

Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*: Inspiration or Aspiration?

WILLIAM CHRISTIE

Wordsworth criticism has yet to come to terms with Keats' observation that the 'Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour, July 13, 1798' [hereafter *Tintern Abbey*] proved Wordsworth's 'Genius' to be 'explorative of those dark passages' of human life — an observation the more challenging for its contingent hypothesis that it is precisely in this that 'Wordsworth is deeper than Milton'.¹ One may, of course, dismiss it as a partial, admittedly personal, reading or response: 'Now if we live, and go on thinking,' Keats continues, 'we too shall explore them'. In other words, and in terms of Harold Bloom's poetics of influence, Keats' appreciation of *Tintern Abbey* would appear a wilful misreading enforced by his own sense of direction and poetic responsibility,² as limited in its own way as Arnold's famous couplet on Wordsworth's poetry:

He laid us as we lay at birth,
In the cool flowery lap of earth.³

Moreover, if it is mistaken to read Keats' own poetry through the filter of his occasional, epistolary speculations, it is, arguably, even more mistaken to treat his various reflections on his fellow-poets as in any way definitive. Yet his focussing on the disturbing aspects of *Tintern Abbey* is itself disturbing, and, at the very least, calls for closer attention to the *whole* poem, especially when a cursory reading suggests that precisely the opposite is the case; that the poem sounds a barely qualified note of optimism, even triumph.

Certainly the poet himself would have us believe that *Tintern Abbey* is a poem of emancipation and enlightenment, discovering and celebrating the harmony — indeed, unity — of man and Nature, as had Coleridge's 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison' and 'Frost at Midnight'.⁴ Far from being an 'exploration', *Tintern Abbey* represents on at least one level an escape from the 'dark passages' of life; an escape, literally and metaphorically, from 'lonely rooms,' 'mid the din /Of towns and cities' (11.26-7), for it is thus incarcerated that the poet feels 'the burthen of the mystery' and 'the heavy and the weary weight /Of all this unintelligible world' most acutely (11.39-41).⁵ The escape itself is, by turns, upwards (transcendence), outwards (geographical relocation), and, ultimately, both. The therapeutic transition to the country would

seem to represent the cause, the condition, and the symbol of salvation. How could it be that a poem that rises to an unprecedented and an unparalleled exaltation of Nature —

The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being (ll.110-112)

— could strike Wordsworth's younger contemporary as in any way preoccupied with exploring the 'dark passages' of human life?

I

'Written' or 'Composed' in 1798,⁶ and published in the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), *Tintern Abbey* on first reading stands out in — even outside — the volume that first brought it to public attention (little recognition though it received in the press).⁷ As distinct, not to say idiosyncratic, in its own way as *The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere*, with which the volume opened, it has even been suggested that Wordsworth's decision to close the volume with the comparatively recently and hurriedly composed *Tintern Abbey* was inspired by the need to supply an 'antidote' or corrective to the sustained and indisputably 'dark passages' of Coleridge's major contribution.⁸ The loco-descriptive form; the apparently 'spontaneous' personal voice;⁹ the modulation from recollection to meditation and, climactically, to inspiration expressed in the 'impassioned' blank verse that we think of, rightly or wrongly, as quintessentially 'Wordsworthian':¹⁰ these are the commonplaces of the lecture theatre, and no less accurate for being so.

While most of this is peculiar *Tintern Abbey* in its context in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), like all the poems of Wordsworth that precede it in that volume, scholarship has identified it, paradoxically, as at once highly derivative and highly innovative: derivative, in that it is rooted in the eighteenth-century recollective, topographical tradition of Thomson, Warton, Akenside, Cowper, Bowles, Rogers, Southey, and even Goldsmith;¹¹ innovative, in that it initiates a descriptive and psychological depth and fusion — a poetic language expressive of the imaginative co-operation of mind and nature — as well as achieving the unapologetic audacity or reach that we identify as 'the Romantic sublime':

I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,

Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
 And the round ocean, and the living air,
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,
 A motion and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things. 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. (ll.94-108)

Yet it has long been recognized that *Tintern Abbey* is more, and is more subtle, than a consummate expression — ‘hypnotic and incantatory’¹² — of Wordsworth’s early, short-lived pantheism (and, consequently, of the influence of Coleridge).¹³ What Keats registered in his letter to Reynolds was *not* this cogent statement of conviction or faith in Nature and in an immanent and unifying spirit, but an anxiety or doubt that remains unresolved, even unmitigated, by so cumulative and powerful a *credo* as this passage represents. What he registered and respected, I would argue, was rather the poet’s keeping faith with the complexity of human experience: ‘Man, anywhere, anytime, betrays in minute emotional and ideational changes an ever-present conflict manifested in a change of mood from vague anxious depression through what Freud referred to as “a certain in-between” stage to heightened well-being — and back.’¹⁴

Tintern Abbey is not a manifesto, however hortatory and compelling its expression of ‘heightened well-being’ — the ‘joy /Of elevated thoughts’ (ll. 95-6) — and in spite of its temporary ‘sense’ of participation in some divine unity. It is, rather, a struggle, of varied and equivocal success, to come to terms with identity and relationship, thus to convert loss into power, and to convert depression into self-possession and, ultimately, transcendence. That struggle, on behalf both of himself and his sister Dorothy — and, obliquely, on behalf of the reader — is figured as a literal and metaphorical journey through time and change: Keats’ ‘dark passages’.

To overlook the temporal dimension of the poem and to read it as a static or ‘synchronic’ affirmation or challenge (like Blake’s ‘Jerusalem,’ for example) is to overlook the dimension that is at once the condition and part of the object of the poem’s ‘exploration,’ not to say its informing obsession. From the opening lines in which the poet reveals the psychological element of time and quietly portends the temporal element of psychology and change

Five years have passed, five summers
 With the length of five long winters

to the closing benediction for Dorothy

Nor wilt thou then forget
 That after many wanderings, many years
 Of absence, these steep woods and lofty cliffs,
 And this green pastoral landscape, were to me
 More dear, both for themselves, and for thy sake.

the elements of time and its co-ordinate, place (location, dislocation) are ubiquitous, like the associated emotions of loss and regret, and the associated ideas of hope and belief.

What we learn from the poem's exploration is that the 'fall' into selfhood or personal identity, as it was for the older theologian and as it is for the modern psychoanalytic theorist, simply *is* a fall from (the sense of) eternity into (a sense of) time, with its inevitable concomitants: separation, decay, and death.

But this is to anticipate too much, too early.

II

The initial result of this struggle with time and its implications in *Tintern Abbey* is a disorientation that the poet is never quite able to overcome. To isolate just one example from the extensive physical, psychological, and metaphysical 'landscape' of the poem, we can cite the opening lines of the fourth verse paragraph. Since first he 'came among these hills' (l.68), the poet's spirit has turned to the Wye, his having become, like the river itself, a 'wanderer through the woods' (l.57).¹⁵ Having paid his exaggerated respects to the 'sylvan Wye' as redemptive through recollection or *mental* revisiting, the poet proceeds to record his response to the memories evoked by the *physical* revisiting which is the occasion of the poem:

And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought,
 With many recognitions dim and faint,
 And somewhat of a sad perplexity,
 The picture of my mind revives again. (ll.59-62)

In other words, we are dealing with a mental landscape ('The picture of my mind') *superimposed* upon the present landscape: vision upon vista. 'The operative memories', to quote Heather Glen,

are not distinctive landmarks, but the altogether more instinctive memories of a previous experience of looking . . . the inarticulate memories of looking that are latent in all perception are being brought to the surface and made conscious.¹⁶

The consequence is 'a sad perplexity' — or, to be accurate where Wordsworth is either vague or, at best, puzzled: 'somewhat of a sad perplexity'. 'Sad' could, of course, mean 'serious' or 'sober', which is entirely in keeping with the poet's mature vision;¹⁷ but why 'perplexity'? Only the poem can answer that question, as well as the question of why, *and how convincingly*, such perplexity gives way to 'present pleasure' (l.65).

One explanation for the poet's 'perplexity' would seem to be that this complex 'revisiting' has invoked the double consciousness to which Wordsworth alludes in *The Prelude*:

so wide appears
The vacancy between me and those days
Which yet have such self presence in my mind
That sometimes when I think of them I seem
Two consciousnesses — conscious of myself,
And of some other being. (II, ll.28-33)¹⁸

If so, the 'two consciousnesses' that here, in *Tintern Abbey*, momentarily perplex the poet, remind us that it is not only the world of urban chaos that is 'unintelligible'; that, while some clarity and purpose attends upon his release from 'the city as prison',¹⁹ it is not a simple contrast between urban (self-)alienation and rural reintegration with which we are dealing. Indeed, from this moment, the coveted emancipation only reveals deeper conflicts within the poet himself, and the discrepancy between the two consciousnesses that results from change and development charges the poem with ambivalence.

The profound uneasiness about time and growth that I have characterized as ambivalent, necessarily pervades Wordsworth's description of the distinct phases of experience, foremost being the phase of 'undifferentiated consciousness' of the poet on his first visit to the Wye valley. (I use the term 'undifferentiated' loosely for any period of his life when the sense of belonging in Nature was acute,²⁰ without necessarily obliterating the feeling that his own 'ego' was 'something autonomous and unitary, marked off distinctly from everything else'.)²¹ In *Tintern Abbey*, it is recalled as that phase 'when first' the poet 'came among these hills', bounding over mountains and along rivers, 'wherever nature led':

more like a man
Flying from something that he dreads, than one
Who sought the thing he loved. (ll.71-3)

This affirmation of the mindless attraction of Nature with a simile so patently negative offers a second explanation of the poet's

'perplexity', while confirming a tendency to equivocation, at once grammatical and psychological, in the poem as a whole. It has, in short, a striking, though complex propriety.

Besides capturing the urgency of the poet's breathless self-indulgence, for example, it stresses an implicit opposition between an unspecified 'prison-house' (trauma? responsibility? conscience? time itself?) and the 'freedom' or escape offered by Nature, while simultaneously suggesting that such conceptual oppositions were, at the time, beyond his understanding. On top of this, the passage enacts and anticipates the anticlimactic movement of the poet *in the present*, from the city that he 'dreads' to the Nature for which his 'love' turns out to be equivocal and contingent; a Nature that, embraced without thought and fellow-feeling, remains a fool's paradise deriving its value from what it is not. What we are left with, then, is the intimation that the poet's participation in the natural world 'when first/ [he] came among these hills' was both joyful and self-oblivious on the one hand, and tenuous, even morally dubious, on the other.

It is *this* realization on the poet's part — that Nature has been used in the past, and may be used again, as an escape — that may well be contributing to his present 'perplexity'. (The same realization, incidentally, pre-empts the more simplistic reaction against Romanticism that culminated a century or so later.) The latent distrust that he feels towards pantheism no doubt arises from a fear of the repetition of this escape from what he dreads, rationalized as a search for truth and love. But this can wait.

Certainly this is where such conflicts and ambivalence as I mentioned above become most apparent, and where their relevance to Wordsworth's struggle to achieve some understanding in 'all this unintelligible world' (l.41) is beyond dispute. The crucial lines 64 to 84 betray an emotional and ideational disorganization that results in a literal *con-fusion* of memories, and this in spite of Wordsworth's sporadic attempts to demarcate at least three phases of experience. What the lines confirm, amongst other things, is the powerful and distortive psychological aspect of our experience both in and of time:

here I stand, not only with the sense
Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts
That in this moment there is life and food
For future years. And so I dare to hope
Though changed, no doubt, from what I was, when first
I came among these hills; when like a roe
I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides
Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,

Wherever nature led; more like a man
 Flying from something that he dreads, than one
 Who sought the thing he loved. For nature then
 (The coarser pleasures of my boyish days,
 And their glad animal movements all gone by)
 To me was all in all. — I cannot paint
 What then I was. The sounding cataract
 Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
 The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
 Their colours and their forms, were then to me
 An appetite: a feeling and a love,
 That had no need of a remoter charm,
 By thought supplied, or any interest
 Unborrowed from the eye.

This recollection of the poet's earlier self, of whom the eye was dictator and for whom Nature was 'all in all', naturally invokes the question of its precise relationship with the present self, or speaker in the poem. In attempting an answer, it is no doubt safest to follow Mary Jacobus who, in a comparison of *Tintern Abbey* with Coleridge's 'Frost at Midnight', simply refers to the past selves recollected by the poets as their 'younger selves'²². Yet the reader would surely be forgiven for thinking that the contrast between the two consciousnesses that Wordsworth draws in *Tintern Abbey* is a contrast between the poet's 'younger self' as a child on the one hand, and, on the other, the poet as a twenty-eight-year-old surveying the landscape of this distant past.

However, this would be, it seems, a radical misreading, encouraged by considering *Tintern Abbey* in the context both of *The Pedlar* and of *The Prelude, or Growth of a Poet's Mind*. The descriptions of his 'former heart' or self in *Tintern Abbey* bear such close resemblances to the child's activity and consciousness in those poems as occasionally to render them interchangeable. Indeed, G. L. Little quotes a passage from the Alfoxden Notebook of 1798 in which Wordsworth describes revisiting the river *Derwent* — in other words, the scene of his childhood ramblings — whose similarity to the opening of *Tintern Abbey*, as to other remarkable lines of the same poem, is unmistakable:

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.²³

Yet if Wordsworth has not assumed a licence to invent a visit to the

Wye valley prior to the one 'five years' previously — and both the subtitle and various, specific references suggest a precision about dating²⁴ — then his affected inability to paint 'what then [he] was' turns the lines into a portrait of the artist, *not* as a child, but as a young man of twenty-three years. And there are those sporadic attempts, to which I referred earlier, to distinguish as scrupulously as possible his present recollection of the intensity and the voracity of his involvement with Nature in the summer of 1793 from the 'coarser pleasures' of his childhood.

The crucial distinction, however, is worth a closer look:

For nature then [1793]
 (The coarser pleasures of my boyish days
 And their glad animal movements all gone by,
 To me was all in all.

If the 'glad animal movements' of his childhood and youth had in fact 'all gone by', what then was he doing bounding over the mountains 'like a roe' in his early twenties? While it may be too strained and too disingenuous to read 'coarser', not only as a comparative adjective, but also as an aural pun for horse (courser), we have only the comparative adjective to enforce whatever distinction Wordsworth may be trying to make. And even here, his use of the word 'appetite' in line 81 involves at least a measure of indiscriminateness in his experience, if not of coarseness — which is not to mention the many occasions when he describes his childhood experience of Nature using images of *ingurgitation*.

The other significant index to the fact that Wordsworth is describing early manhood, rather than childhood and youth, is the telling simile that precedes this important 'distinction which fails to distinguish':

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

Ignoring the wealth of evidence from other texts and fragments that reveals the same pattern in his youthful flight into the countryside, the fact that his 'escape' should be expressed as a simile surely weakens its character, if it does not rob it of any pretensions to truth. (A child may be *like* a man in flight without *being* one.) When later, again in line 81, he describes his emotional attachment to Nature as 'a love', we have become so tolerant of the confusion that we pass over this flat contradiction without demurring. But this, I would argue, is because the real interest of the passage exists in its confusion, and

not in spite of it.

The identification of the boy and the twenty-three-year-old wrought by this confusion, however consciously, distinguishes the passage for its psychological insight which penetrates, while it utilizes, the otherwise crucial elements of time and memory. What the passage records is a radical regression on the part of the young man in the summer of 1793, during which, out of biographical interest, Wordsworth was depressed and anxious for reasons both ideological (the revolution in France having gone sour and the government at home using the chaos to justify more repressive measures) *and* deeply personal (his having been separated from Annette Vallon and their child by England's declaration of war on France)²⁵. There is little doubt that this latter alienation, given the loss of his mother at so young an age, would have been the more disturbing for one who also suffered the subsequent fragmentation of his family.

Wordsworth was lost, in short, 'as in a cloud'²⁶; deserted. And, as Jonathan Wordsworth has argued, 'feelings of desertion' left the poet with a profound need 'to believe himself part of an integrated whole'; the Nature that 'never did betray/ The heart that loved her' was in one, unambiguous sense 'a substitute for the mother who had done just that'²⁷. Even when Wordsworth, with characteristic 'blindness and insight'²⁸, demotes Nature to the role of foster-mother in the *Immortality Ode*, the same appreciation of the mental process that we would call sublimation is manifest. *The Prelude* abounds with images and incidents that have long been recognized as respecting Nature's function in nurturing the child ('Fostered alike by beauty and by fear'²⁹) and as construing Nature's 'forms' as types or figures of the mother and father.

Bearing Wordsworth's early losses in mind, it is hardly surprising that 'passion' should be described as 'haunting' the regressive young man (l.78), or that love should be described in *The Brothers* as an 'infirmity'³⁰. Were one to assemble such occasional statements as these from Wordsworth's vast poetic output, a very different, far more complex figure would emerge than that of the self-elected custodian of 'the essential passions of the heart' who dictates in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* and elsewhere³¹. In *Tintern Abbey*, which finds its tenuous unity or resolution in the reconstituted family of brother and sister (as, in a sense, man and wife), such speculation is by no means irrelevant.

Its immediate relevance, however, is to Wordsworth's regressing to, and indulging in, a self-consuming relationship with Nature at

moments of emotional crisis — regressing and indulging, literally, *with a vengeance*. Deserted by his political heroes and by his moral convictions, alienated from Annette and their child, his impulse is rather to escape the situation that he ‘dreads’ than vainly to seek the love of which he has been bereft. However consciously, the poet *and* the poem desperately conspire to create a vacuum that only Dorothy can fill. And it is little wonder that in fulfilling that role she is introduced into the poem by an implicit comparison with the God of the psalms, as Wordsworth gropes down the ‘dark passage’ of the valley of the shadow of death. Again, these issues must await the more appropriate time allotted to them.

It is enough for our present purposes that the absorption into the poet’s childhood generally of his experience in 1793 is tacitly taken for granted when finally he shifts to define his altered consciousness later in the poem. ‘That time is past’, he insists; arguing, further, that he has

learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth. (ll.89-91)

Any attempt to distinguish the ‘animal movements’ of boyhood from those of manhood has been abandoned. Suddenly his early twenties become a part of his ‘thoughtless youth’ and we are back with the familiar dichotomy of the child and the man. Nor is there any indication as to whether this ‘hour’ refers to an occasional, discrete period of intimacy with Nature, or the blithe conflation of twenty-five years, as Lucy Newlyn has recently suggested:

So dramatically has the relationship with Coleridge altered his responses that the different stages of Wordsworth’s development (up till about 1795) become conflated as he looks back.³²

The parenthetical demarcation of boyhood (ll.74-5), with its recognition that his ‘glad’ days have ‘all gone by’, serves merely to anticipate the more pronounced sense of loss and tone of regret of the line expressing the transition or ‘dark passage’ into a more complete humanity. Whichever way we choose to regard the ecstatic period, or periods, of his close and unselfconscious involvement with Nature, their sacrifice becomes — must become — the price of wisdom.³³

There are, indeed, a number of moments in *Tintern Abbey* when the sense of loss, of the unrecapturable, borders on the self-pity of such eighteenth-century lyrics as Gray’s *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College*, in which the poet’s preoccupation with the past produces only

the paralysis of sentimental melancholy, besides a series of epigrammatic generalizations. In *Tintern Abbey*, on the other hand, the poet exhorts himself to what might reasonably be called a Johnsonian stoicism or 'resolution and independence,' bearing in mind Johnson's undisguised contempt for the fastidious Gray in the *Lives of the Poets*.³⁴ In spite of the fact that 'it is not now as it hath been of yore,' the poet in *Tintern Abbey* progresses from a self-contained withdrawal, through altruism, and rises (or escapes, depending upon how one reads it) into a pantheistic *interdependence*, partaking of the spirit that 'rolls through all things'.

The last quotation but one — from the sixth line of Wordsworth's *Immortality Ode* ('There was a time . . .') — is crucial to an interpretation of the attitude of these lines in *Tintern Abbey*. The repeated phrase 'no more' of *Tintern Abbey* (ll.85, 148) anticipates the lingering pathos of the same phrase in the later poem (l.9). Both poems are poised between the pain of loss and regret on the one hand, and a determination amounting to hope on the other. Both poems recognize an inevitable *rite de passage*, or series of *rites de passage*. In fact the 'dark passages' of *Tintern Abbey* are the universal *rites de passage* of the maturing humanist poet assuming the responsibility of his vocation.

And yet, for all this recognition of the inevitability of development, both *Tintern Abbey* and the *Immortality Ode* record their 'recollections of early childhood' — and, in the case of *Tintern Abbey*, of early manhood — with a directness, power, and pathos which, in combination with a seductive energy and with an emotional and sensual, if not specifically visual, immediacy, leave a residual note of the 'elegiac' that survives both the stoic resolution and even the transcendental affirmation.³⁵ Wordsworth's 'sad perplexity' is more than just 'a fleeting shadow across a poem of steady and shining optimism'.³⁶

III

The anthropological concept of *rite de passage* of course applies to societies more primitive, and therefore more homogeneous, than Wordsworth's own. There *are* poems in which the destruction of the child Wordsworth (with whom, henceforth, I will identify the twenty-three-year-old Wordsworth recalled in *Tintern Abbey*), that allows the adult to take over, is as abrupt and ritualized a form of 'dying into life' as any *rite de passage* — 'There Was a Boy' being a perfect example — but Wordsworth's rituals or *rites*, while equally symbolic, are more personal than social, externalizing adjustments of the individual consciousness. His preoccupation with radically distinct stages of

development and growth — specifically with the transition from the ‘Child’ to the ‘Man’³⁷ — anticipates this commonplace of anthropology, as it anticipates related issues of modern psychoanalysis. (Again, it is important to recognize that this preoccupation moves beyond and further inward than, say, Jacques’s celebrated rendering of the medieval distinction between the seven ages of man in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*.³⁸)

Simply stated, the assumption that Wordsworth shares with the psychoanalytic theorists is that these stages of development relate critically to the ego, and to ego-awareness, as it seeks self-realization through the relationship between the self and the other, and the self *as* other.³⁹ And there is in Wordsworth, of course, the obviously influential assumption of the formative role that childhood experience plays in adult understanding and behaviour, which explains why the psychoanalytic theorists quote *ad nauseam* the line from Wordsworth’s ‘My heart leaps up . . .’ — ‘The Child is Father of the Man’ (without, incidentally, showing the least interest in the Wordsworthian continuity of ‘natural piety’).

Concerning ‘identity and the life cycle,’⁴⁰ therefore, it is hardly surprising that the division of that cycle in Wordsworth’s poetry, especially here in *Tintern Abbey*, in *The Prelude*, and in the *Immortality Ode*, should resemble the work of those neoFreudian commentators like Erik H. Erikson who, after Freud’s own *Totem and Taboo*, attempt to assimilate and recast the findings of the contemporary anthropologists. Conceiving development as a sequence of variously interconnected and necessary phases informed by the theme of the growth and development of a personal ‘identity’, Erikson strikes a recognizably Wordsworthian note:

self-esteem grows to be a conviction that the ego is learning effective steps toward a tangible collective future, that it is developing into a defined ego within a social reality. This sense I wish to call *ego identity* . . .

The conscious feeling of having a *personal identity* is based on two simultaneous observations: the immediate perception of one’s selfsameness and continuity in time; and the simultaneous perception of the fact that others recognise this sameness and continuity . . .

Ego identity, then, in its subjective aspect, is the awareness of the fact that there is a selfsameness and continuity to the ego’s synthesizing methods⁴¹.

The model, moreover, corresponds significantly to Keats’ metaphor of ‘human life’ as ‘a large Mansion of Many Apartments’⁴². The necessary metamorphoses registered by Erikson — whether ritualized, instinctive, or both — thus become the ‘dark passages’ which connect these psychological ‘Apartments’. Interestingly, where Erikson’s

metaphors suggest a linear, predetermined approach to development, Keats conceived a more complex, selective approach in which a number of avenues or 'passages' were available to the developing consciousness, opening the way for later options, ambiguities, and misdirections which, in the unfinished *The Fall of Hyperion*, Keats would attempt to explore and resolve.⁴³

The analogy should not be pushed too far, and certainly not beyond its relevance to *Tintern Abbey*. However, it helps to illuminate Wordsworth's idea of development as having distinct, yet mutually interdependent stages, and with respect to Keats himself, as well as to his commentary on *Tintern Abbey*, it helps to illuminate the work of both poets. For Keats and for Wordsworth, the crucial transition was from the initial stage of human development which the anthropologist Levy-Bruhl would call *participation mystique*: 'which is nothing but a relic of the original non-differentiation of subject and object, and hence of the primordial unconscious state. It is also a characteristic of the mental state of early infancy, and, finally, of the unconscious of the civilized adult.'⁴⁴ So Wordsworth assumed a stage of full and unselfconscious involvement with nature, and Keats talked of 'the infant or thoughtless Chamber in which we remain as long as we do not think.'⁴⁵ The passage from here to the *thoughtful*, and to some extent alienated, stage — to Keats' 'Chamber of Maiden-Thought' — involved the growing awareness of the difference between self and other, the recognition of a divided and divisive personality. The complexity lies in the transition, rather than in the place or chamber of temporary self-presence.

And yet the attraction of the eternal return is, as we have witnessed, as powerfully felt in Wordsworth's poetry as is the need for personal and poetic growth. The nostalgia, with its concomitant emotions of loss and regret; the longing to recapture the 'primordial unconscious state' — these constitute so unrelenting a drive in Wordsworth that he felt obliged to resist.⁴⁶ In the case of *Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth would appear to have found his escape into the past or into self-obliviousness, first in transcendentalism ('when we are laid asleep in body/And become a living soul' he says paradoxically), then in the past which he is quick to renounce, and finally and surprisingly (in the light of the previous renunciation) in pantheism itself. For pantheism, in both its primitive forms and in its sophisticated philosophical forms, arguably represents a regression from the burden of the self as surely as does his mindless pursuit of Nature. 'Originally the ego includes everything', suggested Freud,

later it separates off an external world from itself. Our present ego-feeling is, therefore, only a shrunken residue of a much more inclusive — indeed, an all-embracing — feeling which corresponded to a more intimate bond between the ego and the world about it . . . the ideational contents appropriate to it would be precisely those of limitlessness and a bond with the universe . . . the ‘oceanic’ feeling.⁴⁷

The parallel between this ‘oceanic’ feeling and Wordsworth’s ‘sense sublime/Of something far more deeply interfused’ needs no gloss. What may be seen as the animation or personalization of all nature is finally though tacitly rejected as yet another form of the *depersonalization* both of the self and the nature. The same boundaries that confine the self, define the self. We should not, therefore, be surprised to find that in *Tintern Abbey* the pantheistic passages are quickly either undermined, or qualified by crucial conditionals.

It is in the complex unity in continuity which he finds in his relationship with his sister Dorothy that Wordsworth finally appears to have his cake and eat it too: first, by overcoming his perplexing sense of being two distinct consciousnesses and, as a consequence, establishing his ‘selfsameness and continuity in time’; second, by having this consistently confirmed by his sister; third, by introducing a refashioned version of his love for Nature — one that, as the carefully placed last phrase of the poem confirms, remains contingent upon their relationship:

after many wanderings, many years
Of absence, these steep woods and lofty cliffs,
And this green pastoral landscape, were to me
More dear, both for themselves, and *for thy sake*.

Couched in such terms, Wordsworth’s dilemma may appear anachronistic, an unjustifiable projection of that all-too-familiar twentieth-century *angst*, the ‘identity crisis’. But we need not rely upon the latent, marginal, or unconscious indices which recent critics have isolated and centralized in order to prove the existence of a palpable tension, or radical ‘impropriety’, within a poem.⁴⁸ Wordsworth’s ‘perplexity’ is explicit, especially in the description of his passage from an ‘appetite’ for Nature — when it was, to him, ‘all in all’ — to his more mature and altruistic attitude:

That time is past,
And all its aching joys are now no more,
And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur: other gifts
Have followed, for such loss, I would believe,
Abundant recompence. (ll.84-89)

Again, not surprisingly, *Tintern Abbey* anticipates the *Immortality Ode*:

Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind. (ll.180-3)

But the *Immortality Ode* has its own 'sad perplexities' and complexities, its own transitions, discoveries, and recoveries which, though at times analogous, remain essentially distinct from those of the earlier poem.⁴⁹

IV

Returning, then, to *Tintern Abbey* and to the lines quoted above, and returning with an eye made quiet and discriminating, it is important to remark (as I have done in italics) the frequency of what I would call, inclusively, negative, nostalgic, and sanguine constructions:

That time is past
And all its aching joys are now *no more*,
And all its dizzy raptures. *Not* for this
Faint I, *nor* mourn *nor* murmur: other gifts
Have followed, for such *loss*, *I would believe*,
Abundant recompence.

They are, if you like, 'strategies', or simply propensities or defences, characteristic of the poem as a whole — and, incidentally, exaggerate or even parody Wordsworth's habitual technique. It takes no specialized linguistic or post-structuralist subtlety to appreciate that negations allow conceptual room for the *positives* — or, in the case of Wordsworth's double negatives, the *negatives* — which, with varying degrees of conviction, they strive to deny.⁵⁰ And in the qualifying clause 'I would believe' Wordsworth has managed, wittingly or unwittingly, to express 'the emotional and ideational changes' that betray an 'ever-present conflict', but to express them, not in a sequential 'change of mood' as Erikson argued⁵¹, but in concentrated ambiguities that appear, as here, at crucial moments in the text. 'I would believe' may be read as determination; as desire ('I would like to believe'); and even as despair ('I would like to believe, but cannot') — as anything, in fact, but conviction.

In many cases, Wordsworth simply doth protest too much. A close reading reveals the frequency, not to say proliferation, of negative forms, as of indefinite, conditional, and suggestive forms — indeed of

qualifiers, disclaimers, aspirants, and hypotheses generally. The whole amounts to a considerable tentativeness or confusion, not just regarding the 'philosophy', but regarding the poet's experience as well. In order to gauge just how tentative or insecure, witness the following:

- (a) The 'forms of beauty' that *'have not been'* to the poet as is a landscape 'to a *blind* man's eye' (blind as in '*unseeing*')
- (b) feelings, too,
Of *unremembered* pleasure; such, *perhaps*,
As *may have had no trivial influence*
On that best portion of a good man's life;
His little, *nameless, unremembered* acts
Of kindness and of love. *Nor less, I trust*,
To them I *may have* owed another gift,
Of aspect more sublime (ll.31-38)
- (c) *'If this,/Be but a vain belief'* (ll.51-2)
- (d) *'so I dare to hope'* (l.66)
- (e) *'Nor, perchance, /If I were not thus taught'* (ll.112-3)
- (f) *'May I behold in thee'* (ll.121)
- (g) *'nature never did betray /The heart that loved her'* (ll.123-4)
- (h) *'she can so inform/The mind'* (ll.126-7)
- (i) *Nor perchance,*
If I should be, where I no more can hear
Thy voice (ll.152-5)

The negatives which are designed to deny or destabilize the reader's expectations; the compound verbs that express rather the will to truth, than its discovery or revelation; the crucial conditionals that frame the passages often read as the affirmation of some philosophy or conviction or firm belief held by the poet; the uncertain tense and mood of some crucial verbs; the changing pronoun that Heather Glen has remarked⁵² — all suggest a profound insecurity, betraying rather than obviating the very anxieties from which the poet, in a spirit of determination, would rescue himself. Far from being a manifesto, *Tintern Abbey* is thought-in-process, occasionally contorted, or suspiciously belated, or even ludicrous in its cautious attempts to rescue itself from too categorical a commitment.

V

The poem is, moreover, structured in a curiously similar way, as an attempt to rescue itself from the opening twenty-odd lines which, along with the geographical and chronological specificity of the

subtitle, are an unavoidable indication of the eighteenth-century topographical convention within which Wordsworth would have us believe he is writing.⁵³

Knowing the poet's distaste for the hieratic and the unimaginatively conventional ('Poets do not write for Poets alone, but for men')⁵⁴, and resentful, albeit unconsciously, at the thought that Wordsworth's poetry originated in anything but a qualified 'spontaneity', criticism has mounted a rearguard, though often convincing defence of Wordsworth's idiosyncratic treatment of certain commonplaces, as I suggest above. The characteristically Wordsworthian elements of his rendition of a highly traditional 'prospect' have thus been identified and 'foregrounded'⁵⁵. The deliberate confusion of the opening lines, for example, means that the landscape

ceases to be something merely external and becomes what may be called a mental landscape, a state of being the mind partakes of with the object and the object with the mind⁵⁶.

And the same, stilted prospect harbours proleptic references to the developed theme. The 'sportive woods run wild' (l.17) may be compared with the child's involvement with nature; the 'waters, rolling from their mountain springs' (l.3) both invokes the question of origins and anticipates the pantheistic spirit that 'rolls through all things' (l.103); the 'quiet of the sky' (l.8) inherits its significance in the first ecstatic moment when the poet escapes the dreary city with an 'eye made quiet by the power /Of harmony' (ll.48-9) and in the potential, attributed to Nature late in the poem, of impressing the mind 'With quietness and beauty' (l.128); the almost technical term 'impress' (l.6) itself echoes in this discussion of Dorothy's education in the final verse paragraph (l.127). These analogies or implicit identifications are in fact explicit in the symbolic 'connections' between earth and sky (ll.7-8) and the symbolic supplication of the 'wreathes of smoke' (ll.18-19). It is as if the poem proceeds to wring the psychological and metaphysical significance out of what would otherwise remain conventional details in a self-consciously 'poetic' landscape.

Two further issues are raised by the *literary* awareness of these opening lines. The first is the less controversial. As I argued above, for all its uniqueness in the 1798 volume of the *Lyrical Ballads*, *Tintern Abbey* shares with Wordsworth's other contributions a paradoxical combination of derivativeness and innovativeness, of 'tradition and experiment'. The technique of *Tintern Abbey* is indeed typical of the parody, as well as the play with the reader's expectations, that Wordsworth in the *Lyrical Ballads* effects with varying degrees of self-

awareness and caprice — and, it must be admitted, occasional awkwardness — in the service of what is, overall, a serious, revisionary enterprise. If Wordsworth can parody the sensational popular ballad of the night ride in *The Idiot Boy*; gothic sensationalism generally, and the vogue of infanticide specifically, in 'The Thorn'; the climactic structure of narrative or anecdote in 'Simon Lee' — it is surely not surprising that the most profound exploration of time, memory, and change, as of nature and sanity, in the volume should begin in the mode of those poems whose psychological and metaphysical potential had begun to be realized by his eighteenth-century predecessors. The apparent tautology of 'pastoral farms' (l.17) (a poetic cliché comparable with 'sylvan' rivers), and the heavily ironic *absence* of gypsies and a hermit (*as might seem*, l.20) are but two of the inescapable indices of the convention⁵⁷, as of Wordsworth's determination to adapt the convention to his own visionary and/or revisionary purposes.

The identifiably conventional opening, however, has a more serious and more relevant function to perform, a function that serves to anticipate some of the 'dark' issues to be revealed by the poem as it unfolds. The convention upon which it appears so heavily to rely signals the *alienation* of the poet's consciousness from Nature. If we accept the commonplace that Wordsworth sees a continuity between the physical environment and the inner, mental and moral landscape, it is hardly surprising that, during those 'five' protracted 'years', the 'prospect' should have taken on, at least in part, many of the 'picturesque' — which is to say, artificial or 'literary' — aspects of his reading. After all, many of his genuine 'recognitions' are but 'dim and faint' (l.60). Little wonder that a literary supplement should have contributed to the 'picture of [his] mind' when it was revived. The centrality of memory to Wordsworth's thought and form is a critical commonplace. But of all mental faculties, memory, being the most personal, is therefore the most impressionable, as well as the most capricious (though it is true that what he seeks in Nature is less pictorial accuracy, than moral and emotional stability or salvation).⁵⁸ Convention *per se*, with its 'arbitrary and capricious habits of expression' and form, thus becomes associated with the city as it does in the Preface of 1800, and the urban alienation, incarceration, and confusion that the poem endeavours to overcome takes on the widest possible significance.

We have seen that Wordsworth discovers on his revisiting and revisioning the Wye valley, not the mindless participation of hedonistic youth, but a more sober apprehension, an apprehension able to contain the experience of 'the still, sad music of humanity' and the subsequent

'thought' and meditative humility that this brings with it. The contrivance of the opening twenty-three lines, however masterfully executed, and however integrated into the subsequent structure of imagery, signals his less than exclusive involvement with the natural world, the 'loss' of which he deplures, but the reattainment of which he recognizes can only take place, productively, at a deeper level of emotional and philosophical commitment.

VI

The success of the poem, therefore, is radically contingent upon its success in convincing the reader, and indeed the poet himself, of precisely that commitment: first, to his psychological and poetic development — his sense, that is, of identity in community as child and man; second, to the possibility of epiphany; and, finally but centrally, to the vital role of nature in this development. Some of the poet's discomfort with his own beliefs is, therefore, embarrassingly obvious ('If this/Be but a vain belief', ll.50-51). Other indications of unease, while less obvious, are equally subversive, like the presence that '*disturbs*' him with 'the joy /Of elevated thoughts (ll.95-96); the vague '*sense* sublime /Of something far more deeply interfused' (ll.97-98); the pointedly cautious use of the past tense in the closing lines, in which the poet anticipates Dorothy's recollection that certain aspects of the landscape '*were* to me /More dear, both for themselves,' and for her sake (ll.159-60) (whether or not they will still be so in the future, in other words, remains an open question); or the subtly equivocal clause that introduces the otherwise magniloquent exaltation of Nature quoted above:

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. (ll.108-112)

To these moments of critical indefiniteness we may add the lines about creative apprehension into which so much has been read and in which so much faith has been invested. Wordsworth protests that, given a 'sense of sublime' of a unifying force in the universe, he remains a 'lover'

of all the mighty world
 Of eye and ear, both what they half-create,
 And what perceive. (ll.106-108)

One can hardly imagine clearer confirmation of the co-operative activity of mind and nature, which for the majority of the Romantics was perception itself. And yet, is it not more likely that these lines are less an echo of Kantian and post-Kantian Idealism (again, indebted to Coleridge)⁵⁹, than the expression of a deeply human, creative need for belief, in order to achieve or preserve sanity (or 'wholeness') both within and without? — and in order to justify and to rationalize a role for Nature in this passing intuition of totality? After all, in the precedent of Young's *Night Thoughts*, to which the poet himself expresses his indebtedness,⁶⁰ the idea is closer to Keats' ambivalent notion of creative illusion than to Coleridge's later, Schellingian definition of a genuinely constitutive Imagination.⁶¹

K. R. Johnston's ascription of a dual role to Nature as both actively 'involved as a source of power' and, like a text, passively 'given meaning by participation', begs crucial epistemological and ontological questions:⁶² whence the *ultimate* source of power, from mind or nature?; is nature meaningless chaos without human participation?; how is one to distinguish, if at all, between legitimate and illegitimate 'participation'?; power to what? — to encourage participation in nature? (what individual or general teleological model, in other words, structures this romp in power and participation?). One cannot side-step the issues of authority and priority in this involved relationship, just as one cannot side-step the definition and evaluation of the central concept of 'nature and the language of the sense' (l.109). Doubtless the latter derives from the independent language of nature, or of natural forms, which, as models or archetypes, were integral to Wordsworth's search for a form of expression uncorrupted by human language⁶³. But the 'language' of the *liber creaturarum* can only be understood in the radically different contexts in which it occurs in Wordsworth's poetry, as well as throughout history.⁶⁴

Returning specifically to Wordsworth's 'creative' or 'participatory' vision, it is likely enough that one hundred odd years later, he might just as easily have written out of the same *desire*, in the more fashionable language of Freud, 'both what they half-project /And what perceive'.⁶⁵ The psychological continuity and focus of the poem would thus be preserved, though those critics who would isolate the passage from the whole poem as an adumbration, even an affirmation, of a coherent philosophy of Imagination would inevitably be disappointed.

Indeed, it would not be perverse to see this passage on the transforming power of desire as typical of the larger claims made by

the poem; to see, in short, positive statements or generalizations as unreliable, as shot through with wish-fulfilment. For desire, and not doctrine, is the 'truth' the poem offers: 'for the Poet, he nothing affirms, and therefore neuer lyeth'.⁶⁶

VII

Are we then to dismiss the passages of 'affirmation' or 'inspiration' as rhetorical sleights-of-hand: digressive, and (self-)delusive or disingenuous? It is worth reminding ourselves at this point of the modern theoretical and critical preference for doubt and contradiction, and its concomitant distrust of coherence and absolutes or 'transcendental signifiers'⁶⁷ (indeed, of the transcendental generally as an outmoded Romanticism). With a shift of emphasis and change of terminology, the argument for scepticism that I have propounded could change *Tintern Abbey* into a poem either illustrative, or prophetic, of the inevitable self-deconstruction of any text.

As prisoners of this prevailing taste, we are naturally led to indulge in our own wilful misreadings, and are prone to disavow or distrust all 'affirmation', especially that which is directly derived from 'inspiration'. For while the latter may have been 'literal' for Homer and even Milton, and while it may have remained metaphorically 'alive' for the Romantics until Byron buried it in *Don Juan*⁶⁸, in the twentieth century the idea of inspiration for poets and theorists alike has become either a dead metaphor, or a cultural curiosity, or has been lost in a labyrinth of abstruse speculation.⁶⁹

Interestingly, however, it seems that Wordsworth himself was to become openly uncomfortable with, and even to regret, the long, pantheistic *cumulatio* of the lines beginning with his 'sense sublime /Of something for more deeply interfused' and ending with his extraordinary paean to Nature (ll.96-112). Responding to praise of his 'nature worship' in January 1815, he dismissed it as an erroneous inference derived from 'a passionate expression uttered *incautiously* in the Poem on the Wye', and the mistake of 'ready in cold-heartedness and substituting the letter for the spirit'.⁷⁰

For the older Wordsworth, the pantheism of the passage had, like the Platonic concept of pre-existence in the *Immortality Ode*, a strictly metaphorical or functional validity,⁷¹ and was not to be confused with the 'truth claims' either of rigorous philosophical discourse or of religious faith. He might more accurately have argued that is 'passionate expression' or 'sublimity' is achieved *in spite of* 'the letter',

or of literal confusion. William Empson, for one, has proposed that the semantic and syntactical vagueness of the passage, instead of clarifying Wordsworth's 'sense sublime /Of something far more deeply interfused', points rather to a self-defeatingly '*obscure* sense of *possible* sublimity.'⁷² Moreover, the honorific list of natural and human phenomena hardly bears out K. R. Johnstone's conviction that Wordsworth 're-creates Nature's simulacra with painstaking care in moments which seem determined to transcend Nature.'⁷³

In short, the sublime claims that the poet makes in the famous lines are expressed neither with perceptual nor with grammatical precision.

The gist of Wordsworth's ill-tempered and (it should be borne in mind) retrospective rejoinder is clear enough, however, and there is an element of pedantry in Empson's *literal* reading of these ambiguous lines that raises theoretical questions which are at least as old as 'Longinus' and which are impossible to discuss in any detail, let alone to attempt to resolve, in an essay like this. It is enough, perhaps, to register the extraordinary popularity of the lines in question and briefly to quote a practical critic and practising poet like Philip Davies Roberts: 'Our culture now places considerably less importance on the notion of meaning as conveyed by sound, and considerably more on meaning as conveyed by the printed word.'⁷⁴ In spite of his occasional deference to formal rhetoric, 'Longinus' betrays an equivalent pragmatism or interest in the reader's response (with neoPlatonic overtones):

Composition . . . is a harmony of words, man's natural instrument, penetrating not only the ears but the very soul. It arouses all kinds of conceptions of words and thoughts and objects, beauty and melody — all things native and natural to mankind . . . Shall we not then believe that by all these methods it bewitches us and elevates to grandeur, dignity, and sublimity both every thought which comes within its compass and ourselves as well, holding as it does complete domination over our minds?⁷⁵

Such necessarily indefinite exigencies unfortunately lend themselves to an ever-expanding number of arbitrarily 'valid' readings. (What, for example, do certain sounds *mean*?) However, laying aside momentarily the undeniably pantheistic import of Wordsworth's popular lines, one thing seems clear: the exaltation of Nature is a reflection of the sense or 'spirit' of 'heightened well-being' such as was discussed above, and this is the least that Wordsworth expects his reader to recognize.

But having said this, the spectre of pantheism is not quite so easily overlooked, and we cannot, as Stephen Prickett suggests, arbitrarily 'ignore the attributed 'pantheism' [attributed by whom?] and

concentrate instead on the interpenetration of man and nature.' There is no indication that the unity which Wordsworth 'senses' or infers originates exclusively in an act of Berkleian 'subjective sense-pereception'.⁷⁶ The confidence and momentum of the 'rolling' blank verse is undoubtedly a statement of its own. Conceptually, however, 'murdering to dissect', the vagueness and the doubt remain, and they will not be obliterated either by the poet's rhetorical conviction or by the reader's correspondingly 'spiritual' sense of 'well-being'.

VII

It is time to confront the single most important and, *I would believe*, single most obvious point about *Tintern Abbey*: it does not end with Wordsworth's hymn to Nature as the soul of all his moral being (l.114). While it may seem perverse or unnecessary to advert to this truism at all, what is genuinely perverse is that it *is* necessary — necessary to counteract the tendency to read this, and the orotund and suasive passage leading up to it, as the central and abiding statement of the poem. Why this should be is easy to specify but impossible to justify, as I have tried to demonstrate. Indeed, as the reader over his own shoulder, Wordsworth himself found the lines 'spiritually' compelling, long after he had renounced any 'literal' sense that could be made out of them. Moreover, the pivotal conditional clause that introduces the closing section of the poem would appear to confirm its centrality by suggesting that what follows is merely further proof of this extended and extending proposition:

Nor, perchance,
If I were not thus taught, should I the more
Suffer my genial spirits to decay:
For thou art with me. (ll.114-7)

The hymn to Dorothy introduced by the line from psalm 23, it is implied, will merely lead us back to the hymn to Nature and, from there, to the revelation of an immanent deity informing 'the mighty world /Of eye and ear', as well as all else besides.

However, as Dr Johnson frequently spelled out in his arrogantly humble way, the real business of the writer is to remind people of what they already know.⁷⁷ In this case, what the reader needs to be reminded of, is that the closing lines of *Tintern Abbey* are in no sense a paraphrase, or an expansion, or an exemplification of the preceding lines, and that the crucial conditional, as so often in the poem, is, at best, ambiguous and unhelpful, and, at worst, meaningless. There is nothing inherent in the line 'If I were not thus taught', for example,

to establish whether it means 'had I not had the privilege of such instruction' (which meaning is usually assumed), or whether it means 'if I have misinterpreted the sense (*sens*) of this experience.' The former may be more satisfying (if only temporarily), but the latter is more in keeping with the usual function of such conditionals in the poem, and has at least the virtue of opening up possibilities in the experience of the poem.

Perhaps the major difference between the previous, visionary lines that have traditionally left their overwhelming impression, and this last section involving Dorothy literally (which is to say, lovingly), metonymically, and metaphorically, is that, in the former, while preaching the unity of all life, the poet remains paradoxically isolated, while in the latter we are dealing with *genuine* relationship. As a corollary of this, the poem offers a more honest account of the possibilities and limitations of life as process which lends an authenticity and a propriety to the mediated vision that it proposes as an alternative. Thus the 'integrity' of the poet, both as an individual *and* as a humanist artist dedicated to rendering the 'still, sad music of humanity', is preserved.

That the question of Wordsworth's 'integrity' should become intensified in the concluding lines demands acknowledgement for two apparently disparate, though ultimately related, reasons. The first is simple: it is what *Tintern Abbey* is *about*. The second reason concerns the issue of critical competence, for it must be admitted that such questions are largely closed to most self-consciously modern criticism which, like the eighteenth-century poetry that Wordsworth stigmatized, is preoccupied with exclusively 'literary' elements. Needless to say, Wordsworth would have considered the obsessive classification and the hieratic quibbling as quite alien to the central springs of human passion and creativity. Modern literary theory fashionably but stubbornly assumes the obliteration of authorship, and defines works as self-referring, autonomous verbal and fictional constructs hermetically sealed from the contamination both of 'reality' and of the authorial struggle, as far as possible, to keep faith with that 'reality'. For this reason, it finds itself frequently at odds with the nominal object of its research — the poem itself — and unwilling or unable to discriminate, even to cope.

If nothing else, however, any formal analysis of the poem must recognize the pattern of recurrence explicit and implicit in the closing lines. After the subversive vagueness and hesitancy characteristic of the visionary flight, the tempered vision that completes the poem, and

the 'cyclic pattern' of the poem, have 'more ample power to chasten and subdue.' In short, the prayer and exhortation of the closing passage is better able, not only to keep faith with the poet's experience, but also to give the poem a sense of total form:

The poem ends with a sort of cyclic reference. In his younger sister, the poet sees a repetition of a stage in the larger cycle of human life. She is what he once was, and fortified by the scene which lies before them, she will become what he is now. The poet's earlier stage exists not only ideally in his memory, but actually in his sister.

E. D. Hirsch Jr, from whose study of *Wordsworth and Schelling* I am quoting⁷⁸, might have gone on, after correctly identifying the cyclic form, to stress two further, important functions that Dorothy performs in the poem. First, 'time' and 'self' being *conditions* of consciousness and therefore difficult to conceptualize as the *objects* of consciousness, the introduction of Dorothy allows the poet a perspective that is at least comparatively objective. Having gazed 'through a glass darkly', perplexedly, the poet now meets himself 'face to face', for Dorothy both *is*, and *is not*, her brother — represents, in other words, both his self and other. This brings us to her second important function, which is one of realization: while Dorothy's past, present, and future may repeat stages of the poet's own development, it is the 'sameness *with difference*' (to use Coleridge's phrase) that characterizes her reenactment, and this in spite of the poet's desire to reduce her role to a perfect Echo; his attempts, that is, to compel repetition. The cycle is approximate only. It is, and will remain, recalcitrantly progressive and unpredictable, rather than predetermined and perfect. Clinging to dubious 'intimations of eternity', the poet is prompted to arrogate to himself the role of divine geometer, shaping the transcendent and recurrent perfection of the circle, as Nietzsche would conceive of it, 'in contrast with the neurotic time obsession of repressed humanity':

Joy, however, does not want heirs, or children — joy wants itself, wants eternity, wants recurrence, wants everything eternally the same.⁷⁹

Wordsworth, for his part, aspires to a lasting 'joy /Of elevated thoughts':

Cycles are not circles, however, and Dorothy's 'actuality' is not to be seen as a flawed simulacrum of the ideal. On the contrary, it is the complex combination of the actual and the ideal which she represents, like the landscape itself, that makes her the appropriate mediator for an aspiring poet with a stubborn sense of reality. The prior mediation in the poem, first of 'thought' and then of human suffering, becomes incarnate in her person, and she will grow to combine the present, 'sad' self-consciousness of the poet with the

coveted state of undifferentiated consciousness of the child the poet once was — in short, to combine experience with innocence — and she will combine them inextricably, as the love of a sibling combines the love of both self and other that she represents⁸⁰. Thus where Coleridge, in ‘Frost at Midnight’, had found continuity with change in the relationship between father and son, Wordsworth’s condensed version of continuity ‘in the blood’ and ‘along the heart’ is found in the relationship between himself and his sister Dorothy. All this he captures in a subtle variation on the traditional conceit of the lover gazing on his own reflection in his loved one’s eyes; in Wordsworth’s version, the poet reads his ‘former pleasures in the shooting lights /Of [Dorothy’s] wild eyes’.

So much for continuity. The unity that the poet discovers — neither crudely incestuous, nor crudely narcissistic — is that described in more apocalyptic terms by the German poet Rilke:

the great renewal of the world will perhaps consist in this, that man and maid, freed from all false feeling and aversion, will seek each other not as opposites, but as brother and sister, as neighbours, and will come together as *human beings*⁸¹.

It should be obvious, then, that the closing lines of *Tintern Abbey* assimilate and contain Wordsworth’s solitary vision or ‘sense sublime’. It is for this reason that I have described Dorothy’s function as one of complex combination. The echo of the twenty-third psalm, a biblical rather than a classical pastoral, attempts the reconciliation of pantheistic atemporality and unity of man and nature on the one hand, with, on the other, the more traditional, vicarial mediation of divine but differential *relationship*. Again, Dorothy operates as both self (unity) and other (relationship). The meaning of the word ‘Dorothy’ — a gift of God — is never far away.

The reason that I distinguish Rilke’s speculation as ‘apocalyptic’ is that the Wordsworth of *Tintern Abbey* is not Blake’s God-like Bard ‘who past, present, and future sees’⁸², but the poet in whom the past, present, and future are the objects of a struggle for creative fusion and transcendence in a hostile environment of

evil tongues
Rash judgments . . . the sneers of selfish men,
. . . greetings where no kindness is . . . all
The deary intercourse of daily life. (ll.129-132)

He beholds his past in the present pleasure of return and the present pain of alteration that his own experience has effected in the landscape of the Wye valley, as well as in his sister’s (thus his own) present features

and fate. He attempts to ensure the future through his 'exhortations' (l.147) to Dorothy, charging her to adopt his beliefs. Thus they become less matters of prediction or foresight, than moral or psychological imperatives and have, for that reason, a dubious credibility.⁸³ The primal harmony in which he *would* believe becomes a bulwark against a future orchestrated by chance and unpredictable change; a future, in other words, that must, in all honesty, encompass 'the still, sad music of humanity', while also (so he would 'dare to hope') being unified by an immanent spirit that 'rolls through all things' which he once — in a moment of inspiration? — 'sensed'.

IX

What we are dealing with in *Tintern Abbey* is, of course, not 'inspiration' at all. It should by now be obvious that there are no self-authenticating epiphanies and that this is confirmed by the caution which Wordsworth exercises, both obtrusively and inobtrusively, in qualifying his 'visions' or transcendental meditations. It is a case, rather, of determination, supplication, and yearning. It is a case, not of inspiration, but of aspiration: 'so I dare to hope'; 'I would believe'; 'I must'; 'may have had'; 'may have owed'; 'perchance'. Admittedly, this aspiration rises on occasion to an 'impassioned music of . . . versification' and a power of phrasing that seems self-sanctioning, but here we might quote an ambiguous principle of the ancient critic 'Longinus': 'the sophisms of rhetoric are dimmed when they are enveloped in encircling grandeur'⁸⁴. The poem, like the poet, is never static, never self-satisfied, nor ever 'present to itself'.⁸⁵

Bearing in mind Northrop Frye's functional distinction between the lyric or 'episodic' thematic mode as discontinuous, and the epic or 'encyclopaedic' thematic mode as more extended and continuous,⁸⁶ *Tintern Abbey* is a record of lyric discontinuities and doubts in search of the continuous and encyclopaedic in human experience. Hence the 'dark passages', or the idea of the poem itself as an exploration of the 'dark passages' linking more settled stages or phases of experience and belief. To adopt the famous lines of *The Prelude*, Book Six, this search suggests only that 'our being's heart and home' is, if not with 'Infinitude' (which must remain a moot point), then at least with 'hope',

hope than can never die
With effort and expectation and desire,
And something evermore about to be (ll.540-2)⁸⁷

— in short, with a morally charged '*différance*'⁸⁸.

It is not my intention to isolate any deManic or demonic *aporia* in *Tintern Abbey*;⁸⁹ to expose a contradiction or *mésalliance* at the centre of the poem between 'text' and 'sub-text', or between the 'conscious' and the 'unconscious' of the work, or between its manifest and latent content, such that the poem is instantly dismantled or deconstructed and we are left only with fragments 'shored against' Wordsworth's, or the reader's, or anyone else's 'ruin'. Any such dichotomy or opposition would be a culpable oversimplification. Strictly speaking, 'contradiction' is a logical, rather than a poetic or psychological transgression that, when applied to poetry or psychology, takes on a far less reductive — indeed, even a potentially generative — meaning. Both song and self are large enough to 'contain multitudes'.⁹⁰ The well-worn critical recourse to the paradoxical, and to the occasional 'tension' between and within tone and content, or between and within *dianoia* or poetic thought and philosophical ideas, will have to suffice, regardless of how discredited they may have become⁹¹: 'we are dealing with human nature, and in matters of human growth and development we need to be able to accept paradoxes'.⁹²

It is enough to repeat that, in spite of the poet's eloquent advocacy of 'something far more deeply interfused', *Tintern Abbey* betrays a tentativeness, a self-distrust, even while signalling desire and optimism; to repeat that there exists an undercurrent of doubt, even of desperation. And yet Wordsworth refuses to succumb to a once-fashionable melancholy or to court obliviousness, except momentarily early in the poem ('laid asleep in body' to 'become a living soul' he must surely become indifferent to 'the mighty world /Of eye and ear'). The poet aspires rather to a fundamental continuity and community in the integration of past, present, and future; of Dorothy and himself; of man and nature — to a fundamental continuity and community that can survive the deprivations and dislocations which he portends with a characteristic honesty. There are no guarantees. When all is said and solicited, 'the burthen of the mystery' of human life remains.

Hence Keats' peculiar emphasis, which perhaps only the full context of the passage from the letter to J. H. Reynolds can explain: when the individual inhales in what Keats calls the 'Chamber of Maiden-Thought',

this breathing is the father of that tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of man [compare Wordsworth's 'still, sad music of humanity'] — of convincing one's nerves that the world is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and Oppression [compare Wordsworth's 'solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief' (l.144)] — whereby this chamber of Maiden Thought [as

opposed to Wordsworth's 'thoughtless youth' (l.91)] becomes darken'd and at the same time on all sides of it many doors are set open — but all dark — all leading to dark passages . . . We are in a Mist — *We* are now in that state — we feel the 'burden of the mystery'. To his point was Wordsworth come, as far as I can conceive, when he wrote '*Tintern Abbey*' and it seems to me that his Genius is explorative of those dark Passages . . .

NOTES

- 1 See Keats' letter to J. H. Reynolds, 3 May 1818, in *Letters of John Keats*, selected and edited by Robert Gittings (Oxford, 2nd edn, 1975), p.95. Although F. W. Bateson finds 'the comment a perceptive one', his thesis allows him little space for an extended explanation or analysis; see his *Wordsworth: A Reinterpretation*, 2nd ed (London, 1956), p.144.
- 2 See Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford, 1973) and *A Map of Misreading* (New York, 1975) amongst his numerous publications.
- 3 From his 'Memorial Verses', ll.48-49. *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, ed. Kenneth Allott (London, 1965), p.228. I do not mean to suggest that this is Arnold's only appreciation of Wordsworth's poetry.
- 4 On the formal and conceptual similarities between Coleridge's 'Frost at Midnight' and Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*, see Mary Jacobus, *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's 'Lyrical Ballads 1798'* (Oxford, 1976), pp.118-125.
- 5 Quotations and line references are from Stephen Gill (ed.), *William Wordsworth*, The Oxford Authors (Oxford and New York, 1984).
- 6 On the controversial question of the gestation, geography, and composition of the poem — which I have chosen to side-step — see Geoffrey Little, 'Forms of Beauty, Loops of Time — Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey"', in *Arts* (The Journal of the Sydney University Arts Association), XII (1984), pp.60-82.
- 7 See Robert Mayo, 'The Contemporaneity of the *Lyrical Ballads*', in *Wordsworth: Lyrical Ballads*, Casebook Series, ed. A. R. Jones and William Tydeman (London, 1972), pp.85-86.
- 8 See Little, 'Forms of Beauty, Loops of Time', p.60. It is, of course, *Peter Bell* that is Wordsworth's 'formal' — which is to say, mundane — counterpart to *The Ancient Mariner*; the element of gothic sensationalism in the latter continued to give Wordsworth serious misgivings.
- 9 For a discussion of Wordsworth's use of the words 'spontaneous' and 'spontaneity' see Paul Magnuson's 'Wordsworth and Spontaneity' in Donald H. Reiman, Michael C. Jaye, and Betty T. Bennett *et al.* (eds), *The Evidence of the Imagination: Studies of the Interactions between Life and Art in English Romantic Literature* (New York, 1978), pp.101-118.
- 10 The obvious examples are the so-called 'spots of time' in *The Prelude*. The epithet 'impassioned' is Wordsworth's own; to the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth added a note discussing the possibility of *Tintern Abbey* as an ode: 'I have written in the hope that in the transitions, and in the impassioned music of the versification will be found the principal requisites of that species of composition'. See Gill edition, p.692.
- 11 See, for example, Jacobus, *Tradition and Experiment*, pp.104-118.

- 12 The epithets are from Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, 1957), p.327.
- 13 For a comprehensive and conservative view of the 'pantheism' of Wordsworth and Coleridge — or of their attitudes to the 'One Life' — see Jonathan Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth: The Borders of Vision* (Oxford, 1982), *passim*.
- 14 See Erik H. Erikson's paper 'Ego Development and Historical Change: Clinical Notes', in his selected papers entitled *Identity and the Life Cycle*, in *Psychological Issues*, Vol. 1, no. 1, monograph 1 (New York, 1959), pp.18-49 (p.24).
- 15 The 'allegory' or extended motif of an imperilled journey through a benighted forest was one of the most traditional even when Dante used it at the opening of the *Inferno*.
- 16 *Vision and Disenchantment: Blake's 'Songs' and Wordsworth's 'Lyrical Ballads'* (Cambridge, 1983), p.252.
- 17 See OED reference, especially its use of Coleridge's 'sadder and wiser' in *The Ancient Mariner*.
- 18 I quote from the 1805 version in *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, edited by Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York and London, 1979).
- 19 A superficial glance through any anthology of eighteenth-century literature reveals the extent to which this ancient identification, with its various classical and biblical precedents, had become at once more popular and more urgent, no doubt for social and economic (industrial) reasons. See Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London, 1973), *passim*.
- 20 Wordsworth's famous recollection in the Isabella Fenwick notes of 1843 of the trance-like state he experienced as a child, ending with a heavily Freudian use of 'reality' as an absolute, rather confirms than inverts conventional hierarchies: 'I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence, and I communed with all 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'; as quoted in Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth: A Biography*, vol. I, *The Early Years 1770-1803* (Oxford, 1957), pp.41-2.
- 21 To borrow Freud's definition in *Civilization and its Discontents*. See his *Civilization, Society, and Religion*, The Pelican Freud Library, vol. 12, trans. James Strachey, ed. Albert Dickson (Harmondsworth, 1985), p.253.
- 22 *Tradition and Experiment*, p.124.
- 23 'Forms of Beauty, Loops of Time', pp.69-70, especially p.70.
- 24 This is confirmed by Jonathan Wordsworth. See his *The Borders of Vision*, pp.234, 277.
- 25 Cp. Moorman, *The Early Years*, pp.211-244 (chapter VII).
- 26 Cp. *The Prelude*, Bk VI, l.529; Gill (ed.), p.463.
- 27 *The Borders of Vision*, p.79.
- 28 In adopting the title of Paul de Man's essays in the rhetoric of contemporary criticism *Blindness and Insight* (Oxford and New York, 1971) I am not adopting his thesis.
- 29 *The Prelude*, Bk I, l.306; Gill (ed.), p.382.
- 30 Line 229; Gill (ed.), p.162.
- 31 See Gill (ed.), p.597.

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- 32 Coleridge, Wordsworth, and the Language of Allusion (Oxford, 1986), p.54.
- 33 I am thinking, of course, of the final lines of Gray's *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College*: 'where ignorance is bliss, 'Tis folly to be wise' (ll.99-100). See H. W. Starr and J. R. Hendrickson (eds), *The Complete Poems of Thomas Gray* (Oxford, 1966), p.10.
- 34 Johnson explicitly and implicitly accuses Gray of an anti-social and self-indulgent shrinking, in both life and art, from the vicissitudes of existence. See the *Life of Gray*, in *Johnson as Critic*, ed. John Wain, The Routledge Critics Series (London and Boston, 1973), pp.451-460.
- 35 References to *Tintern Abbey* as 'elegiac' occur in Jonathan Wordsworth's *The Music of Humanity: A Critical Study of Wordsworth's 'Ruined Cottage'* (London, 1969), p.216 and in his *The Borders of Vision*, p.235, as well as in Mary Jacobus, *Tradition and Experiment*, p.123.
- 36 To quote John Jones, *The Egotistical Sublime: A History of Wordsworth's Imagination* (London, 1954), p.94.
- 37 This, at least, Wordsworth has in common with 'primitive cultures', which 'usually recognize two main stages of development, childhood and maturity, the border between them often being demarcated by ritual ceremonies'; see J. Cleverly and C. D. Phillips, *Visions of Childhood: Influential Models from Locke to Spock* (Sydney, London, Boston, 1987), p.80.
- 38 Cp. Cleverly and Phillips, *Visions of Childhood*: 'In medieval times, in some circles, there were held to be seven ages of man, which paralleled the Biblical days of Creation and which also was in harmony with the number of prominent celestial bodies' (p.80).
- 39 See, for example, Jacques Lacan on the 'mirror stage' of child development, during which the child beholds its own image as a '*Gestalt*' which 'symbolizes the mental permanence of the *I*, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination; it is still pregnant with the correspondences that unite the *I* with the statue in which man projects himself, with the phantoms that dominate him, or with the automaton in which, in an ambiguous relation, the world of his own making tends to find completion'; see Lacan's *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London, 1977), pp.2-3.
- 40 See above, p.102, note 14.
- 41 *Identity and the Life Cycle*, p.23.
- 42 The 'speculation' that led to his appraisal of *Tintern Abbey*, in the same letter to Reynolds; *Letters*, p.95.
- 43 See, for example, the opening lines 1 to 18, and the 'test' and dialogue of Canto 1, 107-215; *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. Jack Stillinger (London, 1978), pp.478, 480-483.
- 44 As defined by Carl Jung in his *Dictionary of Analytic Psychology* (London, 1987), p.112.
- 45 *Letters*, p.95.
- 46 They account, for example, for what Jonathan Wordsworth calls the poet's fascination with 'border states' — see his *The Borders of Vision* — and represent the obverse of his public commitment, in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), to delineate 'the essential passions of the heart', and 'to follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature' (Gill, pp.597, 598). I think Jonathan Wordsworth is right to associate this fascination

- with the death-wish, though I would question its status as 'the central metaphor of *Tintern Abbey*' — see *The Borders of Vision*, p.26.
- 47 *Civilization, Society, and Religion*, p.255.
- 48 This tension or impropriety is often located in grammar or 'logic' in order to avoid any suggestion of the mimetic or the expressive. Cp. Michael Riffaterre on Wordsworth's 'Yew-Trees': 'the functional element is not a mimetic detail but the symbolic circularity of phrase. . . Not only because 'shade', as a *tree*-system component, would be a metonym for the whole tree . . . but because the phrase reverses a characteristic representation of epiphany as a self-sufficiency of light emitted and received'; see his 'Interpretation and Descriptive Poetry: A Reading of Wordsworth's "Yew-Trees"', in Robert Young (ed.), *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader* (Boston, London, and Henley, 1981), pp.103-132 (p.116).
- 49 Cp. John Beer, *Wordsworth in Time* (London and Boston, 1979), p.111.
- 50 The idea of language as 'performing', 'implying', or 'bearing' meaning beyond, or even opposed to, literal statement, is at least as old as the Socratic dialogues.
- 51 See above, p.75.
- 52 *Vision and Disenchantment*, pp.255-6.
- 53 See, for example, Mary Jacobus, *Tradition and Experiment*, pp.104-118; Geoffrey Little, 'Forms of Beauty, Loops of Time', pp.64-66.
- 54 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802); Gill, p.608.
- 55 'Foregrounding' is a term associated with what is loosely and inclusively entitled 'Russian Formalism'. As with traditional criticism of *Tintern Abbey*, the choice of 'foregrounded' material may be a presumption, especially if studied out of its 'background' context.
- 56 See J. F. Danby, *The Simple Wordsworth: Studies in the Poems 1797-1807* (London, 1960), p.109.
- 57 As Geoffrey Little remarks, in spite of this ironic 'absence' some unjustifiable apocalyptic and psychoanalytic readings of the significance of the gypsies and the hermit have been offered (Little compares Hartman and Bloom). See 'Forms of Beauty, Loops of Time', pp.70-71.
- 58 Wordsworth's distrust of the supervention of 'literary' or scholastic imagery — even of language itself — upon 'Nature's living images' is manifest in his disparagement of the 'self-created sustenance' of Coleridge's youthful intellect. See *The Prelude* (1805), VI, 305ff.
- 59 Coleridge's familiarity with German philosophy in 1798 remains a much-debated point. For balance and detail, compare Norman Fruman, *The Damaged Archangel* (London, 1971) with Thomas McFarland, *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* (Oxford, 1969).
- 60 See Gill, p.693.
- 61 'The power of humanizing nature, of infusing the thoughts and passions of man into every thing which is the object of his contemplation; color, form, motion, and sound are the elements which it combines, and it stamps them into unity in the mould of a moral idea'; see 'On Poesy or Art', in J. Shawcross (ed), *Biographia Literaria*, Vol.II (Oxford, 1907), pp.253-263 (p.253).
- 62 'The Idiom of Vision' in Geoffrey H. Hartman (ed), *New Perspectives on Wordsworth and Coleridge: Selected Papers of the English Institute* (New York and London, 1972), p.24.
- 63 See my article, 'Wordsworth and the Language of Nature', *The Wordsworth Circle*,

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- XIV, No. 1 (Winter, 1983), pp.40-47.
- 64 For an informed overview, see George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (New York and London, 1975), *passim*.
- 65 For Freud the 'projection' of the 'internal, instinctual' on to 'the external, perceptual', however creative, is an invariably self-delusory activity, what he would call a 'neurotic mechanism'. It occurs throughout his writings, typically in the various papers collected in *On Psychopathology*, vol. 10 of the Pelican Freud Library, trans. James Strachey, ed. Angela Richards (Harmondsworth, 1979).
- 66 Sir Philip Sidney would, of course, argue that this makes poetry more *effectively* doctrinal, but the renunciation of poetic 'truth' in any narrow sense remains. See *An Apology for Poetry* in G. Gregory Smith (ed.), *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, Vol. 1, pp.148-207 (p.184).
- 67 Jacques Derrida's term for any hypostasizing absolute that is assumed to justify anything with pretensions to system and to coherence; see his interview with Julia Kristeva in *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, 1981), pp.19-20, for a comparatively intelligible account.
- 68 See the first stanza of Canto III: 'Hail Muse! *et cetera* . . .' in Jerome J. McGann (ed.), *Byron*, The Oxford Authors (Oxford and New York, 1986), p.488.
- 69 See, for example, Pietro Pucci, 'The Language of the Muses', in Wendell M. Aycock and Theodore M. Klein (eds), *Classical Mythology in Twentieth-Century Thought and Literature* (Lubbock, Texas, 1980), pp.163-186.
- 70 In a letter to Catherine Clarkson, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, 2nd edn, Vol.III, *The Middle Years*, Part II, 1812-1820, rev. by Mary Moorman and Alan G. Hill (Oxford, 1970), p.188.
- 71 See the Isabella Fenwick note to the *Immortality Ode*; Gill, p.714.
- 72 William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (London, 2nd edn, 1961), pp.151-154. The Wordsworth quotation (with my italics) is from *The Prelude* (1805), II, 336-7; a lengthier quotation is relevant to this essay:
 I deem not profitless those fleeting moods
 Of shadowy exultation: not for this,
 That they are kindred to our purer mind
 And intellectual life; but that the soul,
 Remembering how she felt, but what she felt
 Remembering not, retains an obscure sense
 Of possible sublimity, to which,
 With growing faculties she doth aspire. (II.331-338)
- 73 In 'The Idiom of Vision', p.23.
- 74 *How Poetry Works: The Elements of English Poetry* (Harmondsworth, 1986), p.15. For an extended justification of this reordering of a traditional hierarchy, see Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London, 1976), *passim*.
- 75 *On Sublimity*, chapter 39, translated by D. A. Russell in his and M. Winterbottom's edition, *Ancient Literary Criticism: The Principal Texts in New Translations* (Oxford, 1973) p.497.
- 76 Stephen Prickett, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Poetry of Growth* (Cambridge, 1970), p.96.
- 77 'For great things cannot have escaped former observation'; see Johnson's *Life of Cowley* in *Johnson as Critic*, ed. Wain, p.255.

- 78 E. D. Hirsch, Jr, *Wordsworth and Schelling: A Typological Study of Romanticism* (New Haven, 1960), pp.71,72.
- 79 As quoted by Norman O. Brown in his *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytic Meaning of History* 2nd edn. (Middletown, Connecticut, 1985), p.108.
- 80 On the exploitation of the incest theme, see Richard J. Onorato, *The Character of the Poet: Wordsworth in 'The Prelude'* (Princeton, 1971), p.82. Glen also refers to the *'egoisme-a-deux'* that forms the central metaphor of these final lines. Where her emphasis falls on the *'egoisme'*, however, I would place it on *'deux'*: *Vision and Disenchantment*, p.257.
- 81 In his *Letters to a Young Poet*, quoted by Brown, *Life Against Death*, p.134.
- 82 See the 'Introduction' to *Songs of Experience*, l.2. *The Poems of William Blake*, ed. W. H. Stevenson (London, 1971), p.209.
- 83 For a study of 'will' in *Tintern Abbey*, see M. G. Cooke, *The Romantic Will* (New Haven and London, 1976), pp.47-50.
- 84 *On Sublimity*, chapter 17; *Ancient Literary Criticism*, p.481.
- 85 On 'presence' as the fragile assumption upon which most intellectual and theological systems are constructed, see, for example, Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, part 1, 'Writing before the Letter'.
- 86 *Anatomy of Criticism*, pp.54-55 and ff.
- 87 Gill, p.464.
- 88 Again, a term of Derrida's, to suggest the constant and inevitable deferral of meaning in units of language. See *Positions*, pp.24ff.
- 89 'Two equally well-formed linguistic entities occur in juxtaposition in such a way that they are mutually contradictory and require an interpretive decision in favor of the one or the other, yet no possibility of making such a decision exists. This is the paradigm of aporia'; see Wlad Godzich's article 'The Domestication of Derrida' in Jonathan Arac et al. (eds), *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America* (Minneapolis, 1983), pp.20-40 (p.22).
- 90 I am, of course, alluding to the famous lines of Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself*: 'Do I contradict myself? Very well, I contradict myself. /I am large; I contain multitudes'. Though over-quoted, Walt Whitman's refusal to apologize for contradicting himself has a timeless aptness.
- 91 Adopting a theoretical classification to fit the poem (rather than *vice versa*), *Tintern Abbey* is indeed unified, but it is unified neither structurally nor organically. The unity that it possesses derives from the poet/persons or, to risk further disapproval, *from Wordsworth*. My position may be accused of 'a violent yoking of heterogeneous ideas' — specifically of Romantic expressionism; of New Critical 'rhetoric'; and of the 'exaltant contrariness' which is the animating force of the literary intention' for Maurice Blanchot (for this last, see William Ray, *Literary Meaning: From Phenomenology to Deconstruction* (Oxford, 1984), p.15). It is precisely the psychological reality and poetic motif of time and change in the poem that resist rigid theoretical classification yet allow for an evolutionary unity of purpose and poem.
- 92 To quote D. W. Winnicott's paper 'Children Learning'; see his *Home Is Where We Start From: Essays by a Psychoanalyst*, compiled and ed. by Clare Winnicott et al. (Harmondsworth, 1986), p.148.