," 207-11)

The first strong statements of his belief in the beneficent power of nature on the human mind are made at Alfoxden and worked out while Wordsworth was at Goslar from December 1798 to April 1799. During this period, and especially while at Goslar, he began to express this power in the language of animism; but this language was merely a framework, I believe, rather than an expression of strongly held beliefs. The basic and genuine belief in an active power in nature operating through the senses at this time found expression in the classical notion of "the spirit of the place." Havens writes (p. 35) that "the great illustration of the trust which Wordsworth put in the non-rational part of our nature is furnished by his animism. He implied so frequently and at times affirmed with such certitude the existence of natural Powers and Spirits of the air that there can be no doubt of his instinctive belief in them." This confuses the issue; in fact a rather vague if strong belief in active nature finds for a period approximate
expression in "natural Powers" and Spirits of the air." At Alfoxden Wordsworth was moving towards this kind of formulation: in "Expostulation and Reply," he writes of "Powers/ Which of themselves our mind impress" and these, though not precisely spirits of the place, are nevertheless active forces working on the mind from without. In "Peter Bell" the "Spirits of the Mind" have the same kind of function; they are regarded as an outside agency working powerfully, but eventually beneficially on the mind; they are rather different from the spirits of nature which he was to write about at Goslar for they are seen as changing the perception of nature in some way, and thus interfering more directly with the mind:

Dread Spirits! to confound the meek
Why wander from your course so far,
Disordering colour, form and stature!
—Let good men feel the soul of nature,
And see things as they are.

Yet, potent Spirits! well I know,
How ye, that play with soul and sense,
Are not unused to trouble friends
Of goodness, for most gracious ends—
And this I speak in reverence!

... 
Your presence often have I felt
In darkness and the stormy night;
And with like force, if need there be,
Ye can put forth your agency
When earth is calm, and heaven is bright.

Then coming from the wayward world,
That powerful world in which ye dwell,
Come Spirits of the Mind! and try,
Tonight, beneath the moonlight sky,
What may be done with Peter Bell.

(761-85)
Yet although these spirits are not precisely natural in that they change the perception of Nature, nor are they just a mythologizing of the mind's processes, for they are described too certainly as external to the mind for this:

And now the Spirits of the Mind
Are busy with poor Peter Bell;
Upon the rights of visual sense
Usurping with a prevalence
More terrible than magic spell.

Close by a brake of flowering furze
(Above it shivering aspens play)
He sees an unsubstantial creature
His very self in form and feature
Not four yards from the broad highway.

The Spirits of the Mind are the equivalent in "Peter Bell" of the supernatural spirits of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," for these are surely companion poems of sin and regeneration, Coleridge's supernatural and Wordsworth's natural, according to the plan for the Lyrical Ballads already cited (BL XIV: II, 6). In accordance with this plan, the Spirits of the Mind must be understood as natural. Their ambiguous nature does not seriously undercut the effect of the poem, partly because the reader has no difficulty in understanding what happens to Peter Bell as a combination of "action from without and from within" and partly because of the jesting tone of the poem. The spirits are accepted as fictions like the "little boat/ Shaped like the crescent moon" which both accord with the light-hearted tone and further the serious intent of the poem. It is surely because in such a work as "Peter Bell" they are hardly likely to be
taken literally as expressions of belief that these "spirits" were allowed to stay in the published poem, whereas the spirits of "Nutting" and The Prelude were mostly either cut or altered.

In 1798, the year in which he wrote Peter Bell, Wordsworth also wrote the first version of "Nutting," which has a nearer approach to animism, the merest hint of which is retained in the final version. Amongst the discarded lines are these:

Ye gentle Stewards of a Poet's time!
Ye Powers! without whose aid the idle man
Would waste full half of the long summer's day,
Ye who, by virtue of its dome of leaves
And its cool umbrage, make the forenoon walk,
When July suns are blazing, to his verse
Propitious, as a range o'er moonlight cliffs
Above the breathing sea--and ye no less!
Ye too, who with most necessary care
Amid the concentration of your groves
Restore the springs of his exhausted frame,
And ye whose general ministry it is
To interpose the covert of these shades,
Even as a sleep, betwixt the heart of man
And the uneasy world, 'twixt man himself,
Not seldom and his own unquiet heart,
Oh! that I had a music and a voice
Harmonious as your own, to tell the world
What ye have done for me.

(PW II, 505-06)

Wordsworth evidently felt that the poem did not need these lines, for certainly as it stands the very diction in which the incident is related communicates the strength of the effect which it has had on his imagination, and the slight suggestion of the "powers" which remains in the last lines of the poem is all that is needed:
with gentle hand
    Touch—for there is a spirit in the woods.

This spirit, as the poem now stands, is perhaps just the very otherness of the hazel grove, which he had forgotten, thinking of his mood as one in which

of its own joy secure,
    The heart luxuriates with indifferent things,
    Wasting its kindliness on stocks and stones,
    And on the vacant air.

(40-43)

In treating the trees as indifferent things, as mere bearers of nuts, he forgets that when he has torn off their branches his eyes must behold and his mind be troubled by "the intruding sky" among the silent trees. The slight undercurrent of sexual imagery of virgin rape, reinforces this, as women are habitually looked on as objects until reaction demonstrates their subjectivity. The last seven lines of the rejected passage appear in The Prelude, XII, 24-31, where it is the groves which interpose the covert of the shades. Thus it is just the "powers" which completely disappear, partly no doubt because they are unnecessary to the poem and would therefore vitiate its effect, and partly because these terms were soon felt to be inadequate to the ideas which Wordsworth wished to convey, or generally misleading.

This seems particularly likely in view of the changes Wordsworth made in those parts of The Prelude which were written in Goslar. In these passages, which are largely the earliest versions of Books I and II, Wordsworth is deeply concerned to express his sense of a loving power in nature working on the human mind, and arousing the imagination. The main structure of Book I is designed
to communicate the nature of this power, and in the first versions the lines
of invocation and theorization which run between the demonstrating incidents,
the skating, the boat-stealing, and so on, are written in animistic terms, which
are modified in later versions. The earliest manuscript, JJ, was almost
certainly written in Goslar, and MS. V was partly revised from it in the next
year. Both of these manuscripts offer a rewarding comparison to the later
versions of Books I and II. For instance, the various versions of (I, 351-72 of the
1805 version) run thus:

Yes there are genii which when they would form
A favoured spirit open out the clouds
As with the touch of lightning, seeking him
With gentle visitation—others use
Less homely? interference ministry
Of grosser kind & of their school was I
Though haply aiming at the selfsame end
And made me love them.

(MS. JJ: 1st version: Prelude, p.638)

The soul of man is fashioned & built up
Just like a strain of music I believe
That there are spirits which when they would form
A favor'd being open out the clouds
As at the touch of lightning
Seeking him with gentle visitation and with such
Though rarely in my wanderings I have held
Communion. Others too there are who use
Yet haply aiming at the selfsame end
Severer interventions, ministry
Of grosser kind, & of their school was I.

(MS. JJ: 2nd version: Prelude, p.640)

The mind of man is fashioned and built up
Even as a strain of music; I believe
That there are Spirits which, when they would form
A favored being, from his very dawn
Of infancy do open out the clouds
As at the touch of lightning, seeking him
With gentle visitations, quiet Powers!
Retired and seldom recognized, yet kind
And to the very meanest not unknown
With me though rarely in my boyish days
They communed; others too there are who use
Severer interventions, ministry
More palpable, and of their school was I
They guided me,

(MS. V: Prelude, pp.22-23, app.crit.)

The mind of man is fram'd even like the breath
And harmony of music. There is a dark
Invisible workmanship that reconciles
Discordant elements, and makes them move
In one society. Ah me! that all
The thoughts and feelings which have been infus'd
Into my mind, should ever have made up
The calm existence that is mine when I
Am worthy of myself! Praise to the end!
Thanks likewise for the means! But I believe
That Nature, oftentimes, when she would frame
A favor'd Being, from his earliest dawn
Of infancy doth open up the clouds,
As at the touch of lightning, seeking him
With gentlest visitation; not the less,
Though haply aiming at the self-same end,
Does it delight her sometime to employ
Severer interventions, ministry
More palpable and so she dealt with me.

(I [1805], 351-71)

Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows
Like harmony in music; there is a dark
Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles
Discordant elements, makes them cling together
In one society. How strange that all
The terrors, pains, and early miseries,
Regrets, vexations, lassitudes interfused
Within my mind, should e'er have borne a part,
And that a needful part, in making up
The calm existence that is mine when I
Am worthy of myself! Praise to the end!
Thanks to the means which Nature deigned to employ;
Whether her fearless visitings, or those
That came with soft alarm, like hurtless light
Opening the peaceful clouds; or she may use
Severer interventions, ministry
More palpable as best might suit her aim.

(I P850] 340-56)

The passage changes and develops over the years and the changes in content are reinforced by the changes in style. The central thought remains much the same; a power external to the mind forms the mind either gently (as light in some form opens the clouds), and also through a grosser ministry, which is the kind most felt by the poet. In the first version this is stated barely; the outside power appears in the form of "genii." The second version is more explicit, and the image of music-making makes clear the harmonious blending of influences. The "genii" become "Spirits," a vaguer and more acceptable word which moderates the overtones of the supernatural. In the 1805 version, the music-making image is elaborated, so that we understand that the music is the calm mind, composed of apparently discordant elements. The "Spirits" are now "Nature"; this suggests a more impersonal force, rather than a separate non-human intelligence; yet Nature still exerts an active power over the mind, and is still seen as intentionally moulding "a favor'd Being." The version of 1850 is more Christian, with the contrast of the mortal flesh and the immortal spirit in the first line. This perhaps makes the process described, the growth of an immortal spirit, seem even more important. The discordant elements are elucidated; the vague "thoughts and feelings" of 1805 become more explicitly "terrors, pains and early miseries/ Regrets, vexations, lassitudes." In this version there are three distinct means of Nature's influence: the fearless; those
which come with soft alarms (and now the lightning of the earlier versions is softened to "hurtless light/ Opening the peaceful clouds"); and finally the severer interventions which affect the poet. Nature remains the external force in forming the mind but her operations are less explicit and more incidental; she is no longer seen as working to frame "a favor'd Being"; however she is still an active power employing her own means to form the individual mind. Thus we see how the sense of an active power remains, while the language in which the poet chooses to communicate it changes.

This is seen in several other theoretical passages which were first written in Goslar. When both the earliest manuscripts read:

Ah! not in vain, ye Beings of the hills
And ye that walk the woods and open heaths
By moon or starlight, thus from my first dawn
Of childhood, did ye love to intertwine . . .

(MSS. JJ. and V: Prelude, pp. 634 and 26-27)

both the full versions read:

Wisdom and Spirit of the universe!
Thou Soul that art the eternity of thought!
That givest 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;

(1 [1805] 428-34;
[1850] 401-07)

Again the plural becomes the singular, the personal and classical inhabitants of nature, "ye that walk the woods and open heaths," become the underlying force in all creation. "Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe" is much more like
a force which could be addressed as "Nature" or indeed as "God"; it is more powerful, less charming; but its function is essentially the same. All versions show the influence of external nature, the power of "natural objects in calling forth and strengthening the imagination in boyhood and early youth," as the title the passage was given when it was published separately in the collected edition of 1815 suggests.

Again, in the following passage, all versions express the purposive and intentional activity of the external power operating through the senses. Here, although the animistic suggestions remain more strongly in the completed versions than they did in the previous passages quoted, the implication of dryad- and naiad-like spirits is lost, and what is finally expressed is a power which though explicitly separate from the mind of man, is more easily understandable as projection from the mind than are the "spirits" of the earlier version.

Manuscript V reads:

Ye Powers of earth, ye genii of the Springs
And ye that have your voices in the clouds
And ye that are familiars of the Lakes
And standing pools, Ah, not for trivial ends
Through snow and sunshine, through the sparkling plains
Of moonlight frost and in the stormy day
Did ye with such assiduous love pursue
Your favorite and your joy. I may not think. . .

(Prelude, pp. 28-29)

For this the later versions substitute just three lines:

Ye Presences of Nature in the sky
And on the earth! Ye Visions of the hills!
And souls of lonely places can I think . . .
All continue:

A vulgar hope was yours when ye employ'd
Such ministry, when ye through many a year
Haunting me thus among my boyish sports,
On caves and trees, upon the woods and hills,
Impressed upon all forms the characters
Of danger or desire, and thus did make
The surface of the universal earth
With triumph and delight, and hope, and fear.
Work like a sea?

(I [1805] 490–501;
[1850] 464–75)

The shaping power of the external universe remains the dominant theme of
Book I of The Prelude, though the formula for expressing this power changes.
However, the nature of these statements about the external universe, and the
validity of the formulae through which they are made must be considered
carefully and seriously. Jonathan Wordsworth searches for traces of what he
calls pantheism or the One Life in the poetry of this period and seems
disappointed in what he finds here: "In the poetry of Goslar . . . the One life
plays almost no part" (Music of Humanity, p. 213). Later he acknowledges
the existence of these early versions of the theoretical passages, but describes
their pantheism as of "an oddly water-down, subclassical kind," and says of
them that "nowhere . . . is there pantheism that carries any real conviction."
He believes that to passages such as those quoted above from MSS. JJ and V
"we react not as to an expression of belief in supernatural powers, but as to a
figurative way of saying that in his (for the period) very surprising view, it was
the painful moments of a happy childhood that had been most formative."13 In
fact, I think we react to such passages as neither totally figurative nor as precisely
literal, but rather as indicative; we understand from these passages not that there are literally spirits, nor merely that there are formative elements in the mind's growth, but that there is some kind of external power working on the mind which can be expressed through these residually mythological figures. The consistency with which Wordsworth adapted these passages at various stages as he sought new ways of communicating this power seems to bear out this view.

After the Goslar period Wordsworth's belief in an external power working on the mind through the senses generally took other forms. However, in late 1805, it still seemed to him a possible though ultimately unsatisfactory means of expressions, as we see in an alternative passage in MS. A to VIII, 61-69:

    For all things serve them, serve them for delight
    Or profit, from the moment when the dawn
    Ah surely not without attendant gleams
    Of heart illumination strikes the sense
    With its first glistening on the silent rock
    Whose evening shadows led them to repose
    And doubt ye that these solitudes are paced
    By tutelary powers more safely versed
    In weal and woe than aught that fabling Greece
    Invented, Spirits gentle and benign
    Who now perhaps from yon reposing cloud
    Look down upon them or frequent the ridge
    Of old Helvellyn listening to the stir
    That with this ancient Festival returns
    To animate and cheer their calm abode.

    (Prelude, p.269, app.crit.)

The activities of the tutelary powers disappear in the alternative and final version, and their activities are merged into those of the light, the rocks, the clouds, the wild brooks and old Helvellyn. It is natural objects themselves, rather than their spirits, which are finally seen as loving and serving mankind.
In general the active external world is expressed in later years as Nature, Nature's powers or laws, or eventually as God acting through nature. But still it retains its quality of voluntary action upon man and is never just a projection of man's mind, though for it to reach its greatest efficacy and transforming glory it must be transcended by the mind. This power remains constantly renovating because it is outside the mind and so can act upon a clouded mind. Of his period of despondency Wordsworth writes:

What then remained in such eclipse? what light
To guide or cheer? The laws of thing which lie
Beyond the reach of human will or power;
The life of nature, by the God of love
Inspired, celestial, presence ever pure.

(Prelude [1805] XI, 96-100)

Nature as law and impulse forming a human life is also seen in "Three Years she grew"; but this poem is the work of the lyric imagination, a love poem both to a woman and to Nature; so it communicates on a less literal and more suggestive level than does The Prelude. Lucy is not only mentally and spiritually but physically formed through the influence of natural objects:

Beauty born of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face;
And vital feelings of delight
Shall rear her form to, stately height,
Her virgin bosom swell.

She epitomizes nature spiritually and mentally. She is lost because all that is formed by nature is necessarily mortal, and because on one level as a pure distillation of nature she can only exist in the imagination.

The senses and particularly the eye are obviously the essential medium in
this interaction between the external power and the mind, and it is also essential that they should be unhampered in their intercourse with the natural force which forms and renews. This partly explains Wordsworth's distaste for the disorderly, ugly and lifeless scenes of city life.

the close and overcrowded haunts
Of cities, where the human heart is sick,
And the eye feeds it not, and cannot feed.
(Prelude XIII, 803-05)

The city, usually London, is the emblem of the sensual, the unorganized, the trivial. In "Home at Grasmere," in which the poet says that he seeks the aid of noble surroundings, not in distrust of the mind's independent energies, but rather in trust of the fortifying power of natural objects (PW, V, 318), the deprivation of those who lack this fortifying contact is also made plain:

he truly is alone,
He of the multitude whose eyes are doomed
To hold a vacant commerce day by day
With objects wanting life, repelling love;
He by the vast Metropolis immured,
Where pity shrinks from unremitting calls,
Where numbers overwhelm humanity,
And neighbourhood serves rather to divide
Than to unite.
(PW, V, 333: 593-601)

Thus Wordsworth's own intellectual sickness came after his own stay in London. The basic requirement for nature's benevolent action on the mind is the physical contact of the eye and the forms of nature. Though this can be impeded or weakened by the false attitudes of the mind towards the eye, as we have seen in discussing the despotic eye in a previous chapter, nevertheless if the contact is there, the benevolent action of natural forms will eventually restore the mind's tranquillity and health.
iv. Grace

The concept of an external and intellectual force acting benevolently upon the mind and fate of man has obvious similarities with the Christian concept of the grace of God. Naturally therefore as Christian ideas and institutions grew gradually increasingly important to Wordsworth, so his account of the external power was more frequently expressed in Christian terms. Nature's action and teaching in The Prelude indeed is still Nature's; through all the revisions that mode of expression remains apparently satisfactory. But at the same time, the sudden insights which seem to be brought about by an external agency are attributed to God's agency. Grace is not indeed at first described as working directly on the mind in the usual Christian way, bringing an undeserved and unlooked-for spiritual gift. It operates through natural objects and events and as "Nature" was described as operating. There is a suggestion in an early manuscript version of The Prelude (1805) 1 577-593 that Wordsworth may have considered describing the growth of his mind through the operation of two external forces, Nature working through "extrinsic passion" for sports and childish games, and the Eternal Spirit impressing beautiful forms on the mind through a more direct and immediate contact:

The mazes of this argument, I tread and paint
How Nature by collateral interest
And by extrinsic passion peopled first
My mind with beauteous objects: may I well
Forget what may demand a loftier song,
For oft the eternal spirit, he that has
His life in unimaginable things
And he who painting what he is in all
The visible imagery of all the world
Is yet apparent chiefly as the soul
Of our first sympathies—O bounteous power
In childhood, in rememberable days
How often did thy love renew for me
Those naked feelings which, when thou would'st form
A living thing, thou sendest like a breeze
Into its infant being.

(Prelude, p. 636)

This was rejected presumably because the double agency would have been too confusing and because the role of the "eternal spirit" in these lines is too vague.

In the 1805 Prelude God is described, though not consistently, as the power behind nature in forming man:

Great God!
Who send'st thyself into this breathing world
Through Nature and through every kind of life,
And mak'st man what he is, Creature divine . . .

(Prelude X [1805] 386-99)

In the 1850 version of these lines, God works more directly through His grace, though it seems that other forms of life still work to mould man:

O Power Supreme!
Without Whose call this world would cease to breathe,
Who from the fountain of Thy grace dost fill
The veins that branch through every frame of life,
Making man what he is, creature divine . . .

(Prelude X [1850] 420-24)

The word "gracious" is surely used advisedly and in its narrower sense in the following passage, where it is associated with a power giving spiritual transformation to the heedless and undeserving:

A gracious spirit o'er this earth presides,
And o'er the heart of man: invisibly
It comes, to works of unreproved delight,
And tendency benign, directing those
Who care not, know not, think not what they do.

(Prelude V, 491-95)
In "Resolution and Independence" there is a most expressive uncertainty about
the use of the idea of grace: the alternatives given all express an external
intervention, yet the "whether" leaves open the possibility of an unspoken
alternative—maybe the creative mind itself is supplying the ordering power
necessary to fortify and reassure itself:

Now, whether it were by peculiar grace,
A leading from above, a something given,
Yet it befell that, in this lonely place,
When I wish these untoward thoughts had striven,
Beside a pool bare to the eye of heaven
I saw a Man before me unawares;
The oldest man he seemed that ever wore grey hairs.

(50-56)

The suggestion of the leech-gatherer as the agent of supernatural intervention is
taken up again:

And the whole body of the Man did seem
Like one whom I had met with in a dream;
Or like a man from some far region sent,
To give me human strength, by apt admonishment.

Here the old man is like an angel sent from God to one of his chosen. All
the strangeness of the old man's figure, like a sea-beast-like stone, neither alive
or dead, and the powerful effect of his words, so powerful that the poet cannot
understand them as words, all reinforce this sense of supernatural intervention.
But still the incident, however it came about, is a natural ordinary incident,
and it is the poet's mind which transforms it, as it transforms the figure into a
huge stone into a seabeast, and the tale of hardship into a "stream scarce heard"
which dispels his fears. Wordsworth here is showing how the truly marvellous
is not "a mere fiction of what never was" but is the effect of natural objects
and events on the mind of man, "the discerning intellect of man/ When wedded to this goodly universe." This is quite conscious and intentional, as is made plain by Wordsworth's defence of the poem to Sara Hutchinson (EY, p.366: 14 June, 1802):

A Young Poet in the midst of the happiness of Nature is described as overwhelmed by the thought of the miserable reverses which have befallen the happiest of all men, viz Poets—I think of all this till I am so deeply impressed by it, that I consider the manner in which I was rescued from my dejection and despair almost as an interposition of Providence. "Now whether it was by a peculiar grace, A leading from above." A person reading this Poem with feelings something like mine will have been awed and controuled, expecting almost something spiritual and supernatural—What is brought forward? "A lonely place, a Pond" by which an old man was, far from all house or home.

The later poems of course use the concept of grace in a more orthodox Christian way. "Nature's grace," which in these late poems operates rather through the lucid emblemization of natural objects, rather than through their more complex and obscure suggestions, is seen as inadequate without spiritual grace; that is, it can only operate properly on the wise and virtuous, unlike the "gracious spirit" of The Prelude, which acts on the careless and thoughtless:

what are helps of time and place
When wisdom stands in need of nature's grace;
Why do good thoughts, invoked or not, descend,
Like Angels from their bowers, our virtues to befriend;
If yet to-morrow, unbelie'd, may say
'I come to open out, for fresh display,
The elastic vanities of yesterday?'
("Evening Voluntaries" VI, 20-26)

The grace of God is seen working through nature in "Composed upon an Evening of Extraordinary Splendour and Beauty," when the beauty of the sky recalls the "celestial light" of childhood vision:

If aught unworthy be my choice,
From THEE if I would swerve;
Oh, let Thy grace remind me of the light
Full early lost, and fruitlessly deplored;
Which, at this moment, on my waking sight
Appears to shine, by miracle restored.
(71-76)

In yet another "Evening Voluntary," God's grace is seen as working directly on the mind, and preparing it for nature, rather than working through nature. This is very different from the earlier manifestations of the sense of an external power, and indeed is purely orthodox. He writes of Nature:

Nor has her gentle beauty power to move
With genuine rapture and with fervent love
The soul of Genius, if he dare to take
Life's rule from passion craved for passion's sake;
Untaught that meekness is the cherished bent
Of all the truly great and all the innocent.
But who is innocent? By grace divine,
Not otherwise, O Nature! we are thine,
Through good and evil thine, in just degree
Of rational and manly sympathy.
("Evening Voluntaries," IV, 10-19)

The various stages of the concept of the external power influencing the mind of man through the senses overlap greatly of course, but fall roughly into these stages: a general sense of a life in nature like the life of man; a stage of animistic
language when the power is embodied in "Spirits" even "genii"; the power as nature; Nature's grace; and the grace of God. Most of these seem to be expressing essentially the same phenomenon, but divine grace is purely supernatural.

v. The Anima Mundi

All these stages show a power working on the mind which though it works through natural means is not purely natural but is partly voluntary and therefore intellectual. The essential difference between Wordsworth and the empiricists is that Wordsworth's poetic universe was essentially intellectual; the intellect is generally produced by an interaction of man and nature, though at times it seems entirely the product of nature's work on the mind, and at other times like a pure radiation from the mind shining on nature. However, certainly Wordsworth did not see man as moving through an inert and purposeless world.

The empiricists and the idealists differ fundamentally over this problem of what causes and what maintains life or motion. If motion is not inherent in matter, as Descartes thought, how is it begun and how maintained? The empiricists believed that the Creator started the movements of a universe which was then self-activating. The English Platonists, however, understood creation as constant process: Cudworth, using Coleridge's favourite quotation from St. Paul, wrote that "in the bodies of animals, the true and proper cause of motion, or the determination thereof at least, is not the matter itself organized, but the soul as either cogitative or plastically self-active, vitally united thereunto, and naturally ruling over it. But in the
whole world it is either God himself, originally impressing a certain quantity of
motion upon the matter of the universe, and constantly conserving the same,
according to that saying of the Scripture, In him we live and move, ...
or else it is instrumentally an inferior created spirit, soul or life of nature" (True
Intellectual System, Bk. I, ch. v: II, 668-69). Coleridge was fond of
contrasting St. Paul's "In Him we live and move and have our Being" with a
hypothetical Lockean "From God we had our being" for he deplored the belief in
total separation of Creator and Created Universe, with its implications of a material
universe and isolated man. Wordsworth does not formulate his attitude in the
same way, but he too rejects the idea of the separation of Creator and Creation,
saying that "there is nothing in the course of the religious education adopted in this
country and in the use made byus of the Holy Scriptures, that appears to me so
injurious as the perpetually talking about making by God" (MY, Pt. 2, 189: to
Catherine Clarkson, January, 1815). There is throughout his work the same sense
of spirit in nature and of man as an active power in communication with other
active powers. Such a view is obviously close to the concept of the anima mundi
as expressed by writers whom Wordsworth is known to have read and admired, such
as Plato in the Timaeus and Virgil in the Aeneid:

Principio caelum ac terras camposque liquentis
lucentemque globum lunae Titanique astra
spiritus intus alit, totamque infusa per artus
mens agitat molem et magno se corpore miscet.
Inde hominum pecudumque genus, vitaeque volantium
et quae marmoreo fert monstra sub aequore pontus
igneus est ollis vigor et caelestis origo
seminibus, quantum non noxia corpora tardant
terrenique hebetant artus moribundaque membra.
(VI, 724-32)
Newton's "much subtiler Medium than Air" is obviously closely related to this ancient notion of the anima mundi, as the following passage would suggest:

And is not this Medium the same with that Medium by which Light is refracted and reflected, and by whose Vibrations Light communicates Heat to Bodies, and is put into Fits of easy Reflexion and easy Transmission?

And do not the Vibrations of the Medium in hot Bodies contribute to the intenseness and duration of their Heat? And do not hot Bodies communicate their heat to contiguous cold ones by the vibrations of this Medium propagated from them unto the cold ones? And is not this Medium exceedingly more rare and subtile than the Air and exceedingly more elastick and active? And doth it not readily pervade all Bodies? And is it not (by its elastick force) expounded through all the Heavens . . . ?

Newton clearly did not believe that the Creator was totally separated from his Creation, that "from God we had our being." He rejected as too mechanistic the Cartesian concept of motion as an attribute of matter, and proposed this hypothetical effluvium as the cause of motion, reasoning that "the vis inertiae is a passive Principle by which Bodies persist in their Motion or Rest, receive Motion in proportion to the Force impressing it, and resist as much as they are resisted. By this principle alone there never could have been any motion in the world. Some other Principle was necessary for putting Bodies into Motion; and now they are in Motion some other Principle is necessary for conserving the Motion" (Opticks, p.397: Query 31). Rader (p.45) notes the similarity in these respects between Newton and the Cambridge Platonists, whom he admired, and goes on to
suggest an echo between Newton's "subtle spirits and active principles in nature" and the "active principle" passage at the beginning of Book IX of The Excursion. S.G. Dunn suggests that such a hypothesis solved Wordsworth's problem of correlating a real life in nature and man, and a distinct life in God.  

A similar concept of the universe was held by the English Platonist, Shaftesbury, whose ideas of the inward eye and the active mind were also similar to Wordsworth's and whom Wordsworth respected. The unity of all things is one of Shaftesbury's themes: in the Characteristicks, and in the following passage it is expressed in a combination of ecstasies and scientific explanation:

All things in this world are united. For as the branch is united with the tree, so is the tree as immediately with the earth, air, and water, which feed it. As much as the fertile mould is fitted to the tree, as much as the strong and upright trunk of the oak or elm is fitted to the twining branches of the vine or ivy; so much are the very leaves, the seeds, and fruits of these trees fitted to the various animals; these again to one another, and to which they are, as appendices, in a manner fitted and joined; as either by wings for the air, fins for the water, feet for the earth; and by other correspondent inward parts of a more curious frame and texture. Thus in contemplating all on earth, we must of necessity view all in one, as holding to one common stock.  

(Characteristicks ii, 287; quoted by Rader, p.55)  

The anima mundi vein in Wordsworth's poetry has been adequately discussed
elsewhere, and I will not elaborate on it further. It is important to note, however, that here as elsewhere Wordsworth is closer to a Platonic than to an empiricist tradition.

vi. Berkeley and the Language of God

However, there is one English empiricist who does seem relevant to this vein in Wordsworth's thought. This is George Berkeley, and not only the more Platonic later Berkeley of Siris to whom Beach refers (p. 71) but the younger Berkeley, the critic of Locke. His possible contribution to Wordsworth's thought has been noted by several scholars, the best of whom in this regard is probably Hans Joachim Oertel. Rader observes that "in combining a sensationist theory of knowledge with an immanent theism, Berkeley may have contributed substantially to Wordsworth's religion of Nature" (p. 47). Ellen Douglas Leyburn, too, makes large claims: "a rereading of the entire Prelude with Berkeley in mind shows more convincingly than could any collection of isolated passages from it, how wholeheartedly Wordsworth grasped and clung to the central tenet of Berkeley's system, which is the placing of spiritual perception as a paramount in the relation between man and the universe."

Much of her evidence however suggests a confused idea of either Wordsworth's or Berkeley's meaning. Yet there are important similarities which have never been adequately discussed. These similarities seem helpful to the understanding of Wordsworth rather because the parallelism underlines certain aspects of his work than because his work is likely to have been influenced by Berkeley in these aspects.
Geoffrey Warnock says of Berkeley that "he is clearly made most uncomfortable by the view that what there really is in the world, is, as Locke held, an inert, featureless 'stupid' something, of which we know nothing except that it exists and is named 'matter.' Berkeley would detest so brutish a world as this, even if the assertion of its existence had not appeared to him to bristle with gross mistakes and disastrous consequences" (p.92). Berkeley questions the foundations of Locke's belief in matter as "he cannot claim to have discovered it by observation, since in Locke's own view the objects of observation are always, necessarily, and only ideas; we cannot ... actually perceive external objects, but are aware only of the ideas they cause" (Warnock, p.100) Now matter, Berkeley asserts, being by definition dead and inert, cannot cause anything. Any causation must be intellectual, and since we are aware from experience that we cause few of the impressions of our senses by our own intellects, we can assume that our sense impressions are caused by an external intellectual power, which is God. A New Theory of Vision argues for the visible world as the language of God; The Principles of Human Knowledge and most of the later works extend this, and all of the senses are seen as the media of divine communication. The primary insistence is still on the eyes, however, and this visible language of God warns us and enables us to survive and to act providently:

Since you cannot deny, that the great Mover and Author of Nature constantly explaineth Himself to the eyes of men by the sensible intervention of arbitrary signs which have no similitude or connection with the things signified; so as, by compounding and disposing them,
to suggest and exhibit an endless variety of objects differing
in nature, time, and place; thereby informing and directing men
how to act with respect to things distant and future, as well as
near and present. In consequence, I say, of your own sentiments
and concessions, you have as much reason to think, the Universal
Agent or God speaks to your eyes, as you can have for thinking
any particular person speaks to your ears.  

(Alciphron IV, xii: III, 157).

This concept of a divine visual language relates to Wordsworth's poetry in two
ways: it can be considered profitably in relation to Wordsworth's active external
power working on man's mind; and it underlines the significant importance in
Wordsworth's visual world of what seems rather than what causes that seeming.

The world which Wordsworth creates in his poetry reflects his view of the
creation as full of life, a life which is closely directed towards the welfare of
mankind and operates through the senses, and especially the eye, to this end;
all the various ways of communicating the nature of the active external power
agree in this respect. This is precisely how Berkeley describes the operations of
the divine visual language:

this optic language hath a necessary connexion with knowledge, wisdom,
and goodness. It is equivalent to a constant creation, betokening an
immediate act of power and providence. It cannot be accounted for by
mechanical principles, by atoms, attractions, or effluvia . . . But this
visual language proves, not a Creator merely, but a provident Governor,
actually and intimately present and attentive to all our interests and
motions, who watches over our conduct, and takes care of our
minutest actions and designs, throughout the whole course of our
lives, informing, admonishing, and directing incessantly, in a most
evident and sensible manner. \[\text{Alciphron IV, xiv: III, 159-60}\]

This seems to me extremely illuminating in relation to Wordsworth's concept of
an external power and its role in the life of man.

There are also possible indications of Wordsworth's reading of Berkeley in
his references to visible things as speaking a language, and it is very probable
that Wordsworth would have realised the Berkleian nature of such phrases in his
earlier poetry, for Coleridge would surely have pointed them out to him,
recognizing as he did the Berkleian undertones in his own poetry (which are
discussed in chapter one). The Wanderer tells the Solitary that he will find
restoration in the natural world

Where living things and things inanimate,
Do speak at Heaven's command to eye and ear,
And speak to social reason's inner sense,
With inarticulate language.

\[\text{Exc. IV, 1204-07}\]

which seems strikingly Berkleian. Oertel (p. 130) writes that "Expostulation and
Reply," of which the language is very close to the passage just quoted, shows
for the first time, in the lines "this mighty sum Of things forever speaking,"
Wordsworth using the concept of Nature as the language of God, and true
perception as conversation with God. Oertel goes on to quote as relevant
"early converse with the works of God" \[\text{Prelude VII, 742}\] and outward things
done visibly for other minds, words, signs, symbols or actions" (Prelude, III, 174). He also refers to "the language of the sense" from "Tintern Abbey" as having a Berkleian relevance, as does E.D. Leyburn. Certainly there does seem to be a strong Berkleian element in this poem; for not only is "nature and the language of the sense" spoken of as "The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse, / The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul / of all my moral being," which shows that this external power or language has the same providential role in the life of man as has Berkeley's language of God; but also the unity of things is described as "A motion and a spirit, that impels / All thinking things, all objects of all thought / and flows through all things" (my italics). The created universe, apart from the motion and the spirit is seen as existing in its role in perception. Nature is "all objects of all thought" while man is "all thinking things." All is essentially of the intellect. This is very close to Berkeley, who believed that the essential being of "material" things was to be perceived, and that the essential being of persons was to perceive. His universe too is intellectual. Nevertheless the difference must be acknowledged. The language of the sense is not the language of God, and the world of Wordsworth in "Tintern Abbey" though intellect-filled is not explicitly God-filled in consequence as is Berkeley's world.

As our eyes, according to Berkeley, communicate to our mind the language of God, rather than ideas which represent a reality beyond perception, then naturally we should be concerned with what we do see, the actual images before our eyes, and not with a "real" object which does not exist and which if it did
exist we could not know directly. Through habit our minds learn to interpret appearances so that we can act on them: distance, for instance, is estimated almost unconsciously. Berkeley claims that "I neither see distance itself nor anything that I take to be at a distance." Warnock comments that "Berkeley is not, presumably, denying that we take ourselves to see things at a distance; for this we certainly do. Rather he is suggesting that what we actually do see is not at a distance and is not even what we take to be at a distance. I may take myself to be seeing the moon at a distance of 240,000 miles; and the moon really is at that distance away; but then it is not, strictly speaking the moon that I see. What I actually see is 'a small, round, luminous flat'; and this neither is, nor is considered to be, at the distance and of the size of the moon itself" (p. 35).

The object of our vision is precisely what we see. Thus appearances have a new value and importance in the Berkleian scheme, and in this he is in complete contrast with Locke, to whom appearance was illusory, and the unperceived material reality bleak, colourless and silent. Addison expresses Locke's world-picture thus:

Things would make but a poor appearance to the eye, if we saw them only in their proper figures and motions ... We are everywhere entertained with pleasing shows and apparitions; we discover imaginary glories in the heavens, and in the earth, and see some of the visionary beauty poured out upon the whole creation; but what a rough unsightly sketch of Nature should we be entertained with, did all her colouring disappear, and the several distinctions of light and shade vanish? in short, our souls
are at present delightfully lost and bewildered in a pleasing delusion, 
and we walk about like the enchanted hero of a romance, who sees 
beautiful castles, woods, and meadows; and at the same time hears 
the warbling of birds and the purling of streams; but upon the finishing 
of some secret spell, the fantastic scene breaks up, and the disconsolate 
knight finds himself upon a barren heath or solitary desert. 24 

Now what is to Addison the "proper figures and motions" of things, to 
Berkeley is a philosopher's fiction; while what is to Addison "pleasing shows and 
apparitions" is to Berkeley the vital part of our visual experience, as it was to 
Wordsworth as a poet. He was certainly conscious of the silent and colourless 
nature of the conventional Lockean world-picture, for he refers in a note to 
"Tintern Abbey" with admiration to a a line of Young's which comes from a 
passage expressing such a view. 25 What we move in, learn from, and love in 
the external world is what we see, not our dim understanding of a hypothetical 
"what is." Many of the most intense visual impressions recorded in Wordsworth's 
poems describe with scrupulous and scientific care optical phenomena of a kind 
with which he would probably have been familiar through a reading of Newton's 
Opticks; it is the appearance which is carefully recorded, for it was the 
appearance which worked on his mind and aroused his imagination; the scientific 
explanation for that appearance, which concerned Newton (see for instance, 
Opticks, 347: query 16), is ignored as totally irrelevant to poetry about the mind 
and the poet's imagination. Yet it is perhaps the adult's conscious knowledge of 
these laws combined with a very intense memory of their operations on these
particular occasions which make the poet able to realise these moments with such accuracy and strength. In the boat-stealing episode of *The Prelude*, the lower and nearer peak hides the higher and more distant peak, until the boat moves far out into the lake, and suddenly the more distant peak is seen:

from behind that craggy steep till then
The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge,
As if with voluntary power instinct
Uproared its head. I struck and struck again,
And growing still in stature the grim shape
Towered up between me and the stars, and still,
For so it seemed, with purpose of its own
And measured motion like a living thing,
Strode after me.

(I, 377-85)

It is through such appearances that the "Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe" teaches us eventually to recognize "a grandeur in the beating of the heart."
The memories of skating at night are full of sound and movement, but perhaps most vivid are the strange and impressive appearances of Nature at such a time:

Not seldom from the uproar I retired
Into a silent bay, or sportively
Glanced sideway, leaving the tumultuous throng,
To cut across the reflex of a star
That fled, and flying still before me, gleamed
Upon the glassy plain; and oftentimes,
When we had given our bodies to the wind,
And all the shadowy banks on either side
Came sweeping through the darkness, spinning still
The rapid line of motion, then at once
Have I, reclining back upon my heels,
Stopped short: yet still the solitary cliffs
Wheeled by me--even as if the earth had rolled
With visible motion her diurnal round!
Behind me did they stretch in solemn train,
Feebler and feeble, and I stood and watched
Till all was tranquil as a dreamless sleep.

(I, 447-63)
The star's reflection appears to be at one point, as if it can be cut across, like a mark in the ice; but it exists only to the eyes and glides in front of the skater as he chases it; while the cliffs seem to the eye to be moving while the skater is still, and to wheel past at an ever-slackening pace, while in fact cliffs and skater move at the same unaltered pace together in earth's diurnal round. What impresses the poet and fills his mind with forms, and what he therefore describes exists only as appearance, and it is appearance which acts on the growing mind. The action of the external world on the mind of the Wanderer may be compared:

From that bleak torment
He many an evening, to his distant home
In solitude returning, saw the hills
Grow larger in the darkness, all alone
Beheld the stars come out above his head,
And travelled through the wood, with no one near
To whom he might confess the things he saw.
So the foundations of his mind were laid . . .
(Exc., 1, 125-32)

The foundations of the mind are laid by appearances: the tangible and measurable hills do not grow larger in the darkness, as do the visible hills; for that matter, the stars do not "come out" to common knowledge, but to the eye. The eloquence of appearance is also apparent, in a different way, in "Nutting," for it is not consideration or reproof which shames the boy but the very appearance resulting from his action:

I felt a sense of pain when I beheld
The silent trees, and saw the intruding sky.
(52-53)
In fact throughout his poems, and especially in his greater poems, the visible world is taken as what it seems and what it suggests rather than as what tangible material reality it may stand for. The most evident example of this is the way the impressive appearance of the mountain shepherds filled the poet's heart with respect and love for them, and hence for mankind:

    suddenly mine eyes
    Have glanced upon him distant a few steps,
    In size a giant, stalking through thick fog,
    His sheep like Greenland bears; or, as he stepped
    Beyond the boundary line of some hill-shadow,
    His form hath flashed upon me, glorified
    By the deep radiance of the setting sun:
    Or him have I descried in distant sky,
    A solitary object and sublime,
    Above all height! like an aerial cross
    Stationed alone upon a spiry rock
    Of the Chartreuse, for worship. Thus was man
    Ennobled outwardly before my sight,
    And thus my heart was early introduced
    To an unconscious love and reverence
    Of human nature.

    (VIII, 264-79)

This ennobling appearance for Wordsworth is not misleading, for the lakeland shepherds to him did lead a life of "simplicity, And beauty, and inevitable grace" (VIII, 109-10). The working of nature, or God's visual language, to use Berkeley's own language, worked in his mind providentially to transform his understanding and attitudes. It is this active process which is missed by those whose concept of reality is of a material world outside human experience, those who (as indeed I have done from the necessity of making distinctions) call such experiences "appearances" or dismiss them as shadows or delusion. Wordsworth recognizes that his own understanding was of a moving and living reality whereas
theirs was of a lifeless and static mental artefact, as Locke's material world seemed to Berkeley:

Call ye these appearances
Which I beheld of shepherds in my youth,
This sanctity of Nature given to man--
A shadow, a delusion, ye who pore
On the dead letter, miss the spirit of things;
Whose truth is not a motion or a shape
Instinct with vital functions, but a block
Or waxen image which yourselves have made,
And ye adore! But blessed be the God
Of Nature and of Man that this was so;
That men before my inexperienced eyes
Did first present themselves thus purified,
Removed, and to a distance that was fit;
And so we all of us in some degree
Are let to knowledge, wheresoever led,
And howsoever.

(VIII, 293-308)

Wordsowth treats things as they appear in his poetry in the avowed belief that this was his especial task as a poet: "The appropriate business of poetry, (which, nevertheless, if genuine, is as permanent as pure science,) her appropriate employment, her privilege and her duty, is to treat of things not as they are, but as they appear; not as they exist in themselves, but as they seem to exist to the senses, and to the passions" (Grosart, II, 106: Essay Supplementary to the Preface 1815). Now this makes it quite clear that Wordsworth, writing in prose in 1815, was no Berklean, for he makes a distinction between things existing in themselves and things as they seem to exist to the senses which no Berklean could make.

In his poetry he is never concerned to explain the optical phenomena which he records so precisely. He does not attempt to explain why hills should seem larger in the darkness or how at a certain distance a smaller but nearer thing can
conceal a larger but farther thing. It is not relevant, because what matters is the intensity of the visual experience, and the emotion and understanding arising from it. In his poetic stress on the world of appearances and their role in the mental life of man he is quite possibly influenced by a reading of Berkeley. In his prose however, communication has a practical rather than an intellectual or artistic purpose, and he is ready to explain. In the Guide to the Lakes for instance, he explains the appearance of a magnificent castle within the lake or a newly created island. Thus in ordinary communication Wordsworth was prepared to accept the conventional Lockean materialism of the age. When writing poetry, however, he had deeper concerns than in ordinary communication, and had to reject such a view for others which could communicate more closely his perception of the nature of the mind. The very fact that he was prepared to use systems of ideas, as myths, as means of communication, shows that his interest in philosophy was quite different from that of the professional philosopher. He was not concerned with rational acceptance of a structure of ideas but with the communication of his own perception of thought, feeling and object.

vi. The Imagination.

The external power working on the mind of man works through natural objects. Naturally, therefore, Wordsworth observes natural objects with scrupulous care: as a poet he consciously "endeavoured to look steadily at my subject" (Grosart II, 84; Preface to Lyrical Ballads, 1800). He judges other poets by the same criterion; he wrote of Dryden "that his cannot be the language
of the 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
object, Dryden always spoils the passage" (EY, p. 641 : to W. Scott, 7 November,
1804).27 Evidently Wordsworth assumed a close connection between the
language of the imagination and images from Nature. It seems that while the
ture purpose of the imagination may be to go beyond nature, the formation of
the imagination can only come about through a close and respectful relationship
with nature, as is of course suggested by the "Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe"
lines, which show "the influence of natural objects in calling forth and
strengthening the imagination in boyhood and early youth," according to their
title. Imagination is an intellectual faculty, yet based firmly on the senses.
The immature imagination is "duped by shows, enslaved by words, corrupted by
mistaken delicacy and false refinements, as not having even attended with care
to the reports of the senses and therefore deficient grossly in the rudiments of its
own power" (Grosart I, 323: "Answer to the letter of Mathetes," 1809). As
Heffernan says "All too often his references to this important faculty [the
imagination], which holds the key to his theory of poetry, are fragmentary and
confused,"28 and I have no intention here of attempting to sort out Wordsworth's
changing meanings. Yet as a corrective to the work of such critics as Heffernan,
who stresses the intellectualizing role of the imagination, and Hartman, who
stresses the opposition between Imagination and Nature in his poetry, it seems
necessary to reaffirm that Wordsworth understood the power and strength of the
imagination as springing from the attentive ear and eye.
Yet the imagination is essentially to Wordsworth a creative power. It creates by "innumerable processes; and in none does it more delight than in that of consolidating numbers into unity and dissolving and separating unity into number,—alterations proceeding from, and governed by a sublime consciousness of the soul in her own mighty and almost divine powers" (Grosart II, 138: Preface to the edition of 1815). And Wordsworth asserts that in distinguishing his Poems of the Imagination, his use of the word "has no reference to images that are merely a faithful copy, existing in the mind, of absent external objects; but is a word of higher import, denoting operations of the mind upon these objects, and processes of creation or composition, governed by certain fixed laws" (Grosart II, 1:35: Preface to the edition of 1815). Thus the imagination is not concerned with the mere recording of natural objects; it is a mental activity partly working on natural objects, and is evidence of the powers of the human intellect. Yet still, the origins of its power are said to come from the senses. It is hard to reconcile these two aspects of the imagination, and power originating in the soul, and the power originating in the senses. However it is surely false to suggest that the two aspects need no reconciliation because they are two stages of understanding at different periods. It is true that in earlier years Wordsworth was more likely to write as if the imagination's strength came from the reports of the senses, and in later years as if it were an intellectual power. Nevertheless in most discussions there is this apparent ambivalence. This ambivalence seems to be a recognition of the complex interchange between the mind and the senses both in the process of perception and in the exercise of the imagination. The active external power
operates through the sense on a mind which, active in its own right, organizes the impressions of the senses and thus transforms them. (The next chapter will show how this interchange relates to the pattern of Wordsworth's impressions of the senses and thus transforms them. As I have shown in chapter two, the interior disturbance of Wordsworth's early twenties was caused partly by the despotism of the eye, by a too avid seeking for the external, but his cure came about mainly through the forcible and early "visitings of imaginative power" which came through this early experience with natural objects (Prelude XII, 174-207). (The next chapter will show how this interchange relates to the pattern of Wordsworth's thought, and to philosophic thought.) Occasionally this can be understood from prose statements: writing to Coleridge about a proposed method of organizing his collected works, he described one of his classes of poems as "relating to natural objects and their influence on the mind either as growing or in an advanced state, to begin with the simply human and conclude with the highly imaginative as the Tintern Abbey to be immediately preceded by the Cuckoo Poems, the Nutting, after having passed through all stages from objects as they affect the mere human being from properties with which they are endowed, and they affect the mind by properties conferred; by the life found in them, or their life given" (MY, Part I, 335: 5 May, 1809). That natural objects have both life in them and life given by the mind is the explanation of their ambiguous relation to the imagination. The mind's perception of their own life stirs the imagination; the more powerful imagination resulting gives new life to the objects through its ordered perception. Yet any generalized explanation of such a process over-
simplifies and thus obscures the process as it works in the poems. It is necessary to observe the poet at work. So I shall finish this chapter with a brief consideration of three passages, all of which are explicitly connected by Wordsworth with the imagination, and all of which are evidently concerned with the active power external to the mind. It is partly because of their evident concern with this active power external to the mind, their extreme closeness to the events or scenes which inspired them, that W. J. B. Owen considers these three poems as not properly of the imagination, in the sense that they describe but do not employ the imagination, for they do not rise towards general truth, and are not the embodiments of universal ideas, and because the imagination in these lines receives rather than creates. I think that in these poems the imagination is at work, but that the general truths it communicates are implicit, rather than explicit.

"There was a boy," which begins the Poems of the Imagination in the Collected Poems, is concerned with "one of the earliest processes of Nature in the development of this faculty. Guided by one of my own primary consciousnesses, I have represented a commutation and transfer of internal feelings, cooperating with external accidents to plant, for immortality, images of sound and sight, in the celestial soil of the Imagination" (Preface 1815, quoted Prelude, p.547). In the midst of his expectation of further hootings from the owls, the sights and sounds of Winander impress themselves deeply on the boy's mind; and the emphasis in the poem is on the passivity and openness of the mind, and the active force of nature:
Then, sometimes in that silence, while he hung
Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise
Has carried far into his heart the voice
Of mountain-torrents; or the visible scene
Would enter unawares into his mind
With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
Its woods, and that uncertain heaven received
Into the bosom of the steady lake.
(18-25)

Without his will, a shock carries the voice of the mountain torrents far into
his heart; unawares the visible scene enters his mind; the external becomes the
internal; in a submerged image of the process at work in the boy, the heaven
is received into the bosom of the lake, a recurrent submerged image in
Wordsworth's poetry. It appears in the 1794 manuscript additions to An
Evening Walk:

Yes, thou art blest, my friend, with mind awake
To Nature's impulse like this living lake,
Whose mirror makes the landscapes charms its own
With touches soft as those to Memory known;
While exquisite of sense the mighty mass
All vibrates to the lightest gales that pass.
(PW, I, 12; app.crit.)

It is glimpsed in another description of a boy in a similar landscape:

the calm
And dead still water lay upon my mind
Even with a weight of pleasure, and the sky,
Never before so beautiful, sank down
Into my heart, and held me like a dream.
(Prelude, II, 170-74)

The sky, the external object, is absorbed and reflected by the lake, or the mind
or heart. The imagination is surely at work in the way the image communicates the
sense of the whole verse paragraph which it ends. In The Prelude, this passage
illustrates the operations of the external powers:

A wiser spirit is at work for us,
A better eye than theirs, most prodigal
Of blessings, and most studious of our good.

(Prelude V, 360-62)

Thus we see how in childhood the Imagination, though present in potential in the child, is developed and fostered through the eye and ear, or through the external power in natural objects, quite unconsciously and involuntarily.

The developed and cultivated imagination of the poet is shown as responding quite differently to the external power. The image given to the eyes is not merely absorbed into the mind involuntarily and accepted by it; it is immediately transformed by it, given meaning, and this perhaps complex meaning, understood as it is instantly and simultaneously, rather than through the logical sequences of rational thought, can immediately deepen or relieve the feelings. This is seen in some unpublished lines, unpublished no doubt because although the image is very beautiful, its import is merely suggested, though its effect is stated, and the descriptive language is still uncertain. On a visit to London, in 1808, Wordsworth walked across the city in the early hours of the morning, deeply troubled by Coleridge's physical and mental sufferings:

Press'd with conflicting thoughts of love and fear
I parted from thee, Friend, and took my way
Through the great City, pacing with an eye
Downcast, ear sleeping and feet masterless
That were sufficient guide unto themselves,
And step by step went pensively. Now, mark!
Not how my trouble was entirely hush'd,
(That might not be) but how, by sudden gift,
Gift of Imagination's holy power,
My Soul in her uneasiness received
An anchor of stability.—It chanced
That while I was thus pacing, I raised up
My heavy eyes and instantly beheld,
Saw at a glance in that familiar spot
A visionary scene—a length of street
Laid open in its morning quietness,
Deep, hollow, unobstructed, vacant, smooth,
And white with winter's purest white, as fair,
As fresh and spotless as he ever sheds
On fields or mountain. Moving Form was none
Save here and there a shadowy Passenger
Slow, shadowy, silent, dusky, and beyond
And high above this winding length of street,
This moveless and unpeopled avenue,
Pure, silent, solemn, beautiful was seen
The huge majestic Temple of St. Paul
In awful sequestration, through a veil,
Through its own sacred veil of falling snow.
(PW IV, 374-75)

As in "Resolution and Independence," the uneasy soul is given an "anchor of stability" by a sudden vision: the sight of St. Paul's through its veil of snow brings the same reassurance as did the sight and the story of the Leech-gatherer; indeed the trouble is similar, for while in "Resolution and Independence" the poet was troubled by the "despondency and madness" which seemed a likely fate for him as a poet, here he is troubled by the despondency of one dearly-loved fellow poet. The initial gift is from without; the faculty of sight is stressed: "I lifted up my heavy eyes, and instantly beheld, saw at a glance"; and the visible scene is described with some care. Yet the gift is thought of as springing from "Imagination's holy power"; in a letter in which he told Sir George Beaumont of this incident, he wrote "I cannot say how much I was affected at this unthought-of sight in such a place, and what blessing I felt there is in habits of exalted imagination" (PW IV, 476). The educated
imagination seizes instantly on the image, both in its own beauty and in its relevance to the troubled mind. London, whose chaos and corruption and triviality Wordsworth disliked so much, is transformed by the snow and the stillness, as it once was seen from Westminster Bridge to be transformed by the morning light. It is cleansed and its innocence restored (by "purest," "fresh," "spotless" snow), its uproar is stilled (the avenue is "moveless and unpeopled") and above all, it is ennobled, for the splendour and mystery of St. Paul's, a triumph of human art, and a centre of the worship of God, dominates the quiet scene "the huge majestic temple of St. Paul/ In awful sequestration, through a veil/ Through its own sacred veil of falling snow" (the words "veil" and "temple" together, recalling the crucifixion, reinforce the solemnity of the building as a religious symbol). The imagination, by grasping the order and beauty which transforms a "familiar spot" into a "visionary scene," gives tranquillity to a mind troubled by the confused and unhappy life of his friend, perhaps by granting him the understanding that a similar beauty and peace can transform Coleridge. It is surely significant that it is a cathedral, a great work of religious art, which dominates the scene which so eases the poet's mind when troubled about a great and essentially religious artist. Faith, art, and order are freshly understood as enduring values, despite the mutability and disorder of the ordinary world.

The imagination must be cultivated; it needs peace, beauty and intellectual exercise in order to flourish. But even the educated imagination is not a function of the will. The moments when it awakes comes suddenly, unexpected
and unsolicited. The poet in the St. Paul's lines, is "pacing with an eye/
Downcast, ear sleeping and feet masterless." The senses are dormant, not
giving even ordinary information. In his ascent of Snowdon, the poet's eyes
are similarly cast earthward, until

at my feet the ground appeared to brighten,
And with a step or two seemed brighter still;
Nor was time given to ask or learn the cause,
For instantly a light upon the turf
Fell like a flash, and lo! as I looked up,
The Moon hung naked in a firmament
Of azure without cloud . . .

(Prelude XIV, 35-41)

The imagination operates suddenly, like a flash, when the eyes are bent
earthwards or the senses otherwise preoccupied. This is also seen in "A Night-
Piece," where the traveller walks "with unobserving eye/ Bent earthwards"
until he is aroused by "a pleasant instantaneous beam" and he too looks up to
see the clear moon.

This poem is extraordinarily interesting in its demonstration of the workings
of the imagination, both because of its power of suggestion, and because of its
relationship with the Snowdon episode of The Prelude. Wordsworth himself
said that this poem and "Yew Trees" were among the best "for the imaginative
power displayed in them." It should be quoted in full:

The sky is overcast
With a continuous cloud of texture close,
Heavy and wan, all whitened by the Moon,
Which through that veil is indistinctly seen,
A dull contracted circle, yielding light
So feebly spread that not a shadow falls,
Chequering the ground--from rock, plant, tree, or tower.
At length a pleasant instantaneous gleam
Startles the pensive traveller while he treads
His lonesome path, with unobserving eye
Bent earthwards; he looks up—the clouds are split
Asunder,—and above his head he sees
The clear Moon, and the glory of the heavens.
There in a black-blue vault she sails along,
Followed by multitudes of stars, that, small
And sharp, and bright, along the dark abyss
Drive as she drives: how fast they wheel away,
Yet vanish not!—the wind is in the tree,
But they are silent;—still they roll along
Immeasurably distant; and the vault,
Built round by those white clouds, enormous clouds;
Still deepens its unfathomable depth.
At length the Vision closes and the mind,
Not undisturbed by the delight it feels,
Which slowly settles into peaceful calm,
Is left to muse upon the solemn scene.

The poem shows, as does the St. Paul's fragment, how in a state of distraction,
a sudden vision of a beauty and power impresses itself on the mind, and
changes the state of mind. The "pensive traveller" is startled into consciousness of the visible world by the sudden clearing of the clouds over the moon.

But his vision is not the only vision in the poem. He was unobserving while the sky was clouded, but the clouded sky is nevertheless observed, and with as close an observation as the cloudless vault. There are thus by implication two pairs of eyes, the narrator's and the traveller's, though they finally merge into "the mind" which is left to muse upon the solemn scene. The figure of the traveller, startled by the sudden light is perhaps a figure of the sudden intercession of the imagination through nature, showing the same process which is at work in the St. Paul's fragment, and in the Snowdon episode, in "I wandered lonely" and many other poems. The unnamed presence of the narrator is a
demonstration of the education of the imagination through observation of the common face of nature. Both narrator and traveller are in fact aspects of Wordsworth's own mind.

Now the two states of mind are reflected by the two states of the sky: the careful but undistinguishing and unillumined observation of natural objects by the narrator is paralleled in these lines:

The sky is overcast
With a continuous cloud of texture close,
Heavy and wan, all whitened by the Moon,
Which through that veil is indistinctly seen,
A dull, contracted circle, yielding light
So feebly spread that not a shadow falls,
Chequering the ground—from rock, plant, tree, or tower.

(1-7)

The traveller's mind, suddenly awakened by the power of natural objects is paralleled in these lines:

above his head he sees
The clear Moon, and the glory of the heavens.
There, in a black-blue vault she sails along,
Followed by multitudes of stars, that, small
And sharp, and bright, along the dark abyss
Drive as she drives: how fast they wheel away,
Yet vanish not! the wind is in the tree,
But they are silent;—still they roll along
Immeasurably distant; and the vault,
Built round by those white clouds, enormous clouds,
Still deepens its unfathomable depth.

(12-22)

It is beyond doubt that these skies are described with precision and love, and for the sake of their own beauty. But it also seems beyond doubt that the moon here is a figure of the imagination, commonly contracted and dull, and illuminating so dimly that "not a shadow falls/ Chequering the ground from rock, plant, tree, or
That is, in such a feeble state of imagination, natural objects have no mental extension beyond the image imprinted on the senses. The moon becoming apparent arouses the mind, as the imagination does, and makes it conscious of the grandeur and power of the universe which is normally forgotten; the stars "immeasurably distant" and silent in their movements, beyond the reach of the wind.

The moon thus has here the same function that it has in the lines on the climbing of Snowdon episode in The Prelude; it is an image of the mental powers of man. And there are closer similarities, too, between the two passages: in both there is at first the obscuring mist or cloud; in the Snowdon episode the poet raises himself above the mist, while in "A Night-Piece" the wind breaks the cloud; in both cases the sudden light on the ground draws attention to the unveiled moon. In both cases there is a vault built of cloud or mist; in the Snowdon episode the moon and the poet look down into the break in the mist from which arises the roar of waters, while in "A Night-Piece" the traveller looks up through the vault of clouds through which he sees the moon and also the stars.

It seems to me that these two chasms in mist and cloud, both of which are described (one directly) as the "dark abyss" are exposing the proper objects of the imagination—the mysterious voices of water, the immeasurable distances of the stars.

Both these visions record real scenes. Dorothy Wordsworth records the experience on which "A Night-Piece" was founded, in the Alfoxden Journal for 25 January, 1798: "The sky spread over with one continuous cloud, whitened by
the light of the moon, which, though her dim shape was seen, did not throw forth so strong a light as to chequer the earth with shadows. At once the clouds seemed to cleave asunder, and left her in the centre of a black-blue vault. She sailed along, followed by multitudes of stars, small, and bright and sharp. Their brightness seemed concentrated. (half-moon)." The ascent of Snowdon is clearly enough the record of an actual incident. Both these pieces show how Wordsworth understood the imagination, not only through their imagery, which is explicit in the Snowdon lines, implicit in "A Night-Piece," but also in their handling. In both, the imagination is both aroused by and expressed by natural objects, whose own identity is closely respected; but in both cases it is seen as a light which transforms objects. There is in Wordsworth's poetry a power external to the mind, working through natural objects; but the true purpose of this power is to arouse the mind's own power, a power which lies dormant in all minds, but which is properly developed and vigorous in the mind of the man with an educated imagination:

such minds are truly from the Deity
For they are Powers.

(Prelude XIV, 112-13)

In the next chapter I will go on to discuss some implications of the mind's activity, and the reciprocal action of the mind's power and that of the external world.
Notes

1. Young, Night Thoughts, IV, 703-05:
   Read Nature; Nature is a friend of truth
   Nature is Christian; preaches to mankind;
   And bids dead matter aid us in our crred.
Quoted by Joseph Warren Beach, The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth Century

2. Berkeley makes the same point in coming to a different conclusion. See
   Warnock, p. 89.

3. Unfortunately this encouraged an illiberal attitude to the education of women
   and the poor; see, for instance, Grosart, III, 466-67.

4. de Selincourt (Prelude, pp. 542-43) suggests that the kind of education to
   which Wordsworth refers here is that founded on Rousseau's teaching. Moorman
   also mentions Thomas Wedgwood's plans for a nursery for genius (I, 332-37).

5. Havens (p. 114) comments on this as does David Perkins in The Quest for
   Permanence: The Symbolism of Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats (Cambridge, Mass.,
   1959) pp. 52-53.


7. Piper, pp. 4-5, quoting first from Lamb's review as revised by Gifford in
   The Quarterly Review, 12, and then from The Monthly Review, 66.

8. Piper, pp. 62-63, Mr. Piper's case for the influence of such thinkers on
   Wordsworth could have been more convincing if he had been content to present them
   as one influence among many, and if he had been consequently less anxious to
   present Wordsworth's ideas of the Active Universe as already formed by the time he
   met Coleridge.

9. The relationship between "Peter Bell" and "The Ancient Mariner" is
   discussed by Kathleen Coburn in "Coleridge and Wordsworth and the Supernatural,"
   University of Toronto Quarterly, 25 (1956), 121-30.

10. The punctuation is that of MS. V.

11. The punctuation is that of 1850.
The 1805 version reads "or on the earth." The punctuation is that of 1850.


Hartman's interesting treatment of these animistic passages, though not immediately relevant to my theme, suggests their importance. He says (p.212): "How did Wordsworth raise himself from his obsession with specific place to the key notion of spots of time. I suspect the intermediate concept to have been that of genius loci or 'spirit of place.'"

Elizabeth Geen's arguments, in "The Concept of Grace in Wordsworth's poetry," PMLA, 58 (1943), 689-715, support the contention that Wordsworth's later orthodoxy is less a retreat from the naturalism of "Tintern Abbey" than a return to an earlier position, which, while all its implications may not have been realised at the time, was more in line with the later Wordsworth than with the pantheist of 1798-1802.

According to Ernest Tuveson (p.86) many eighteenth-century writers saw grace as operating through nature. It is interesting to compare his account of such writings but it is not relevant to my discussion of Wordsworth for there is no suggestion of a purposive force in nature itself—it is more like Wordsworth's later and more orthodox phase.

Acts, 17, 28.

CL, II, 866: to Wm. Sotheby, 10 September, 1802; CL, IV, 768: to C.A. Tulk, September, 1817.


See Beach, pp.71 and 86, and Havens, p.195.


It has been argued that Berkeley misunderstood Locke's ideas of substance, and that nearly all critics of the two philosophers, including Warnock, have fallen into the same error. However, I am more interested in what Locke was understood to have meant than what he actually did mean. For further discussion see Jonathan Bennet's "Substance, Reality and Primary Qualities" in American Philosophical Quarterly, 2 (1965), and Warnock's 1968 Preface.

To Young, men "Take in at once the landscape of the world, / At a small inlet which a grain might close, / And half create the wondrous world they see. / Our senses, as our reason, are divine, / But for the magic organ's powerful charm, / Earth were a rude uncoloured chaos still" (Night Thoughts, VI).


He judged most of Dryden's contemporaries and successors in the same terms precisely: "It is remarkable that, excepting the nocturnal 'Reverie' of Lady Winchilsea, and a passage or two in the 'Windsor Forest' of Pope, the poetry of the period intervening between the publication of the 'Paradise Lost' and the 'Seasons' does not contain a single new image of external Nature; and scarcely presents a familiar one from which it can be inferred that the eye of the poet had been steadily fixed upon his object, much less that his feelings had urged him to work upon it in the spirit of genuine imagination" (Grosart, II, 118: Essay Supplementary to the Preface, 1815).


C.C. Clarke, The Romantic Paradox (London, 1962), p.26, notices this image: "the lake is a living lake, and so of course is the lake of the mind. Both have depth, and take impressions; both react sensitively at the mere touch . . . an attempt is made here to create a world in which the dimensions are, indifferently, spatial and mental."

The relationship between the climbing of Snowdon episode and "A Night-Piece" has been discussed by James Kissane ("'A Night-Piece': Wordsworth's emblem of the mind," Modern Language Notes, 71 [1956], 183-86), who notes the implications which this has for the imagery of "A Night-Piece," but does not explore the parallel as fully as he might. W.J.B. Owen (p.50), also notes the similarity.

Crabbe Robinson's diary for 9 May, 1815, quoted by Havens, p.230.

Kissane writes of this passage: "This is the habitual condition of the human mind--to be clouded over with 'trivial occupations and the round/ Of ordinary intercourse,' so that the light of the imagination, like the light of the moon, is
'so feebly spread that not a shadow falls.' In this condition, the operating faculty is the understanding, 'that false secondary power/ By which we multiply distinctions.' This faculty for making precise distinctions is characterized in the first six lines of the poem . . . " I disagree with this interpretation of the passage and doubt if the lines are at all relevant to that "false secondary power." His position seems to ignore the existence of two personages in the poem.
Chapter Four: The Eye and the Active Mind: Wordsworth and the Neoplatonists

Introductory

The importance of sight to Wordsworth is seen in the stress on his poetry on light, on that which makes sight possible. Wordsworth's own natural sensitivity to effects of light is seen early on in his work: *An Evening Walk* is unified by the movement of the sun from afternoon brilliance to the last fading of twilight. This sensitivity lasted until his old age: the mostly late "Evening Voluntaries" are greatly concerned with effects of sun- and moon-light, indeed probably the last poem he wrote is concerned with moonlight; ("Evening Voluntaries," X, composed 1846, published 1850). Wordsworth's sensitivity combines with a strong literary and religious tradition, the tradition of Milton and St. John's Gospel, to make it natural to Wordsworth to express good by light, and evil by darkness. For instance, Ruth's husband in his brief spell of virtue says "'My soul from darkness is released/ Like the whole sky when to the East/ The morning doth return'" ("Ruth," 178-80). Similarly, mankind has "One sense for moral judgments, as one eye/ For the sun's light" (*Prelude*, VIII, 671-72), and "if he do but live within the light/ Of high endeavours, daily spreads abroad/ His being armed with strength that cannot fail" (*Prelude* IV, 169-71). Sight like light is an image of good; in the "Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff" liberty and philosophy are spoken of as "the eyes of the human race" (Grosart, I, 21), while in *The Convention of Cintra*, political injustice is seen as "blindness" (Grosart, I, 132).
Now while these images are fitting and effective enough, elsewhere
Wordsworth's light imagery is more potent, more essentially inwoven with his
meaning. This imagery suggests the power and activity of the mind or the eye,
and the mutuality of perception. In using such imagery, Wordsworth seems to
follow not so much the orthodox Christian tradition which tends to equate light
with God or Christ, and thus by extension with various forms of good, but the
Neoplatonic tradition, which indeed expressed the Good through light, but also
explicitly treated the intellect as light and saw perception as interaction.
Before supporting and elaborating this statement as I intend to do in this chapter,
it is necessary to show how Wordsworth's light imagery works.

i. Imagery of Sight and Light.

Much of this imagery clearly suggests the activity of the mind or the eye,
rather than its passivity, for man is seen in these images not merely as the
receiver of natural light but as the radiant centre of intellectual light. These
images show that Wordsworth saw intellectual activity as luminous: poetry, poets,
art, the mind itself, all irradiate. The Prefatory Poem to the Poetical Works
makes this clear with its brilliant assurance:

If thou indeed derivest thy light from Heaven,
Then, to the measure of that heaven-born light,
Shine, Poet! in thy place, and be content:-
The stars pre-eminent in magnitude,
And they that from the zenith dart their beams,
(Visible though they be to half the earth,
Though half a sphere be conscious of their brightness)
Are yet of no diviner origin,
No purer essence, than the one that burns,
Like an untended watch-fire, on the ridge
Of some dark mountain; or than those which seem
Humbly to hang, like twinkling winter lamps,
Among the branches of the leafless trees;
All are the undying offspring of one Sire:
Then, to the measure of the light vouchsafed,
Shine, Poet! in thy place, and be content.

To Wordsworth as to the Greeks the god of poetry and music was also the god of light. In the little ballad "The Power of Music" the London street musician, who is "An Orpheus!" and a figure of the poet or artist, sheds light on the twenty or so poor people who listen to him:

As the Moon brightens round her the clouds of the night,
So he, where he stands, is a centre of light;
It gleams on the face, there, of dusky-browed Jack,
And the pale-visaged Baker's, with basket on back.

(13-16)

In this trivial incident, Wordsworth epitomizes the power of the artist. The apparent clumsiness of the first stanza, which earns it a place in The Stuffed Owl, deliberately signals the connection of this poor street artist with the divine and the classical (the Pantheon) and the world of Learning (the street takes its name from Oxford), while at the same time suggesting a place well-known to be noisy and vulgar. The musician himself is physically blind, which further emphasizes his position as poet-figure but he is intellectually radiant. Art appears as luminous in some lines inserted in manuscript, after Prelude V, 108-09, in the passage describing the dream of the Arab and the two books. The book of prophetic verse has
power
To irradiate the spirit with a light
Piercing and vital as the solar beams
Whence joy and hope, and solace to mankind.
(Prelude, p. 142)

Wordsworth writes of his own early poem "Salisbury Plain" (later "Guilt and Sorrow") that it "broke like light from far" upon the "young imagination" of Coleridge (Prelude XHI, 360-65).

The poet (or possibly just the human spirit) is connected with light in poems in which the poet himself is imaged by the sun. In the second Evening Voluntary, "On a High Part of the Coast of Cumberland, Easter Sunday, April 7, the author's sixtythird birthday," the poet describes how

The Sun, that seemed so mildly to retire,
Flung back from distant climes a streaming fire,
Whose blaze is now subdued to tender gleams,
Prelude of night's approach with soothing dreams.
(1-4)

The force of this as a figure for the aging poet is hidden until the end of the last stanza where he prays for grace "for the brief course that must for me remain" so that he is "for a season, free/ From finite cares, to rest absorbed in Thee" as the sun's light has an interval of "tender gleams/ Prelude of night's approach" before the final darkening of its light. The sunset is also seen as an image of his own death in one of his earliest poems, "Extract from the Conclusion of a poem composed in anticipation of leaving school." He writes that wherever and whenever he is dying, he will remember his native regions:

Thus, while the Sun sinks down to rest
Far in the regions of the west,
Though to the vale no parting beam
Be given, not one memorial gleam,
A lingering light he fondly throws
On the dear hills where first he rose.

(9-14)

There are several versions of this image of the dying poet as the setting sun.²

The imagination appears as a source of light with power "To elevate the
more-than-reasoning Mind/ And colour life's dark cloud with orient rays"
("Weak is the will of man" Miscellaneous Sonnets, Part I, xxxv). The "Elegaic
Stanzas" ("Peele Castle") show this image more notably. When Wordsworth writes
of "the gleam,/ The light that never was, on sea or land,/ The consecration and
the poet's dream" with which he would have transformed his picture of Peele
Castle by a tranquil sea, he is surely writing of a kind of imagination, a kind
which he now, since his "deep distress" at his beloved brother's death, sees as
perhaps heartless, or at least as belonging to "the heart that lives alone/ Housed
in a dream at distance from the Kind." It seems that the gleam given by the
inexperienced artist's eye did not bring true vision, for "such happiness" as this
"is to be pitied, for 'tis surely blind." This poem moves in the same direction as
the Immortality Ode, of course; both poems speak of the loss of joy and vision, and
of the compensating sympathy with human suffering: the Immortality Ode, which is
the earlier poem, the first four stanzas being written in 1802 and the rest in 1804,
sees the former state of joy and vision as a higher state, and is less quietist and stoical.
In both poems, and especially the Immortality Ode, this lost joy, which wonderfully
enhances natural beauty, is seen in terms of light.

The use of light imagery in the Immortality Ode is extremely complex; part of
its power lies in its ambiguity. Yet certainly it is relevant in part to intellectual
or spiritual activity. The soul is "our life's star," the "obstinate questionings of sense" are "a fountain light of all our day" and "a master light of all our seeing." The mind sees by its own light. The "celestial light" of the young child's vision is described in terms which suggest that it is an external light (by external I mean not physical, but spiritual light from some source outside the soul, such as God or Paradise) from which the child can and must move:

The Youth, who daily from the east
   Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,
   And by the vision splendid
   Is on his way attended;
   At length the Man perceives it die away,
   And fade into the light of common day.

Yet surely the light is also seen as emanating from the soul itself; so that when this spiritual light fades, and the young man is left with only the "light of common day," it is understood as a loss of spiritual power rather than a loss of heavenly favour. CLEANTH BROOKS, 3 in a good article on the Ode, 4 noting that the facing of celestial light results not, as one might expect, in darkness, but in "the light of common day," sees this as bearing out his belief that the child is equated with the sun or the moon in the early stanzas of the poem: "If the sun, at his glorious birth, lights up a world with the glory and the freshness of a dream, a light persists even after he has begun to ascend the sky like the child growing into manhood, yet the sun gradually becomes his own prisoner. Indeed it is very easy to read the whole stanza as based on a submerged metaphor of the sun's progress: the soul is like our life's star, the sun, which has had elsewhere its setting."

Brooks also believes that earlier in the poem the child's soul is equated with the
source of light:

The poet says the rainbow and the rose are beautiful. We expect him to go on to say the same of the moon. But here with one of the nicest touches in the poem, he reverses the pattern to say, 'The moon doth with delight/ Look round her when the heavens are bare.' The moon is treated as if she were the speaker himself in his childhood, seeing the visionary gleam as she looks round her with joy. The poet cannot see the gleam but he implies that the moon can see it, and suggests how she can: she sheds the gleam herself, she lights up and thus creates her world. This seems to me a hint which Wordsworth is to develop later more explicitly, that it is the child, looking round him with joy, who is at once the source and the recipient of the vision.\footnote{5}

Thus Brooks suggests that in the Immortality Ode there is a hidden image of the child as sun or moon. Elsewhere in Wordsworth's poetry the mind, or mental attributes, is seen as the sun. In "To the Clouds" the sun is written of as:

\begin{quote}
Source inexhaustible of life and joy
And type of man's far-darting reason, therefore
In old time worshipped as the god of verse,
A blazing intellectual deity.
\end{quote}

(80-83)

Here the intellect and the artist's vision are equated with the source of light. In The Excursion, the Solitary imagines a lone American Indian

\begin{quote}
when, having gained the top
Of some commanding eminence, which yet
Intruder ne'er beheld, he thence surveys
Regions of wood and wide savannah, vast
Expanse of unappropriated earth,
\end{quote}
With mind that sheds a light on what he sees,
Free as the sun, and lonely as the sun,
Pouring above his head its radiance down
Upon a living and rejoicing world!

(Esc. III, 935-43)

Here the object of vision is illuminated both by the light from within, the mind, and by the light from without, the sun. The two lights are seen as working together, in this way in one of the passages in The Prelude where Wordsworth is stressing the creative nature of his mind, denying that the poet's joy springs from mere passivity to sense impressions:

But let this
Be not forgotten, that I still retained
My first creative sensibility;
That by the regular action of the world
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. An auxiliar light
Came from my mind, which on the setting sun
Bestowed new splendour; the melodious birds,
The fluttering breezes, fountains that run on,
Murmuring so sweetly in themselves, obeyed
A like dominion, and the midnight storm
Grew darker in the presence of my eye:
Hence my obeisance, my devotion hence,
And hence my transport.

(Prelude II, 358-76)

A supreme example of light understood as the type of intellect forms the conclusion of The Prelude. As shown in chapter three, both in this passage and in "A Night-Piece" the moon emerging from mist or cloud is seen as a figure of the sudden power of the imagination. The poet climbs Snowdon through the
misty night intending to see the sun rise. But his vision is not of the rising sun
(perhaps the full light of truth is never perceived by a human being); instead he
emerges from the mist to see:

The Moon hung naked in a firmament
Of azure without cloud, and at my feet
Rested a silent sea of hoary mist

(XIV, 40-42)

while through a rift in this ocean of mist

Mounted the roar of waters, torrents, streams
Innumerable, roaring with one voice!

(59-60)

This glorious vision is understood in reflection to be

the type
Of a majestic intellect, its acts
And its possessions, what it has and craves,
What in itself it is, and would become.
There I beheld the emblem of a mind
That feeds upon infinity, that broods
Over the dark abyss, intent to hear
Its voices issuing forth to silent light
In one continuous stream; a mind sustained
By recognitions of transcendent power,
In sense conducting to ideal form,
In soul of more than mortal privilege.

(66-77)

This great and complex episode is both real experience and image, a typical
Wordsworthian combination, though sometimes the image is almost submerged,
as it is in "A Night-Piece." Here we are told quite clearly the meaning of the
experience. The image is that of the great soul, the artist or thinker brooding
over, and thus warming into life, thus creating from, the dark abyss of experience
and ideas, all that the mind works on. Further implications of this passage will
be discussed at the end of the chapter.
In these images, physical light and mental light are seen working together; one of the qualities of Wordsworth's poetry revealed by an examination of his images of the eye and of light is that perception thus is implicitly communicated as cooperation between subject and object, so that both are sources of light and can be equated. As we have seen, the mind and intellect can be expressed by the image of the sun, and must be imagined as shining through the eyes, while on occasion the eye itself is seen as radiant: a female beggar is "Haughty, as if her eye had seen/ Its own light to a distance thrown" ("Beggars"). Equally, the sun can be seen as an eye: the Leechgathering is found "beside a pool bare to the eye of Heaven." Now this is a commonplace: it is used without any very great force of particular meaning by Wordsworth himself, and by his great predecessors: Shakespeare writes in Sonnet XVIII "Sometime too hot the eye of Heaven shines," while Spenser writes of Una "Her angel face,/ As the great eye of heaven shined bright," (FQ, I, iii, 4) a line quoted by Wordsworth. However, the earlier lines of this stanza from "Resolution and Independence" in which this phrase occurs, "Now whether it were by peculiar grace,/ A leading from above, a something given," bring new life to the conventional image, so that "the eye of Heaven," because of these suggestions of heavenly interference in human affairs, communicates the sense of a divine scrutiny.

The implications of this imagery which suggests an exchange of roles between the eye and the sun are extended by the ambiguity of certain lines in the Immortality Ode. Ambiguity in Wordsworth's poetry is likely to be conscious and intentional, as he was the most scrupulous of poets about precision and purity of
language and expression, and accordingly is particularly worth examination. In the lines (176-77) "What though the radiance which was once so bright/ Be now forever taken from my sight," his essential meaning is clear enough, but it is notable that the radiance can be regarded as coming either from within or from without the mind; that is, it may be taken from his sight either in the sense that his sight is bereft of the radiance with which it once used to look at nature, or that his sight is no longer able to behold this radiance shed upon nature from some other source. Both meanings are in the reader's mind; he is aware, perhaps unconsciously, of light as both internal and external.

A similar ambiguity lies in the lines (197-99):

The Clouds that gather round the setting sun
Do take a sober colouring from an eye
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality.

The first meaning of this passage is, of course, that the eye is that of the poet, or man similarly experienced in human suffering, whose eye bestows a sober colouring both in the Newtonian sense that colour is not in the object, but in the eye beholding it, and in the imaginative sense that the eye of the now experienced poet looks on the setting sun in its beauty as a type of man's mortality. The underlying sense of the image is that the eye there mentioned is the sun, from which indeed the clouds do take their sober colouring in the sense that the sun's rays on them cause them to be seen as coloured, and which has indeed, in the immemorial imagination of man, kept watch o'er man's mortality.

These ambiguities reinforce the impression given generally by these images of light and of the eye: the eye sheds light and receives it; the mind both gives
an organising radiance to the object and absorbs the radiance of the object. This reciprocal action in perception is noted by Brooks in his comments on the last stanza of the Immortality Ode: "The poet says that the clouds do not give to but take from, the eye their sober colouring. But in the last two lines of the stanza the flower does not take from, but gives to, the heart. We can have it either way. Indeed the poem implies that we must have it both ways. And we are dealing with more than optics" (100-101). Thus throughout the poem, at a submerged level, the pattern is there: the pattern is one of interchange and cooperation. Perception is both intellectual and physical, and is a matter of reciprocity.

Thus we see that for Wordsworth light expresses intellect; that Wordsworth thought of the mind as shedding light on the object perceived. The implications of this are twofold: firstly, it implies that the mind's role in perception is active; and secondly, that perception is a matter of interaction between the subject and the object. These ideas are, of course, expressed quite explicitly in the body of Wordsworth's poetry, as will be shown; his light imagery, however, shows how these ideas work together; it shows their fusion in poetry. Now, a similar fusion is present in the works of the Neoplatonists. They, too, equate, on some level, light with intellect; they, too regard the mind as essentially active, and for them, too, perception is reciprocal action between perceiver and perceived. Such ideas are certainly not exclusively Neoplatonic: they feature separately in other schools of philosophy, especially the concept of the active mind. Yet in Neoplatonism they work together, just as they do in
Wordsworth's light imagery. I have already suggested that there is a strong relationship with Neoplatonism in certain aspects of Wordsworth's thought: in his understanding of certain moments of perception as union between subject and object; in the notion of the senses as tyrannic; in the concept of the inward eye; and in the concept of Creation as process rather than completed action. This complex of ideas of light and intellect suggests further that some understanding of the relevant Neoplatonic concepts may well deepen the understanding of much of Wordsworth's greatest poetry. It seems to me extremely likely that contact with the Neoplatonic tradition was a considerable factor in the formation of the thought and imagery of Wordsworth after 1797, the time of his meeting with Coleridge, and the beginning of his flowering time, a factor which must, however, be understood as working with his own natural tastes, and earlier reading and thinking. The question of his contact with the ideas of Neoplatonic writers, who figures so considerably in Wordsworth's library, and so strongly influenced Coleridge during the years of his closest friendship with Wordsworth, is discussed in the first chapter of this thesis.

ii. Light in Neoplatonic Writings

In his rich and various use of light as a figure for the intellect or the spiritual, Wordsworth echoes the rich and various Neoplatonic tradition. Both in imagery and through direct statement, we see in most Platonic and Neoplatonic writers the same equation of light with intellect. Plotinus expresses the essential independence of the Intellectual Principle in the imagery of light:
"It is certainly thus that the Intellectual-Principle, withdrawing to the inmost, seeing nothing, must have its vision—not of some other light in some other thing, but of the light within itself, unmingled, pure, suddenly gleaming before it" (Ennead V, 5, 7: p.40). Thomas Taylor, in a note to the Cratylus, writes that "the sun subsists in the most beautiful proportion to the good; for as the splendour proceeding from the good is the light of the intellectual world; and that which emanates from the apparent sun is the light of the sensible world. And both the sun and Apollo are analogous to the good; but sensible light and intellectual truth are analogous to superessential light" (Four Dialogues, pp. 53-54). The same image is used in the introduction to the Parmenides; Taylor, writing of the good, the first cause, observes: "Plato, too, in the Republic, that we may be enabled to gain a glimpse from analogy of his transcendent nature, compares him to the sun. For as the sun by his light not only confers the power of being seen on visible objects, but is likewise the cause of their generation, nutriment and increase; so the good, through superessential light, imparts being and the power of being known to every thing which is the object of knowledge" (Four Dialogues, p. 262).

As we see from this passage, the Good is like the sun's physical light, because it is superessential light. Now in such writings, analogy and identity are not differentiated as sternly as they are in most other philosophical writings. Elsewhere we see that for Taylor, physical light is part of the superessential light, that "Light, of which he [the sun] is the fountain, is nothing more than the sincere energy of an intellect perfectly pure, illuminating in its proper habitation
the middle region of the heavens; and from this exalted situation scattering its light, it fills all the celestial orbs with powerful vigour, and illuminates the universe with divine and incorruptible light" (Four Dialogues, note on the Cratylus, p. 56). Plotinus, too, refers to light as "something incorporeal," and as Berkeley observes in Siris, writing of the Neoplatonists:

There have not been wanting those who, not content to suppose light the most pure and fine of all corporeal beings, have gone yet further, and bestowed upon it some attributes of a yet higher nature. Julianus, the Platonic philosopher, as cited by Ficinus, saith it was a doctrine in the theology of the Phoenicians, that there is diffused throughout the universe a pellucid and shining nature, pure and impassive, the act of a pure intelligence. And Ficinus himself undertakes to prove, that light is incorporeal, by several arguments.

Siris itself is a strongly Platonic work, which can be regarded in many ways as a dissertation on light and fire, as these seem to be some of the unifying ideas, once the subject of tar-water is forgotten.

It is misleading to suggest that the Neoplatonic connotations of light should be precise, for such various writers naturally understood the concept somewhat differently: no exact conversions can be made. Nevertheless, it is true that in general light is understood by the Neoplatonists as intellectual and spiritual. The concept of light as the act of a pure intelligence, demonstrated above, may be compared with the varying concepts discussed by Berkeley in this passage:
As the Platonists hold intellect to be lodged in soul, and soul in ether; so it passeth for a doctrine of Trismegistus, in the Pimander, that mind is clothed by soul, and soul by spirit. Therefore as the animal spirit of man, being subtile and luminous, is the immediate tegument of the human soul, or that wherein and whereby she acts; even so the spirit of the world, that active fiery ethereal substance of light, that permeates and animates the whole system, is supposed to clothe the soul, which clothes the mind of the universe. The Magi likewise said of God, that he had light for his body and truth for his soul. And in the Chaldaic oracles, all things are supposed to be governed by intellectual fire. And in the same oracles, the creative mind is said to be clothed with fire. Thus also in the psalms, Thou art clothed with light as with a garment. (Siris, 178-179).

iii. The Active Mind

The understanding of intellect as light implies that the individual mind, as well as the universal intellect, is active, in that the mind is seen not as darkness lightened from the outer world, but as light illuminating the outer world. That this is true for Wordsworth we have seen in examining imagery which shows the transformation of external objects by this "auxiliar light," this "gleam, the light that never was, on sea or land." We know of Wordsworth's belief in the essential activity and supreme beauty of the mind more directly from numerous statements throughout his works, and especially The Prelude and other poems of the crucial
period, 1797-1807. For him, the mind of man can be "A thousand times more beautiful than the earth" a thing "of quality and fabric more divine" (Prelude XIV, 448-54). We have seen in examining the development of his attitudes towards vision that the mental crisis which afflicted him partly because of the despotism of the eye, eventually convinced him of the necessity of the mind's activity in perception. The powerful "spots of time" are those through which we come to understand "to what point and how/ The mind is lord and master-outward sense/The obedient servant of her will," (XII, 221-23). This question of the active mind in Wordsworth's poetry has been the object of much attention; Havens (pp.323-24) indeed has a useful list of the chief references in Wordsworth's poems to the active powers of the mind. There is no need to repeat the various ample demonstrations. This concept does not wholly explain Wordsworth's ideas of perception, as discussion of the external power in chapter three may suggest; I shall discuss the relationship of these ideas later, in writing of reciprocity in perception. Wordsworth's belief in the mind's activity is well established.

Now Neoplatonism (in so far as it is one philosophy) is the philosophy of Mind, as empiricism (in so far as it is one philosophy) is the philosophy of Sense. Mind, in Neoplatonic works, is often, of course, discussed rather as the universal than the individual mind, though each individual mind is part of the universal Mind and reaches understanding of other things only through its participation in that Mind. The ultimate concern of such writers is likely to be cosmological rather than psychological. Thus quotations from these works are easily misinterpreted out of context, and must be treated with care. Neoplatonic discussion of mind
does, however, involve the individual mind, and shows its superior role to sense in perception, as is easily demonstrable from those works in the tradition known to be easily available to Wordsworth. Thomas Taylor typifies this in his contrast between "the divine light of mind and the sordid gloom of sense."\textsuperscript{12}

Shaftesbury's discussion of thought and sense is particularly relevant to the present argument. He writes that: "Thought we own pre-eminent, and confess the reallest of Beings the only Existence of which we are made sure of, by being conscious. All else may be only Dream and Shadow. All which even Sense suggests may be deceitful."("The Moralists," Part 3, Sect. 1: II, 369). The point of Shaftesbury's argument is that the mind confers value on experience, a view which Wordsworth certainly shared; the mind must not be a "mere pensioner/On outward forms" (Prelude VI, 737-38), for without its activity sense is a "spell," enthrallement or slavery.\textsuperscript{13} The diction of those passages describing the active mind, however, is one of nobility, dignity, and grandeur.\textsuperscript{14} Shaftesbury writes in this vein, connecting it with the mind's apprehension of Ideal Beauty: "For if we may trust to what our Reasoning has taught us; whatever in Nature is beautiful or charming, is only the faint Shadow of that First Beauty. So that every real LOVE depending on the Mind, and being only the Contemplation of Beauty, either as it really is in it-self, or as it appears imperfectly in the objects which strike the Sense; how can the rational Mind rest here, or be satisfy'd with the absurd Enjoyment which reachest the Sense alone" ("The Moralists," Part 3, Sect. 2: II, 395). He writes in a similar vein elsewhere: "That neither can
MAN by the same Sense or brutish Part, conceive or enjoy Beauty: but all
Beauty and Good he enjoys is in a nobler way, and by the help of what is
noblest his MIND and REASON . . . For as the riotous MIND, captive to
Sense, can never enter in competition, or contend for Beauty with the virtuous
MIND of Reason's Culture; neither can the objects which allure the former,
compare with those which attract and charm the latter" ("The Moralists," Part 3,

In the same way, the Cambridge Platonist, Ralph Cudworth is predictably
insistent on the superiority of mind over sense, and its essential activity in
perception. Gian Orsini, in a comparison of Cudworth's thought with Kant's,
writes that "one of Cudworth's lasting merits is the firm assertion of the 'self-
active character of thought'" (pp. 144-45). This is seen in Cudworth's
discussion of the cause of motion, which he says in animal bodies is "not the
matter itself organised, but the soul as either cogitative or plastically self-active,
vitally united thereunto, and naturally ruling over it. But in the whole world it
is either God himself . . . or else it is instrumentally an inferior created spirit,
soul or life of nature that is, 'Plastic Nature' " (True Intellectual System,
Bk. I, ch. v; III, 668-9).

Much of Cudworth's invective is directed against Hobbes ("a modern
atheistick writer") and his followers for their excessive reliance on the evidence of
the senses. Cudworth, in answer to their assertions, points out that the senses
alone do not even enable us to understand their own nature or their own evidence,
and goes on:
sense is not knowledge or understanding, nor the criterion of truth as to sensible things themselves; it reaching not to the essence or absolute of them, but only taking notice of their outside, and perceiving its own passions from them rather than the things themselves: and that there is a higher faculty in the soul, or reason and understanding, which judges of sense; detects the fantasy and imposture of it, discovers to us that there is nothing in the objects themselves like to those forementioned sensible ideas; and resolves all sensible things into intelligible principles; the ideas whereof are not foreign and adventitious, and meer passive impressions on the soul from without, but native and domestick to it, or actively exerted from the soul itself." (True Intellectual System, Bk. I, ch. v; II, 634-635)

All our ability to generalise and order our impressions comes from the mind, and those who believe that "they have not the least cogitation of anything not subject to corporeal sense" belie themselves in their own words, as "fancy and sense itself, upon this hypothesis could hardly scape from becoming non-entities too, forasmuch as neither fancy nor sense falls under sense, but only the objects of them; we neither seeing vision, nor feeling taction, nor hearing audition, much less, hearing sight, or feeling taste or the like" (True Intellectual System, Bk. I, ch. v; II, 636). Cudworth concludes that there is "one main difference betwixt understanding, or knowledge, and sense; that whereas the latter is phantastical and relative only; the former reacheth beyond phancy and appearance to the absoluteness of truth" (Bk. I, ch. v; II, 719-720).
Berkeley expresses very similar views of the respective roles of mind and sense in Siris. However, in his early years, in which he formulated the doctrines for which he is most famous, the years of the New Theory of Vision and the Principles of Human Knowledge, his understanding of the matter was different: he wrote then "Mind is a congeries of Perceptions ... Say you the Mind is not the Perceptions but that thing which perceives, I answer you are abused by the words that and thing, these are vague empty wordw without a meaning." (Philosophical Commentaries, 580-81, quoted by Warnock, p. 196). As Orsini (p.29) observes, later on "he developed another philosophy, which is closer to the Neoplatonic philosophy of the Cambridge thinkers whom Coleridge favoured."

This philosophy was expounded in Siris. Now obviously there are connections between the various stages of Berkeley's thought and the principle connection is that of mind and its activity: "There is nothing active in the universe but Mind" (quoted without reference by Warnock, pp. 89-90). Nevertheless, there is a great difference between the way in which this concept affected the early works, which, as was seen in chapter three, were mainly concerned with sense experience as the language of God (the Universal Mind), and Siris, which was also concerned with the active powers of the individual mind. This active power plays a vital role in the chain of understanding connecting eventually the lowest agent in perception, sense, to the highest, deity as the object of intellectual knowledge:

The perceptions of sense are gross: but even in the senses there is a difference. Though harmony and proportion are not objects of sense, yet the eye and ear are organs, which offer to the mind such materials
by means whereof she may apprehend both the one and the other.

By experiments of sense we become acquainted with the lower faculties of the soul, and from them, whether by a gradual evolution or ascent, we arrive at the highest... In all this scale, each lower faculty is a step which leads to one above it. And the uppermost naturally lead to deity, which is rather the object of intellectual knowledge than even of the discursive faculty not to mention the sensitive... The calamity therefore is neither strange, nor much to be complained of if a low sensual reader shall, from more love of animal life, find himself drawn on, surprised, and betrayed into some curiosity concerning the intellectual. (Siris, 303: V, 140)

Throughout Siris, as Warnock (p. 221) shows, Berkeley is at pains "to point out that most of these authorities [those numerous obscure writers, mostly of the Neoplatonic tradition, cited in Siris] either said, or darkly hinted, that Mind or Intellect must be enthroned as the true active principle in all phenomena:"

It would be a gross distortion to suggest that the only philosophical treatment of the active mind accessible to Wordsworth was that of the writings in the Neoplatonic tradition. Kant is surely for most modern readers the most notable philosopher to propound this theory. Havens writes, misleadingly ignoring the Neoplatonists and Kant's own European predecessors, that it was Kant who "first made clear that in acquiring knowledge of the external world the mind is not passive, as had been thought, but active and creative, and that the primary creative activity in perception belongs to the imagination" (p. 205).
In this matter Locke himself has been commonly misunderstood, as his rejection of innate ideas has caused him to be thought of as a complete materialist. Locke, it must be remembered, after all respected Cudworth deeply, and while his stress is on the passive role of the mind, he is by no means a complete materialist as regards perception: "Every act of sensation" he wrote, "when duly considered, gives us an equal view of both parts of nature—the corporeal and spiritual. For, whilst I know, by seeing or hearing, that there is some corporeal being without me—the object of that sensation, I do more certainly know that there is some spiritual being within me, that sees and hears. This I must be convinced, cannot be the action of bare, insensible matter; nor ever could be without an immaterial thinking being" (Essay, Bk. II, xxiii: I, 406-407). Ernest Tuveson probably overreacts to this common misconception of Locke, yet there is truth in his assertion that while Locke does regard sensation as passive, the mind in his account compares and combines, and "possesses, too, the essential test for a living thing: it can refuse to consider." He goes on "thus did Locke bring the mind within the natural order while preserving its integrity, vitality, and self-awareness" (pp. 18-19).

Though the concept of the active mind is important to thinkers outside the Neoplatonic tradition, it is within this tradition, as I have said, that one finds this concept concurrent with the notion of light as intellect, and the idea that perception involves the reciprocal action of subject and object, as these concepts work together in Wordsworth's light imagery, and in his poetry in general. Perhaps the most important of these related ideas to Wordsworth's poetry is that of perception as reciprocity. This chapter will end with a discussion of this idea in its
various forms in Wordsworth's works, and an indication of its important role in Neoplatonic epistemology.

iv. Reciprocity in Perception

It is inadequate merely to assert that Wordsworth saw perception as reciprocal action between man and the universe. This is a complex idea and has different implications in different works, and different passages within the various works. The general trend has indeed been perceived by various critics: F.W. Bateson wrote that "the efficient cause, so far as the poetry had a single originating source, was the impelling need Wordsworth felt to integrate the more subjective or inward-looking and the more objective or outward-looking aspects of his personality" (p. 186). David Perkins also suggests that Wordsworth seems to move towards an understanding of truth as the union of the perceiving eye and the perceived object (p. 94). S.G. Dunn also considers that certain passages such as The Prelude (1805) II, 245 ff., are based on the assumption that "reality is the result of an interaction," and therefore disagrees with those critics who consider Wordsworth "a pure sensationalist." Seymour Lainoff says that between 1798 and 1802 imagination is characteristically seen as collaboration between subject and object. Rader sees a casual remark about the necessity in philosophy of drawing from both Plato and Aristotle as suggesting "a view of the world which seems to me the heart and core of his thought—that the truth is not to be found in either inner vision or outward experience alone, but in 'an ennobling interchange of action from within and from without'" (p. 42). Critics have pointed out the responsive nature of Wordsworth's
verbs.  Hartman treats the subject of reciprocity in perception most suggestively though he is usually obscure and sometimes misleading. Yet none of Wordsworth's critics, not even Hartman, seems to stress adequately the important truth that for Wordsworth while reciprocity between perceiver and perceived is possible but not necessary to all acts of perception, it is the essential feature of the poetic, or creative, act of perception.

The possibility of interaction between mind and nature, of marriage between them, as Wordsworth expresses it, is clearly stated and celebrated at the beginning of the never completed philosophical poem, "The Recluse," which was published as the Prospectus to The Excursion: that the possibility is this alone, rather than an epistemological necessity, is evident, for the sensual are still in their "sleep of death":

Paradise, and groves
Elysian, Fortunate Fields--like those of old
Sought in the Atlantic Main--why should they be
A history only of departed things,
Or a mere fiction of what never was?
For the discerning intellect of Man,
When wedded to this goodly universe
In love and holy passion, shall find these
A simple produce of the common day.
--I, long before the blissful hour arrives,
Would chant, in lonely peace, the spousal verse
Of this great consummation:-- and, by words
Which speak of nothing more than what we are,
Would I arouse the sensual from their sleep
Of Death, and win the vacant and the vain
To noble raptures; while my voice proclaims
How exquisitely the individual Mind
(And the progressive powers perhaps no less
Of the whole species) to the external World
Is fitted:-- and how exquisitely, too--
Theme this but little heard of among men--
The external world is fitted to the Mind;
And the creation (by no lower name
Can it be called) which they with blended might
Accomplish.

(47-71)

There are two parties in the creation of a Paradise, "the discerning intellect of Man" or "the individual mind," and "this goodly universe," "the external World." These are perfectly fitted to each other, and when united make a garden of delights. The act of perception which unites subject and object in love can become the common act of perception, when the passive are stirred to activity. It is clear, though, that this blissful hour has not yet arrived, and that at present such perception is rare. Wordsworth is not describing the ordinary act of perception.

The 1800 Preface to the Lyrical Ballads shows that the essential work and the essential nature of the poet is to communicate the truths expressed in this passage; "What then does the Poet? He considers man and the objects that surround him as acting and re-acting upon each other, so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure." 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 proper ties of nature" (Grosart, II, 90).

Hartman notices "the reciprocal generosity of nature and imagination" shown in this passage from The Recluse, and comments truly enough on this subject:
"Yet for Wordsworth, as The Prelude makes clear, the interaction of nature and mind remains a mystery, 'The incumbent mystery of sense and soul.' There is no mechanical "epistemological' fitting of the one to the other . . ." (p.219).
Certainly, the fitting of mind to nature is not generally expressed as part of the necessary mechanism of the ordinary act of perception. It may be true that it is occasionally possible to read certain passages referring to the interaction of subject and object as though it referred merely to the common act of perception. The famous lines in "Tintern Abbey" (102-07) may be understood in this way:

Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye and ear,—both what they half create
And what perceive.

Yet here too it seems very likely that Wordsworth is writing of heightened experience rather than common experience. A similar phrase is used in a fragment of blank verse, possibly written as early as 1795:

Yet once again do I behold the forms,
Of these huge mountains, and yet once again,
Standing beneath these elms, I hear thy voice,
Beloved Derwent, that peculiar voice
Heard in the stillness of the evening air,
Half-heard and half-created.

This fragment seems to have echoed in Wordsworth's mind when he was writing "Tintern Abbey"; the first lines are certainly reminiscent of the completed poem ("and again I . . ." followed by a line ending "once again"), and the last line is strikingly like that just quoted; here it suggests that the voice of the Derwent is half created through the power of loving memory—that it is half heard because it is perceived to be present in the still evening air, and half created because it is known to be present from past experience. Thus the reciprocity described in this act of perception is peculiar to Wordsworth's own experience; it is possible
that in "Tintern Abbey," the eye and ear half create their perceptions not
because the mechanics of perception are understood to involve creation from
the mind, but because certain acts of perception involve creation from a mind
unique in its experience or powers. Certainly in a similar dichotomy between
finding and creating in "Peter Bell" (143-45), the creation is understood as
being positive, and like artistic creation:

What nobler marvels than the mind
May in life's daily prospect find,
May find, or there create?

Of this passage, David Perkins (p. 91) observes that, for Wordsworth "in daily
life, the mind can both receive from sense and create whatever makes up the
content of human consciousness." This dichotomy is often repeated, though
with slightly different meanings. There are comparable lines in The Prelude:

Hitherto I had stood
In my own mind remote from social life,
(At least from what we commonly so name.)
Like a lone shepherd on a promontory
Who lacking occupation looks far forth
Into the boundless sea, and rather makes
Than finds what he beholds.

(III, 513-19)

Occasionally the implication seems to be that the marriage partners,
to adopt Wordsworth's image, are equal in their partnership, that both the
"intellect of man" and "this goodly universe" are equally active in perception.
When in The Prelude, the poet refuses to undervalue "Salisbury Plain" (later
"Guilt and Sorrow"), it is firstly because this poem "broke like light" on
Coleridge's imagination, and secondly because he himself acknowledges the
strength and vitality of his mind at this time:

in life's everyday appearances
I seemed about this time to gain clear sight
Of a new world—a world, too, that was fit
To be transmitted and to other eyes
Made visible, as ruled by those fixed laws
Whence spiritual dignity originates,
Which do both give it being and maintain
A balance, an ennobling interchange
Of action from without and from within;
The excellence, pure function, and best power
Both of the object seen, and eye that sees.

(XIII, 368-78)

Here the "dignity," the "ennobling" action (and the implications of the diction are important) come from an interchange between equal agents. Similarly in the section of The Prelude describing Wordsworth's undergraduate journey through the Alps, he expresses the equality and kindred nature of the two partners in perception "my soul," and "whate'er I saw, or heard, or felt."

His anxiety is to stress the mind's equality in such perception, and thus the true value of the perception. He does not assert the mind's superior role:

Not rich one moment to be poor forever;
Not prostrate, overborne, as if the mind Herself were nothing, a mere pensioner
On outward forms—did we in presence stand
Of that magnificent region. On the front Of this whole: Song is written that my heart Must, in such Temple, needs have offered up A different worship. Finally, whate'er I saw, or heard, or felt, was but a stream That flowed into a kindred stream; a gale, Confederate with the current of the soul, To speed my voyage; every sound or sight, In its degree of power, administered To grandeur or to tenderness.

(VI, 735-48)
Similarly in the "auxiliar light" passage (II, 368–76) already quoted at length, we see that there are two independent powers at work, capable of cross purposes, but most blessed when they work in cooperation. The setting sun already has its splendour, otherwise the mind's "auxiliar light" could not bestow new splendour; the midnight storm, already dark, in the heightened act of perception grows "darker in the presence of my eye." A "creative sensibility" is retained despite the possible weakening effects of habit "the regular action of the world." But the inner "plastic power," though capable of rebellion and "war/ With general tendency" was still "for the most Subservient strictly to external things With which it communed." Thus, at this stage (and Wordsworth is writing of his schooldays) it is possible for the external universe to be the dominant partner in the reciprocal action between external and internal.

However, more often Wordsworth writes more forcibly and compellingly of the mind's active role in perception. Though the importance of this concept to him has been indicated, the role of the active mind has not been properly discussed. The power of mind is shown to transform experience, to redeem it, and make it fertile. The mind which exerts this power makes experience: noble and dignified; the mind which neglects this power and is content with the passivity of the senses itself becomes servile. And the role of servant is more properly that of the senses: "the mind is lord and master--outward sense/ The obedient servant of her will" (Prelude XII, 222–23). As we have seen, Wordsworth writes of the "spots of Time" as communicating understanding of the proper relationship between mind the master and sense the servant. He goes
on to tell of one such moment in time, the scene of visionary dreariness when he saw the gibbet on the moor, and the girl carrying her pitcher, in the place he returned to later "in the blessed hour of early love" when

Upon the naked pool and dreary crags,
And on the melancholy beacon fell
A spirit of pleasure and youth's golden gleam;
And think ye not with radiance more sublime
For these remembrances, and for the power
They left behind? So feeling comes in aid
Of feeling, and diversity of strength
Attends us, if but once we have been strong.
Oh! mystery of man, from what a depth
Proceed thy honours. I am lost, but see
In simple childhood something of the base
On which thy greatness stands; but this I feel,
That from thyself it comes, that thou must give
Else never canst receive.  

(Prelude, XII, 264-77)

The dialectic of the child's and the young man's experience, the interplay between feeling and feeling is what the narrative tells of; but it does not bring Wordsworth to merely Hartleyan conclusions about the mind's formation from association. Instead there is mystery; no explanation, but instead the feeling that mind's outward motion creates the greatness, "that thou must give/ Else never canst receive." Thus the whole incident with its commentary reinforces the belief that "the mind is lord and master," stated at the beginning.

Even when the active mind is less emphasized, its importance is still implicit in the very suggestion that there are vital modes and dead modes of perception. The vital mode is every man's mode in childhood, but most adults succumb to passive vision through the indifference of habit. The child is
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.—Such, verily, is the first
Poetic spirit of our human life,
By uniform control of after years,
In most, abated or suppressed; in some,
Through every change of growth and of decay
Preeminent till death.¹⁹

(Prelude II, 254-65)

The same implications are perhaps seen more clearly in a manuscript passage
about the abuse of science. This passage shows how, if they are allowed to
interact and respond to each other, the senses and the intellect strengthen each
other continually and all the world of the senses becomes charged with our life,
and recharge it in return. However, when perception lacks reciprocity, when
mind or sense is unmated, the natural world is barren for us, and our mental
activities diminish us as they diminish the object of our attention. He writes of
Science:

its most noble end
Its most illustrious province must be found
In ministering to the excursive power
Of intellect and thought. So build we up
The being that we are. For was it meant
That we should pore, and dwindle as we pore,
Forever dimly pore on things minute,
On solitary objects, still beheld
In disconnection dead and spiritless,
And still dividing and dividing still,
Break down all grandeur, still unsatisfied
With our unnatural toil, while littleness
May yet become more little, waging thus
An impious warfare with the very life
Of our own souls? Or was it ever meant
That this majestic imagery, the clouds
The ocean and the firmament of heaven
Should lie a barren picture on the mind?
Never for ends of vanity and pain
And sickly wretchedness were we endued
Amid this world of feeling and of life
With apprehension, reason, will and thought,
Affections, organs, passions. Let us rise
From this oblivious sleep, these fretful dreams
Of feverish nothingness. Thus disciplined
All things shall live in us and we shall live
In all things that surround us. This I deem
Our tendency, and thus shall every day
Enlarge our sphere of pleasure and of power,
For thus the senses and the intellect
Shall each to each supply a mutual aid,
Invigorate and sharpen and refine
Each other with a power that knows no bounds.

To Wordsworth, the man who retains and fosters his powers of mind, so that for him the intellect and the senses do "each to each supply a mutual aid" is a true poet, though not necessarily a maker of verses, for Wordsworth acknowledges that "many are the Poets that are sown/By Nature; man endowed with highest gifts, The vision and the faculty divine;/ Yet wanting the accomplishment of verse." (Exc. I, 77-80). The hymn dignifying the vital process of such minds forms the conclusion to the Prelude. This is an extremely rich but difficult passage; perhaps both its richness and its difficulty are suggested by its being the partial subject of three separate discussions in this piece of work. Perhaps its greatest difficulty arises from Wordsworth's claims of enormous vital powers for two forces, mind and nature. The claims are so great that they are not easily comprehended, and not easily reconciled. The first claim is made for the mind. The moon shining above the abyss-like break in the mist is seen as "the emblem of a mind/ That feeds upon infinity that broods Over the dark abyss" (XIV, 70-72). The great force of the description of the moon above the sea of mist swells the claim
made for the mind's power; so, enormously, does the echo of Milton (Paradise Lost, i, 21) in "broods over the dark abyss" with its implication that the mind is like the Holy Ghost, brooding over Chaos and hatching the Creation; and so does the stated nature of the mind's action: it feeds upon infinity; it is a mind "sustained/ By recognitions of transcendent power,/ In sense conducting to ideal form,/ In soul of more than mortal privilege" (XIV, 74-77); the redeemed soul may have such privilege. It has too in some sense the function of moulding, joining, abstracting outward things. We know this, for this is the mental function which "Nature shadowed there" on Snowdon. These powers are surely the mind's imaginative powers. Still, it is Nature who shadows these powers, and she is spoken of in these lines as possessing a great independent strength, a "mutual domination," exercised "upon the face of outward things," a power "which all acknowledge when thus moved," a power which is the "express Resemblance of that glorious faculty/ That higher minds bear with them as their own." Nature's power is emphasized more strongly in the 1805 version: she "exhibited" rather than shadowing forth (1.79), and later "thrusts forth upon the senses" rather than "exhibiting" to them (87-88), and instead of her power being the "express resemblance of that high mental power," it is its "Counterpart/And Brother!" (88-89). Manuscript W (1804) is even stronger: in a related passage it speaks of these appearances as "her [Nature's] own naked work/ Selfwrought, unaided by the human mind" (Prelude, p. 624: 49-50). Thus in the later versions, less stress is placed on Nature's independent power, but it still remains a formidable force.
Still, powerful though Nature is, the point of the passage, of the discussion, the image, and of the whole episode, is the power of "that glorious faculty/ That higher minds bear with them as their own." They are not dependent on Nature for they too are creative:

They from their native selves can send abroad Kindred mutations; far themselves create A like existence; and, whenever it dawns Created for them, catch it, or are caught By its inevitable mastery, Like angels stopped upon the wing by sound Of harmony from Heaven's remotest spheres.

(93-99)

Such minds through their own vitality, live "in a world of Life." Their relation to the senses is the true one: they are "not enthralled,/ But by their quickening impulse made more prompt To hold fit converse with the spiritual world." The vision of the moon above the dark abyss is communicated as showing Nature's power; but the image it suggests is that of the mind's power, and it is the power of the creative mind which is the subject of this episode.

I strongly disagree with Geoffrey Hartman's account of the ascent of Snowdon episode (pp. 184-86). Hartman believes that "Wordsworth is of the mind's party without knowing it" while I believe that Wordsworth is of the mind's party and knows it very well. I believe that Hartman's case rests on a misunderstanding. He writes that "when the poet emerges from the mountain mist (Prelude XIV, 35) two things force themselves one after the other on his senses," the first being the moon, apparently "insulated from the lower sphere ..." while "the second is the roar of waters rising from that sphere." Now his argument rests on this "one after the other." For "Nature, Wordsworth suggests, forced a shift in his attention from
one apparently supreme agent to another, from moon to abyss; a shift which makes him aware of an antiphony between them. The active principle cannot be localized." Hartman argues that in fact the shift in attention is not something forced by Nature, but a trick of the poet's own mind: "so strong is the usurpation of sight that it masks the continuous sound, and the re-entry of the latter into consciousness appears like a breakthrough. Though the vision, therefore, is about nature, it is also about the poet's perception of nature, since not heaven and earth but only the poet's mind is turned . . . Thus, Wordsworth's greatest visionary sight is based on the simplest kind of psychical error."

The error seems to me to be Hartman's and not Wordsworth's, for there is in fact no "one after the other" in this passage. Although the moon is mentioned at the beginning and the sound of waters at the end of the description, there is no suggestion of what Hartman calls a breakthrough, or that Wordsworth is aware first of the sight then of the sound; the description is all one. True, the sea of mist is at first described as silent; it is silent, unlike the true sea, and it remains silent--it is through a rift in this silent sea that the sound of waters rises. So there is no question either of a "mutation in nature" or a psychical error.

Thus, as Hartman seems to have no basis for saying that Wordsworth is of the mind's party without knowing it," one might assume that Wordsworth is of nature's party. And indeed Hartman does assert of the Snowdon vision that "its import, daring if taken literally, is that there exists in imagination in nature analogous to that in man." This statement is partly true, as I hope I have demonstrated. The import of the passage is that both man and nature have an extraordinary power; the stress is on man's power.
Hartman says (p. 254) that "Wordsworth sees Imagination by its own light, and calls that light Nature's." He is referring to the 1805 version of The Prelude XIII, 62-65:

but in that breach
Through which the homeless voice of waters rose,
That dark deep thoroughfare, had Nature lodg'd
The soul, the Imagination of the whole.

It is true that Nature is seen as shaping the incident. But the whole episode does not stress nature's power, but the "world of life" in which both mind and nature can be seen as great energies. It is because each partner is felt to be a glorious power that reciprocity in perception is such an important force in Wordsworth's poetry.

Now Hartman's overemphasis on Wordsworth's treatment of the power of nature points out the contrast between Wordsworth's concept of reciprocity and Coleridge's. It is significant to my argument that the two poets shared the view that perception implies reciprocity, and important for a proper understanding of Wordsworth's poetry to realise the difference in position in the two poets over this matter. Hartman says of Wordsworth: "Nature is not a universe of death that lives only from or within our life" (p. 184). This could not be said of Coleridge, whose famous lines from the fourth stanza of Dejection, were surely in Hartman's mind when he made the above comment:

O Lady! we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does Nature live:
Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud!
And would we aught behold, of higher worth,
Than that inanimate cold world allowed
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 potent voice, of its own birth,
Of all sweet sounds the life and element!

(47–58)

David Pirie says of this, in his discussion of the original of "Dejection" a verse letter to Sara Hutchinson, "Perception is neither simply active or simply passive, but a union of subject and object from which Joy is born." This could be said of Wordsworth's poetry; yet Wordsworth is different in that he never makes us feel that "In our life alone does Nature live." S.G. Dunn writes that "this would never do for Wordsworth," and Rader (p.28) comments that Wordsworth "never shared Coleridge's belief . . . that nature, when unredeemed by imagination, is an 'inanimate cold world' for Wordsworth the outer world pulsates with life and beauty." Although the animism of some of his early poems fades away, although his belief in the "one life" wanes, still the life of Nature is often asserted and never denied. For Wordsworth, the external power remains a power, as was seen in Chapter three. This difference between the two poets is made clear in Owen Barfield's comparison of them (p.90). His account of Wordsworth is exaggerated, yet the distinction made between his position and Coleridge's is a true distinction: "For Wordsworth . . . it was nature that was the predominating factor in the polarity between mind and nature. He looked for, and found, inspiration in nature considered, or certainly felt, as another being altogether rather than as counterpoint to his own mind. Coleridge also looked for, and sometimes found, inspiration in the same way. But his was a mind in which the
opposite factor predominated." However, in his prose Coleridge frequently suggests that there is some kind of life in Nature corresponding to the soul in man. In "On Poesy or Art," he writes: "If the artist copies the mere nature, the natura naturata, what idle rivalry! If he proceeds only from a given form, which is supposed to answer to the notion of beauty, what an emptiness, what an unreality there always is in his productions . . . . Believe me, you must master the essence of the natura naturans, which presupposes a bond between nature in the higher sense and the soul of man" (BL, II, 257). He concludes that there is a similarity in essence between the perceiver and the object perceived, and writes, in the same essay, that " . . . of all we see, hear, feel and touch the substance is and must be in ourselves; and therefore there is no alternative in reason between the dreary (and thank heaven! almost impossible) belief that everything around us is a phantom, or that the life which is in us is in them likewise; and that to know is to resemble, when we speak of objects out of ourselves, even as within ourselves to learn is, according to Plato, only to recollect" (BL, II, 269).

Reciprocity in perception in the most narrowly epistemological sense is discussed by Coleridge at some length in Biographia Literaria, XII (I, 174):

Now the sum of all that is merely OBJECTIVE we will henceforth call NATURE, confining the term to its passive and material sense, as comprising all the phenomena by which its existence is made known to us. On the other hand, the sum of all that is SUBJECTIVE we may comprehend in the name of the SELF or INTELLIGENCE. Both
conceptions are in necessary antithesis. Intelligence is conceived of as exclusively representative, nature as exclusively represented; the one as conscious, the other as without consciousness. Now in all acts of positive knowledge there is required a reciprocal concurrence of both, namely of the conscious being, and of that which in itself is unconscious. Our problem is to explain this concurrence, its possibility, and its necessity. During the act of knowledge itself, the objective and subjective are so instantly united, that we cannot determine to which of the two the priority belongs. There as here no first and no second; both are coinstantaneous and one.

In the seventh chapter of Biographia Literaria we learn more about how this instant unity is achieved:

There are [in the process of thought] evidently two powers at work which relative to each other are active and passive; and this is not possible without an intermediate faculty, which is at once both active and passive. (In philosophical language we must denominate this intermediate faculty in all its degrees and determination, the IMAGINATION. But in common language and especially on the subject of poetry, we appropriate the name to a superior degree of the faculty, joined to a superior voluntary control over it)" (I, 86).

Thus we see in Coleridge in his own way, a related understanding to Wordsworth's of perception as interaction between subject and object. And in the stanza from "Dejection," despite the insistence that "in our life alone does
nature live, "we find a very similar combination of light image, active mind, and perception as reciprocity to that which is the subject of this chapter: "Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth/ A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud/ Enveloping the earth." Now between Wordsworth and Coleridge in their most active years as poets and friends there was a continual cross-fertilization. When he wrote his letter to Sara Hutchinson, Coleridge had read the first stanzas of the as yet incomplete Immortality Ode, and its imagery no doubt affected him; but then no doubt Wordsworth had already been influenced by Coleridge's thoughts on these subjects so crucially important to both poets; and Coleridge's thoughts on the subject were certainly and demonstrably influenced by the Neoplatonists and kindred thinkers, whose work interested him so deeply.

Coleridge's awareness of the Neoplatonic treatment of this matter is seen wherever he writes of it; it is made clear in the quotation from Plotinus (Ennead I, vi, p.64) with which he ends chapter VI of Biographia Literaria: "For in order to direct the view aright it behoves that the beholder should have made himself congenorous and similar to the object beheld. Never could the eye have beheld the sun, had not its own essence been soliform, (i.e. preconfigured to light by a similarity of essence with that of light) neither can a soul not beautiful attain to an intuition of beauty" (I, 80).

The Neoplatonic treatment of this subject which generally describes perception as a mutual act in which like is in relation to like, is based on Plato's treatment of the subject, and its development by Plotinus in the Enneads, the most important and influential body of Neoplatonic writings. Marjorie Hope Nicholson (pp.76-77)
observes that "there are plenty of light theories in ancient thought but they are at bottom theories of perception rather. To Pythagoreans, sight was something that emanated from the eye, as hearing from the ear. To Atomists, sight and soul were emanated from efflux from the object. Plato combined the two." Plato's account of the eyes in the Timaeus suggests their kinship with the substance of light:

... they fabricated the luciferous eyes the first of all the corporeal organs, binding them in the face on the following account. Of that fire which does not burn, indeed, but which comprehends our proper diurnal light, the gods fabricated the orbs of the eyes. For the fire contained within our body, and which is the genuine brother of this divine fire, they caused to flow through the eyes with smoothness and collected abundance, condensed indeed in the whole, but especially in the middle of these lucid orbs; so that the more dense fire might remain concealed within the recesses of the eyes, and the pure light subsists about the effluxive river of the sight, then similar concurring and being mingled with similar, one domestic body is constituted according to the direct procession of the eyes; and this too in that part where the internally emitted light resists that which is externally adduced. But the whole becomes similarly passive through similitude, when it either touched anything else or is itself touched by another, then the motion produced by this contact diffusing itself through the whole body of the eye, as far as to the soul, causes
that sensation which we denominate sight. But when this kindred fire separates into night, the conjunction being dissolved, sight loses its power. (trans. Thomas Taylor, Four Dialogues, p. 479)

Plotinus' view of the eye is based on the same concept, that the eye does not merely passively absorb light from an external source, but itself contains and sheds light—for him, too, it is "luciferous." He writes that "the eye is not wholly dependent upon an outside and alien light; there is an earlier light within itself, a more brilliant, which it sees sometimes in a momentary flash. At night in the darkness a gleam leaps from within the eye: or again we make no effort to see anything; the eyelids close; yet a light flashes before us; or we rub the eye and it sees the light it contains. This is sight without the act, but it is the truest seeing for it sees light whereas its other objects were the lit, not the light" (Ennead, V, 5, 7: p. 409).

Thomas Taylor asserts that the notion of the active nature of the eye's role in seeing has a long history. He stresses both the active nature of the eye and the interaction of subject and object in his introduction to his translation of the Timaeus:

With respect to sight it must be observed that Democritus, Heraclitus, the Stoics, many of the Peripatetics and ancient geometricians together were of opinion that vision subsists through a lucid spirit emitted from the eyes: and this spirit, according to Plato and his followers, is an unburning vivific fire, from which it originally proceeds. But this fire the illumination of which, as we have already observed, gives life to our mortal part, is
abundantly collected in the eye as in a fat diaphanous substance, whose moisture is most shiny and whose membranes are tender and transparent, but yet sufficiently firm for the purpose of preserving the inherent light. But a most serene ray shines through the more solid pupil; and this ray originates internally from one nerve, but is afterwards derived through two small nerves to the eyes. . . . This visual ray, however, cannot proceed externally and perceive objects at a distance unless it is con joined with external light . . . (Four Dialogues, p. 425).

Thus the very visual act, for the Neoplatonists, is a conjunction of two lights, the internal and the external.

Taylor also suggests that the higher modes of perception involve not merely reciprocity but empathy to the extent of unity. Writing in a note to the Phaedo on Socrates' divine reason, he says that there are four kinds of knowledge, and that the fourth "no longer uses analyzations or compositions, definition or demonstrations, but by a simple and self-visive energy of intellect, speculates things themselves, and by intuition and contact becomes one with the object of its perception; and this energy is the divine reason, . . . which far transcends the evidence of the most divine revelation since this last is at best but founded in opinion, while the former surpasses even the indubitable certainty of science." (Four Dialogues, p. 191). Plotinus, too, understands perception as ultimately the union between subject and object. He states that "in the Intellectual Principle itself, there is complete identity of Knower and Known, and this not by way of domiciliation as in the case of even the highest soul, but by Essence, by the fact
that, there, no distinction exists between Being and Knowing; we cannot stop
at a principle containing separate parts; there must always be a yet higher, a
principle above all such diversity" (Ennead III, 8, i: p.245). This identity is a
measure of truth; the more accurate the perception, the closer will be the unity:
"In proportion to the truth with which the knowing faculty knows, it comes to
identification with the object of its knowledge . . . The idea must not be left
to lie outside but must be made one identical thing with the Soul of the novice
so that he finds it really his own" (Ennead III, 8, 6: p.244).

Wordsworth wrote of the poetic act of perception as the product of interaction
between subject and object, and in this he was close to the Neoplatonists, who
believed that the visual act itself and the intellectual act in general was the
cooperation of two energies. Yet as we have seen, the cooperation between these
two energies is understood by the Neoplatonists as a merging of the two energies,
because subject and object are essentially the same. : Plotinus wrote of the
perceptive faculty that "discerning in certain objects the Ideal-Form, which has
bound and controlled shapeless matter, . . . it gathers into unity what still remains
fragmentary, catches it up and carries it within, no longer a thing of parts, and
presents it to the Ideal-Principle as something concordant and congenial, a
natural friend" (Ennead 1, 6, 3: p.58). The discussion in chapter two of the
development of Wordsworth's attitudes to the eye showed that he communicates in
certain passages, both published and in manuscript, the actual experience of what
the Neoplatonists believed in theory to be the true mode of perception, when he
writes of the loss of the sense of distinction between the subject and the object.
Yet in general Wordsworth did not see perception as a merging of perceiver and perceived. He saw a combination rather than a union of energies. His understanding of perception as involving two essentially kindred but distinct energies in mutual action is seen in his imagery of sight and light, and a more general understanding of reciprocal perception is seen throughout his poetry, and especially The Prelude. I think that an important key to the pattern of his thought lies in the closeness to the thought patterns of Neoplatonism. This is true of other aspects of his thought, such as the inward eye, the despotism of the senses, and so on.

For these reasons, I find it impossible, despite the evident importance of empiricism to Wordsworth's thought, as shown in chapter three, to agree with the position of critics such as Beach, who assert of Wordsworth that "in psychology he draws his inspiration, in his most representative period, from the school of English philosophy that derives from Locke, and that lays its stress on sensations as the basis of experience and so of the intellectual and spiritual life of man" (p.128). I do not suggest that Wordsworth and the Neoplatonists have an identical understanding of the various problems discussed. As I have indicated in the first chapter, Wordsworth was peculiarly unlikely to adopt wholesale the ideas of any one school. Still, the pattern is there in Wordsworth's poetry; it is there in Coleridge's writings; it is there in the Neoplatonic writings. This is a good enough chain, with enough demonstrable practical links to suggest a real vital influence. The differences, which must not be ignored, arise because Wordsworth, having been aroused to consciousness of the formulation of these ideas by Coleridge and the Neoplatonists, and their relation to his own thoughts, adapted them to his own understanding of the problem.
Notes

1 This is a late version, arrived at after much correction, as de Selincourt's critical apparatus shows (pp. 474-75).

2 The idea behind this poem must have appealed strongly to Wordsworth, for there is a paraphrase of these lines in The Prelude (VIII, 462-75) and similar lines occur in MSS. U and V, and were intended to follow II, 144. The early version of these lines comes in "The Vale of Esthwaite," 504-13 (PW I, 281).

3 Compare "Composed upon an Evening of Extraordinary Splendour and Beauty," (PW, IV, 10-13), composed in 1817, of which, as Wordsworth says in a note, "Allusions to the Ode entitled 'Intimations of Immortality' pervade the last Stanza." Here the context ensures far less ambiguity, and the radiance seems one that comes through God, an external though a spiritual light, rather than the soul's own radiance.


5 The vitality which this concept of the moon looking with pleasure on the brightness she emanates had for Wordsworth, is shown in the similar concept in a probably much later and certainly far different poem: "What heavenly smiles! O Lady mine,/ Through my very heart they shine;/ And if my brow gives back their light,/ Do thou look gladly on the sight;/ Reflected from the mountain's side/ And from the headlong streams" (PW, II, 36).

6 In the 1793 edition of Descriptive Sketches: "Moves there a cloud o'er midday's flaming eye" (25); "Loose-hanging rocks the Day's bless'd eye that hide" (255); and in The White Doe of Rylstone, where Norton feels that he has become "A spot of shame to the sun's bright eye" (851).

7 In a note to the original quarto edition of An Evening Walk, 333.

8 First among his excellencies for Coleridge was "an austere purity of language both grammatically and logically; in short, a perfect appropriateness of the words to the meaning" (BL, XXII : II, 115).

9 Raine and Harper, p. 149: from Taylor's paraphrase translation of Plotinus' Concerning the Beautiful (1787); i.e. Ennead I, VI.

10 Siris, para. 206: V, 101-02: The works of Julianus is one of the books which Coleridge asked John Thelwall to buy for him, in a letter of November 19, 1796: CL, I, 262.

11 See, for instance, Cudworth, True Intellectual System, I, ch. v: II, 737. See also below.

13 PW IV, 283 : Critical apparatus to the Immortality Ode, stanza ix, between 153-154 in Manuscript L; Prelude XIV, 106.

14 E. G. Prelude XIII, 368-78.

15 Maclean (p. 52) shows how Locke's has been indiscriminately designated as the école sensualiste.


18 However, Francis Christensen in "Creative Sensibility in Wordsworth," JEGP, 45 (1946), 361-68, shows that there are for Wordsworth, two kinds of perception, common and heightened. He writes: "... Wordsworth conceived the senses themselves as creative. Or, to be more exact, he conceived of the process of sensation as either passive and mechanical, in which case we have 'vulgar sense' or as active and creative, in which case sense may be 'subservient to moral purposes,/ Auxiliar to divine.' In this case, this is 'creative sensibility'".

19 The 1805 version of II, 255-58 (II, 267-73) reads:

From nature largely he receives; nor so
Is satisfy'd, but largely gives again,
For feeling has to him imparted strength,
And powerful in all sentiments of grief,
Of exultation, fear, and joy, his mind,
Even as an agent of the one great mind,
Creates, creator and receiver both.

20 PW, V, 402: Addendum to MS. B of "The Ruined Cottage," 54-86. See also PW, V, 138-39, app. crit.: lines corresponding to Exc. IV, 941-78. The point I am making is made more clear by reference to the unpublished version quoted, which also seems to be better poetry, on the whole.

21 This same Miltonic echo, again with the image applied to the mind, is found in The Prelude, 1, 139-45.


Conclusion

This study of the eye in Wordsworth's poetry in the perspective of the history of ideas shows, predictably enough, that Wordsworth's ideas of sight were influenced by both empiricist and idealist thought. His own poems show both the Platonic and the Aristotelian strain which he believed that a just system of philosophy requires. His habits of mind as regards philosophy were, as has been said, eclectic: he takes up from a system of ideas those parts which were sympathetic to his own understanding, and uses them to formulate and to help express his own sense of the nature of things. What he chose and what he discarded from philosophical works necessarily reveals his own preoccupations, and he will accordingly express the same idea, or very similar ideas, in the terms of two systems of thought generally understood to be radically opposed. The point of this thesis is not so much that Wordsworth's treatment of vision can be shown to be influenced both by Locke and by Shaftesbury and so on, as that he was prepared to use the different ideas of Locke and Shaftesbury on vision to communicate similar concepts, where possible. He drew different ideas together and made them his own. (Of course, to some extent all descriptions and rationalizations of the same phenomena must be similar.) These concepts, so important to him that they focussed all his explorations of ideas are the active mind, active nature, and reciprocal action between the two in perception. A study of the eye in his poetry makes the same concerns clear. These concepts have been the topic of repeated discussion throughout this thesis, either directly or implicitly.
The importance of the active mind to Wordsworth is seen in his insistence that the act of perception should not involve the physical eye alone in contact with the object, but also the intellect and the imagination. He insists, for instance, that he did not view the Italian Lakes in passive subjection to their beauty,

as if the mind
Herself were nothing, a mere pensioner
On outward forms.

(Prelude VI, 736–38)

The imagined sight has been shown as sometimes being preferred to the bodily sight, as in the Yarrow poems, because of its strength and poignancy. The eye can be seen as a despot if it operates merely passively so that beauty is sought as a sensual delight. The "obstinate questionings of sense" in the Immortality Ode are reinvigorating because they are a reassurance of the mind's independent energy. It has also been seen that the nature of sight and light imagery show that the intellect, and especially the creative intellect, is seen as radiant: there is an Apollonian cluster of ideas of light, music and poetry, and intellectual activity. The mind casts light like the sun; the imagination is the moon shining over or through an abyss.

Now this central concept of Wordsworth's evidently owed much to Neoplatonism. All the thinkers in this vein with whom Wordsworth is likely to have had some kind of contact, Plotinus, Cudworth, Shaftesbury, the later Berkeley, Thomas Taylor, all stress the superior role in perception of intellect over sense, and deplore a purely sensual mode of perception. They all see intellect as the real active force throughout the universe. To Plotinus, Berkeley and Taylor, this intellectual force
was seen in terms of light, at times almost equated with physical light.

Yet important though the Neoplatonic vein undoubtedly is in Wordsworth's thought concerning the active mind, his absorbing interest in it can hardly be regarded as being inspired by an interest in Neoplatonic thought. It is evident that this merely helped give form to his own independent ideas; and it is also evident that the empiricists also contributed form to these independent ideas about the active mind, though to a lesser extent. This may seem strange, as empiricism is generally thought of as the school of intellectual passivity in sensation. Yet some aspects of empiricism stress the potent role of the mind in perception: if one adapts Locke's views of primary and secondary characteristics then the eye can be looked on as colouring its own world. As I noted, Wordsworth knew, admired, and indeed echoed a passage of Young's in which the mind is shown as all powerful in this way. Man can

Take in at once the landscape of the world
At a small inlet which a grain might close,
And half create the wondrous world they see.
Our senses, as our reason, are divine;
But for the magic organ's powerful charm,
Earth were a rude uncoloured chaos still.  
(Night Thoughts VI)

It is notable that what appealed to Wordsworth in this passage is the sense of man's eye and hence man's mind as creative. I think that he is concerned with this basically empiricist view of perception in the following fragment from the "Alfoxden Notebook":

There is reason
There is creation in the eye,
Nor less in all the other senses; powers
They are that colour; model, and combine
The things perceived with such an absolute
Essential energy that we may say
That those most godlike faculties of ours
At one and the same moment are the mind
And the mind's minister.

(PW, V, 343: Appendix B, IV, vi)

Wordsworth felt free to use doctrines, which, in the context of the philosophies from which they are taken, would be inconsistent: the intellect as active, and the senses, through their mechanical activity, as creative. He can do this because the all-important underlying idea of intellectual creativity can find expression through both of these forms, and because, too, his attitude to the senses was ambiguous: he both recognized their power to develop the imagination, and their power to confine the imagination.

In the matter of Active Nature, too, it has been shown how Wordsworth used ideas from several traditions of thought in an attempt to express his belief in a voluntary power external to that of the mind, that is, nature's power. To some extent, Wordsworth's belief in active nature can be regarded as empiricist, as would be expected in a man of his generation: Like Locke, Wordsworth observes that the eye once open has no choice of what it shall see from a certain aspect. Wordsworth celebrates this, as it means that the eye can bring into the mind what is not willed or sought by the mind, enlarging thus the sympathies and the imagination. The child is seen as learning to love natural beauty through its early associations with his games and occupations, until it becomes loved for its own sake, and in its turn the love of its beauty brings about the love for the men
who dwell in such beauty, and thus eventually the love for all mankind. This has an obvious relationship with the doctrines of association put forward by Hartley. However, part of the empiricist concept of the role of the object in perception is rejected by Wordsworth, who evidently is unable to see natural objects as totally inanimate, and writes of them as exerting voluntarily a (generally) beneficent power over the mind of man. The various forms taken by this belief were examined in a comparison of the various versions of the exhortatory and theoretical passages of The Prelude, Books I and II, in manuscripts JJ and V and in the 1805 and 1850 texts. The earlier versions express this power very much in the terms of Greek and Latin animism. In his feeling that there is a spirit in nature which is related to the spirit of man Wordsworth comes close to the notion of the anima mundi of the Timaeus and the Aeneid, and also to the related ideas of Neoplatonism. Such a view also has close affinities with Newton's hypothetical ether. And the external active force sometimes takes the form of grace, whether natural or metaphysical. So Wordsworth communicates his ideas of active nature through the means of various classical, Christian, idealist, and empiricist concepts.

Ideally, for Wordsworth, an active mind combines with an active object and perception is a matter of reciprocity. This is stated explicitly in that part of "The Recluse" which became the Prospectus to The Excursion. It is clear, too, in the discussion of mind and nature which follows the climbing of Snowdon episode in The Prelude, and indeed is frequently stated. The "quiet eye" of "Tintern Abbey" and "A Poet's Epitaph" is one which both absorbs the impressions
given by nature and behold them transformed by intellect. Throughout Wordsworth's works there are a series of dichotomies, some of which have been discussed above, which make it plain that for Wordsworth there are two forces working in perception: he writes of

an ennobling interchange
Of action from without and from within;
The excellence, pure function, and best power
Both of the object seen and eye that sees,
(XIII, 375-78)

and that

this I feel
That from thyself it comes, that thou must give
Else never canst receive.
(XII, 275-77)

The roles of "finding" or "perceiving," and of "creating" were discussed above. It is notable that in making this dichotomy in "Tintern Abbey"

the mighty world
Of eye and ear,—both what they half create,
And what perceive,
(105-07)

Wordsworth is drawing on the passage of Young, quoted above, and thus using what implications of reciprocity there are in the empiricist tradition, namely that the mind perceives, in that it takes in the primary qualities of the objects, and creates, in that it bestows the secondary qualities on the object. Yet to Wordsworth, reciprocity in perception is something more than this rather inert exchange, which after all is how the most ordinary sensory perception of "the vacant and the vain" (Prospectus to Exc., 61) might be described. Creative perception is the offspring of
the discerning Intellect of Man
When wedded to this goodly universe
In love and holy passion.

(52-54)

This idea of reciprocity is, as has been suggested, more like the Neoplatonic idea of perception: the Platonic and Neoplatonic notion of sight is of the coalescence of two lights, the internal, the light of the eye, and the external, the light of the sun. The Neoplatonic notion is that the true intellectual act is a union between an essentially similar perceiver and perceived. Normally, Wordsworth steadily rejects this ultimate implication of Neoplatonism: for him, there are two independent active forces in perception. Yet, as was noted, on occasion he experienced perception in which there was no conscious separation of subject and object, and the usual media of perception, the senses or the mind, are utterly forgotten. The conscious expression of such an experience may well owe something to Neoplatonic thought.

These three matters have naturally run through this thesis, three inter-related strands. Besides these matters, yet inevitably related to them to some extent, other questions have emerged. The sense of loss, which was discussed in relation to "Tintern Abbey," the Immortality Ode, and "Peele Castle," is, I think, a mark of the lesson inevitably learnt throughout life about the need for interchange between subject and object. In all three poems, a movement is recorded from the necessary subjectivity of youth (which is seen very differently in the three poems) to a growing awareness of the need for attention to the external, the painful world of adult experience, "the still, sad music of humanity," "the soothing thoughts that spring/
Out of human suffering, "it recognizes the need for "frequent sights of what is to be borne." What is lost is spontaneous and heedless joy in beauty, and what is gained is a knowledge of the necessarily painful nature of external reality. But this is hardly a question of reciprocity in perception, as such. The matter of the Inward Eye is more closely related to this question, for this phrase seems to express a mental re-creation of an apparently spontaneous revelation of nature's while similar expressions, such as "the intellectual eye," are used of the bodily eye whose vision is transformed through intellectual energy.

I believe that Wordsworth, though dependent in some aspects of his thought on British empiricism, was closer in many ways to Neoplatonism. This is of secondary importance to his own experience, however. Undoubtedly he used these ideas of vision, but undoubtedly they were transformed in his own mind, and his poetry is essentially the expression of an independent individual, and not of any school.
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