

Université de Montréal

Eye and Ear in Wordsworth's Poetry

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RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse de doctorat porte sur la phénoménologie visuelle et auditive dans la poésie du poète romantique Britannique William Wordsworth. Je soutiens que l'œil, bien qu'il soit usurpateur, joue un rôle fondateur dans le développement de la conscience chez ce poète. L'oreille, quant à elle, souvent présentée comme organe rédempteur, a aussi des imperfections. Ensemble, l'œil et l'oreille, dépassent leurs imperfections respectives et joignent leurs forces dans la construction du poème et, au-delà de cela, à la construction de la conscience du poète.

Mots clefs: œil, oreille, phénoménologie, herméneutique, Romantisme Britannique, empirisme, sensibilité.

ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with the visual and aural phenomenology in Wordsworth's poetry. It places Wordsworth's aesthetics between the most immediate embodied experience and the most exalted operations of the mind. My contention in the first two chapters is that one way to understand Wordsworth's ambivalence toward the eye is to consider that visual perception is not a substratum on which imagination is coated or fabricated. Both bodily vision and imagination constitute characteristic and, strictly speaking, necessary ways of seeing. In the third chapter I deal exclusively with the ear, its status as an "organ of vision" as well as its impairments. The fourth chapter concentrates on the notion of synesthesia and delineates how beyond their negativity the eye and the ear contribute evenly to the growth of the poet's mind.

Keywords: eye, ear, phenomenology, hermeneutics, British Romanticism, empiricism, sensibility.

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À la mémoire de 'Pa,
À Ommi,
À Marco, le triomphal résumé de tous les autres.

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Introduction

It is with romantic poetry that we begin a poetic confrontation of the realms of the two reigning senses.
(*Vision and Resonance* 23)

Noel Jackson pinpoints the emerging interest in man as a “physiological entity” in the late eighteenth century as the beginning of modern history: “almost all recent histories of perception date cataclysmic changes in the sensorium to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the period in which the disciplines of human-scientific knowledge, and ‘Man’ as both a subject and an object of that knowledge, assume their modern form” (“Archaeologies” 176). This thesis is interested in the link between changes in the sensorium in the Romantic era and in the epistemology of man, yet circumscribes its focus to the reassessment of what seeing and hearing mean for Wordsworth, and to the role of the imagination in the visual and aural phenomenology. The choice of the topic immediately presented two challenges. The first is that in addressing the senses, which, Maurice Bowra says, “for the Romantics ... was the instrument which set their visionary powers in action” (12), the thesis enters a field that is not only quite ancient, but increasingly well-trodden as it is at the crossroad of physiology, philosophy and poetry.¹ The second is that in being exclusively interested in Wordsworth – who makes a case for the involvement of poetry and physiology in the construction of consciousness, cognition, and subjectivity – it intermingles subjects that are too lengthily complex to be contained in one thesis.²

¹ For a better grasp on how literature and science are inherently conversational, reciprocally conducive and actively integrated in each other see Jennifer Ford, who posits, that “there was no clear distinction between theorists and practitioners of medicine and those of poetry” (6). On the close affinities between poetry and human sciences in the Romantic era, see Alan Bewell, *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment*, Maureen N. McLane, *Romanticism and the Human Sciences*, and Noel B Jackson *Science and Sensation in Romantic Poetry*.

² Noel Jackson draws attention to the influence that new brain theories exerted on Romantic poetry. “As historians of medicine have long asserted, this is a period that saw considerable advances in the understanding of the brain and the nervous system, and these scientific developments were significantly refashioning the study of the mind, formerly the province of philosophy, along anatomical and physiological lines” (3). Among the most

In an effort to broaden current critical debates on visual and aural phenomenology, I challenge the existing categories of analysis by proposing two claims. The first is that the judgment of the small contribution of the “bodily eye” to Wordsworth’s poetry should be saddled with strong relativism. The second is that the usurpatory eye and the magnifying ear connect together beyond their respective negativity, and contribute evenly to the making of poetry. I concede that the ear has two advantages over the eye in that it readily transform sounds – even fleeting sounds – into presence making them thereby part of the imagination, and also contributes more significantly than the eye to moral consciousness. Because of its impairments, however, the ear should not be given special pre-eminence. Wordsworth’s poetry, I posit, is predicated on the principles of sensual compensation and equivalence.

The thesis draws out its full breadth over four major chapters. The first, entitled “The Return to the Visible,” is mostly concerned with mapping out the critical terrain. It first addresses the question of how Wordsworth can be approached as a practitioner of the poetry of sensation and embodiment, and at the same time as a poet of disembodiment whose best poetry consists in moments “when the light of sense / Goes out” (*The Prelude* 6. 600-1). Imagination is, of course, divested of material existence or substance, but its correlative relationship to the body – evident in Wordsworth’s lexical idiosyncrasies – encode the poet’s understanding of the imagination as fundamentally embodied.

Commenting on Wordsworth’s statement “I wished to draw attention to the truth that the

important studies conducted in this area are those of Karl M Foglio “Theories of Perception and the Psychology of Mind in the late Eighteenth-Century, Roy Porter “Medical Science and Human Science in the Enlightenment,” John P Wright “Metaphysics and Physiology: Mind, Body and the Animal Economy in Eighteenth-Century Scotland.”

power of the human imagination is sufficient to produce such changes even in our physical nature as might almost appear miraculous,” Youngquist writes “shifting the emphasis from the first part of this sentence to the last, from imagination to physical nature, begins to recover the physiological agenda of Wordsworth’s ‘Preface,’ its commitment to a poetry of bodily effect” (33). Youngquist’s suggestion is that embodied imagination is a hallmark of Wordsworth’s poetical technique. “The physical agenda” is reflected in Wordsworth’s tendency in the Preface as well as in the poetry to engage with views concerning the embodiment of the imagination, that is, the interaction of the imagination and the senses in a bodily network, and his sustained interest in the different ramifications and important implications of this interactive dynamic.

My theoretical approach in this thesis balances between phenomenological hermeneutics and Deconstruction in order to revoke whatever circumscription has been assigned to the commerce between the eye and the ear. Its governing theoretical principle is that “genuine interpretation must point out what no longer stands in the words, but is said nonetheless” (Heidegger “An Introduction to Metaphysics” 10). In tracing the hidden sensual polysemy, I trust to the text “itself [to] provide us with the tools we are to use in deconstructing it” (Rajan 16). I shall fasten on a few Deconstructive strategies to question the conventional critical pronouncements about the function of the eye and the ear, and to trade the breadth of traditional meanings for a nuanced hermeneutics richer in specific textual details.

I posit that vision and hearing are unstable and subversive properties of the text. They resist both domestication and interpretation, lending themselves, therefore, to a deconstructive interpretation which “comes close to extracting a confession by a sort of

language-torture” (Hartman *Unremarkable* 198). I neither confirm nor reject the critical pronouncements that concluded many discussions about the function of the eye and the ear in Wordsworth’s poetry. My aim is to bring to light the other directions that have not been provisioned in these critiques. Thinking between hermeneutics and Deconstruction, I hope to emphasize the significance of the postmodern pattern of thinking in-between, and to lodge my argument in a transversal zone, allowing for more disclosure and openness.

The proper argument of the first chapter is that despite its usurpatory and tyrannical potential, the “bodily eye” plays a crucial role in the continuum of the imagination. Though it is too undeveloped to afford much in the way of imaginative or visionary power, it has a unique value; urging Wordsworth to identify the inbuilt synergies which produce the comprehensive power he calls the “Imagination.”³ After I survey the various eighteenth-century developments which influenced Wordsworth’s treatment of the eye (mainly Locke and Hartley), I marshal evidence for Wordsworth’s ambivalence toward the eye. While explicitly denigrating it, he suggests that it is a vessel of “holy pleasure” (“Admonition to a Traveller” 1) and of “creation” itself (“There is creation in the eye” *Lyrical Ballads* 323).⁴ The “manifold distinctions . . . perceived in things where to the common eye / No difference is” led to “gentle agitations of the mind” which in turn made it possible to see “blessings spread around me like a sea” (*Prelude* 2. 395). The eye is “despotic,” yet in

³ In my discussion of the tyranny of the eye I omit to speak of the daemonic eye. Frank D. McConnell develops this claim in his *The Confessional Imagination*. In his analysis of *The Borderers* he says that “it is equally important in the crucial area of his handling of the sense and imagery of sight, because it organizes itself around the pathetic image of the sightless man preyed upon by daemonic characters. Such characters, ironically so trust visual evidences and the whole world of the visual that they become possessed (either as manipulators or gulls) by its prejudices and thus destroy any truly human behavior or relationship” (102).

⁴ My treatment of the despotic energy of the eye goes beyond the context of Book 12 of *The Prelude*, where, referring to his indictment of the picturesque tradition, Wordsworth extols: “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” (128-30). My concern with the eye’s despotism extends to all the episodes where thought is distorted by visual exuberance.

many poems the language of seeing is used in its extended use of insight and even enlightenment. Seeing a flash, for instance, is one of the hallmarks of true personal enlightenment where enlightenment means grasping or realizing the significance of the veridical visual experience. The afterimage of the Daffodils “flash[es] upon that inward eye / Which is the bliss of solitude” (“I wandered Lonely as a Cloud” 21-22), and “a light upon the turf/ Fell like a flash” (*Prelude* 14. 38-39) atop Mount Snowdon. In both cases the flash is a flash of insight on which Wordsworth instantly acts. Moreover in his eulogy of the eye, Wordsworth adds that his sight “Could find no surface where its power might sleep” (*Prelude* 3. 166). I propose that one way to understand Wordsworth’s ambivalence toward the eye is to consider that visual perception is not a substratum on which imagination is coated or fabricated. Both perception and imagination constitute characteristic and, strictly speaking, necessary ways of seeing. The one essential role played by the “bodily eye” is to warrant the crucial, albeit problematic, relatedness of imagination to nature.

My argument develops from Hartman’s claim that the “bodily eye” establishes and secures the grounding principle of *akedah* (Hebraic term meaning “binding”) that imagination both seeks and resists.⁵ It seeks it for purposes of regenerative sustenance and resists it when it is anxious to found itself *ex nihilo*. Hartman explains that the “the rock [on which humanity is founded] is Mathew or Michael, leech gatherer, or Wanderer, pastoral people, in contact with the earth and whose eye is on the earth” (*Wordsworth’s Poetry* 291). That the contact with the earth is established by the eye suggests that the eye is more emphatically sensitive to nature. I examine the importance of this relatedness to

⁵ Hartman opposed *Akedah* to “apocalypse” (*Wordsworth’s Poetry* 225). For an elaborate discussion of this antithesis see George Douglas Atkins. *Geoffrey Hartman: Criticism and Answerable Style* (51-60).

nature not only to the “pastoral people” and the other characters belonging to the same category of the natural men, but also to the imaginative man. And since the imaginative man evolves from the natural man, I focus on the trope of return as relatedness and study its ontological, epistemological and discursive values.

1 Return: the ontological value

I contend that the return to the visible – which represents a circling back into a sense of origin from within the imagination – fosters Wordsworth’s sense of self-consciousness. Yet because there is no nominal or definite origin in Wordsworth and because the beginning is often the “middle (and muddle) of things” (Hartman, *Wordsworth’s Poetry* 53), imagination’s return to the visible only makes sense if its value or purpose is to confirm the “leveling” of nature’s and the poet’s being (Fry 64). In the language of Paul Fry “[Wordsworth’s poetry] has a far more radical, pressing, and original motive, which is ontological – or rather ... ‘ontic’”(2).⁶ The “bodily eye” is involved in the project of thinking being in relation to nature because of what Hartman calls its “lucidity” (*Unremarkable* 183). Hartman’s description discloses the two major characteristics of the eye. Firstly, the eye provides an ontic foundation and a physical grounding to which imagination incessantly returns for regenerative sustenance. Secondly, it protects from the disillusionment that is likely to result from the emphatic enchantment with the visible world.

⁶ Of course, Paul Fry is not the first to have intuited the mergence of nature and mind. This idea has been investigated sporadically, though not systematically, by numerous critics. Fry himself writes that “F.R. Leavis ... imputes the ‘wisdom’ of Wordsworth’s very incoherence to ‘his sense of communion with the non-human universe.” By the time Basil Willey wrote his “Background” books, what he called the ‘mergence with the inanimate’ in Wordsworth was commonplace. It had already inspired the clear-sighted invective of Irving Babbitt against Wordsworth’s ‘primitivism’” (64).

The perspicuity of the ontological question is what pressures us not to exclude the “bodily eye” from this project, and to try to understand “what” constitutes the self in its relation to nature; an ontic and ontological entity to which the self discovers itself to be antithetical. Nature and the self stand in an ontic-ontological relation. Both have a capacity for ontology; the self by measuring itself against nature, and nature because it has “its mode of being, its status as beings or as a being, its relation to human being, and the being of its being” (Fry 63). The poet’s being is different from nature’s being only insofar as it does not intervene in any way in nature’s ontology whereas nature promotes the poet’s ontological inquiry.

I critique two opposite trends in Wordsworth criticism. The first – the visionary trend – privileges a forthwith leap into the imaginative and celebrates it as a phenomenon that does not relate again to its sensuous form. This trend suggests that the fully-fledged imagination guards against the slippage into nature. Its argument invalidates the use of the “bodily eye” beyond the stage of childhood. It might have resulted from a misinterpretation of Hartman’s claim that “the desire of the Romantics is perhaps for what Blake calls ‘organized innocence,’ but never for a mere return to the state of nature” (*Beyond Formalism* 300-1). Hartman suggests that Wordsworth is no primitivist and that imagination’s return to nature, to the ontic, is symptomatic of an effort to see itself in nature and not to see nature. Clearly, however, “state of nature” has not exactly been interpreted from within its oppositional determination with respect to culture; that is, as primitivism. Rather, it has been taken to mean *physis*, which translates in the language of the early Heidegger, for instance, as “the world”; an entity of detached observation which makes itself accessible as an object of empirical intuition. Michael Lewis succinctly notes

that “Heidegger’s early notion of world . . . understood nature solely insofar as it was taken up into the human realm of means and ends, the ‘ready-to-hand’ world” (10). Nature claims no higher standing in the writings of the early Heidegger than an object or a utility. It is in this particular framework that nature, in both its “present-at-hand” and “ready-to-hand” determinations, has been thought to be useful to Wordsworth’s imagination.⁷ This idea does not, in my view, have much plausibility because the “high argument” (*The Recluse* 824) in Wordsworth’s major poetry; the fittedness of the imagination and nature evidences the more than utilitarian appeal that nature has for Wordsworth. Much of this appeal derives from the idea that nature, as Guinn Batten puts it, “is neither a maternal imaginary to be transcended nor a source only of material sustenance to be exploited” (149).

Hartman has been thought to believe that in forsaking nature imagination forsakes the eye despite his declaration on another occasion that “there are no sharp breaks or ritual passings between one state of mind and another: vision is always continuous with sensation” (*Unremarkable* 11). Sense experience, making sense only in relation to nature, allows for the reading of “continuity with sensation” as continuity with nature. So while at first it might seem that Hartman makes a clean sweep of his earlier claim (“never a mere return to the state of nature”), the notion of “contin[uity] with sensation,” also read as continuity with nature, resolves the gambit as it asserts nature’s signification to the mind. The misinterpretation of Hartman’s claim seems to have encouraged the visionary group of

⁷ Michael Inwood defines Heidegger’s “present-at-hand” and “ready-to-hand” in the following words: “more often [Heidegger] uses [‘present-at-hand’] for a particular mode of being, for things that we find neutrally reposing in themselves” (128). The objectification characteristic of the mode of being “present-at-hand” is also conspicuous in Heidegger’s definition of *Dasein*: “*Dasein* is not something present-at-hand which possesses the ability to be something as an extra; it is primarily being-possible. *Dasein* is always what it can be, and in the way in which (*wie*) it is its possibility” (*Being and Time* 143).

critics to believe that the experience of visual perception in Wordsworth is only degree zero in the architectonics of creative thought and that it offers a ground for transcendence that is antithetical to the “ontic” motive as opposed to its being, as Scofield says, “at the centre.” Here is Scofield’s comment in full

in moments of essential perception [Wordsworth] perceives the irreducible separate being of other people and things, and their relation with his own being. He is the poet of this moment of perception, and gives us the feeling of it in his poems. Without the presence of the vital flame at the centre, the larger faith, the ‘love of nature’ and the ‘love of mankind’ can have no meaning. (365)

On the other hand, the opposite trend that I call “the materialist trend” raises the ontic above the ontological by considering it is a repressed force whose nature it is to return and to haunt. Any attempt to circumvent or sublimate it is bound to failure. This trend puts Wordsworth’s “visionary” power under pressure, and jeopardizes the ontological project. I argue that only a critical middle ground between the ontological and the ontic frees Wordsworth criticism from the fallacy of a fixed origin by interpreting the return to nature as a pursuit of “possible sublimity.” This pursuit is, of course, antithetical to the attempt to establish a steadfast meaning and an ultimate truth.

I will study what I call “the return to the visible” in the opening book of *The Prelude* where the “soul” comes face to face with the ontological issue it has skirted through the use of *medias res*. Should it find/trace/track correspondences between the past (childhood) and the present of composition, or found these correspondences on the spot? The problem related to the alternative of finding is that since it draws on a presence of absence it goes beyond the phenomenology of presence. The problem related to the alternative of founding is that it construes a contrived and defective beginning. In the midst of this anxiety, “an anxious eye / ... with intrusive restlessness beats off / Simplicity and

self-presented truth” (247-49). It is certainly true that the eye is presented as an impediment in this episode, yet the fact that Wordsworth turns to it is a crucial critical gesture, which is symptomatic of Wordsworth’s belief that only what is perceived by the “bodily eye” is truly foundationalist.

2 Return: the epistemological value

My contention in this part of the first chapter is that for Wordsworth the epistemological value of the return to the visible is “seeing things as they seem” as opposed to “seeing things as they are,” and that this principle is a form of reflexive ontological awareness. Wordsworth reaches this theory after realizing a rift in Coleridge’s thought concerning the confluence of idealism and realism. My use of the term “realism” corresponds to what Fish defines as “the first-pass view of the purely phenomenological aspect of veridical visual experience or ... the conscious character of seeing” (3). Coleridge wanted Wordsworth to systematize the relation of man as a subject of eye and ear and nature as an object in his projected *magnum opus* *The Recluse*. Yet Wordsworth was unable to achieve or even to conceive of this system. Paul Fry asserts that

[Wordsworth] could only have written *The Recluse* if he had been Coleridge. He knew this all along, and when Coleridge failed to supply ideas on returning from Malta the fate of the poem was sealed. Not that he could never have gotten Coleridge’s philosophy into poetry without help, as is sometimes said; he simply could never enter into it. (19)

At the end of the Preface to the 1814 edition of *The Excursion*, the latter makes a significant statement: “It is not the Author’s intention formally to announce a system; it was more animating to him to proceed in a different course; and if he shall succeed in conveying to the mind clear thoughts, lively images, and strong feelings, the Reader will have no difficulty in

extracting the system for himself” (*Selected Poems and Prefaces* 470). Commenting on these lines Alison Hickey writes:

The implication is that ‘delivering a system’ would dull not only the poet’s animation, but also the reader’s; moreover, it would risk constituting an undue imposition of authority, and Wordsworth is loath to conceive of his poem as enslaving the reader to another man’s system. Such reluctance is always motivated in Wordsworth, stemming both from the poet’s awe for the singularity of others and from his stake in his own independence. His refusal to impose a system is also a refusal to subject himself to a system – his own or Coleridge’s. (17)

I argue that though both poets looked at the complex of idealism-realism from the same perspective, they offered competing accounts. Through a comparison of their respective theories, I hope to demonstrate how Wordsworth succeeded in highlighting the epistemological incoherence that Coleridge’s theory of idealism/realism has run into, and that he embraced the epistemologically anti-foundationalist idea that accounts of knowledge are formed by feelings that are conditioned by thoughts.

For him what is seen is what is thought is seen and has very little relation to the object outside consciousness. My argument is not that Wordsworth does not see the object, nature or the external world in its own right, but that because there exists 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,” (“Tintern Abbey” 99-102) the object is not perceived precisely as it presents itself to the senses. Underlying this assertion is, of course, the widely known argument that the external world is itself an “active universe” (*Prelude* 2. 254), which, in interacting with the mind, allows it more freedom in constructing its own perceptions. The argument ties in with Wordsworth’s declaration that “our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts” (*Selected Poems and Prefaces* 448). This declaration

is problematic because in suggesting the complete dependence of feelings on thoughts, it simultaneously undermines the reliance of thoughts on feelings. In discussing Wordsworth's "problem of reconciling feelings with thought that silently drives much of Wordsworth's best poetry," Blank maintains that "the function of a great deal of Wordsworth's poetry is to make this kind of distinction in order to come to terms with his problematic feeling" (46).

I start this part by studying *Peele Castle*, the poem in which Wordsworth relinquishes the mode of seeing things as they seem after realizing that the external world or nature has betrayed him. According to Matlak the poem celebrates "the poet's renunciation of his gladsome belief in Nature's benignity" (17). Wordsworth's vision of a castle on a placid summer day is corrected by Beaumont. The latter portrays the castle battered by a stormy sea which is quite similar to the one which engulfed his brother John. What piques Wordsworth's interest in Beaumont's painting is its overwhelming violence, which, in his current state of mind, he takes to be a real depiction of the outside world's reality. What he never acknowledged before and suddenly realizes through the painting is that the external world is more prone to mutability and chaos than permanence and harmony. By thus portraying the sea, Beaumont pinpoints the wish-fulfillment in Wordsworth's vision which would have "seen the of soul of truth in every part" (31), and demonstrates that it is not truth in nature that is delusive but Wordsworth's perception of it. Underlying the confrontation between these two ways of seeing is the paradox of idealism and realism.

In trying for the connection between realism and idealism in "Tintern Abbey" I draw attention to the fact that the poem comprises a significant paradox, which is that imagination transcends the picturesque yet depends on it for growth and consolidation.

Imagination and the picturesque are two opposing camps just like the ideal and real, form and substance, harmony and discord, yet in the poem they have considerable kinship.

Thinking in opposites is, according to Smith, part of Wordsworth's "habitual turn of mind." He claims that

In Wordsworth, a pattern of basic habits of thinking and feeling unfolds itself in a kind of dualism: Wordsworth had a very strong habit of thinking in terms of paired opposites or contrarities. Everywhere, in nature, in his individual man and in society, he saw a constant interplay of opposing forces. These contrarities were a characteristic manifestation of his mind. (1181)

The paradox is captured in the declaration that "while with an eye made quiet by the power / Of harmony, and the deep power of joy, / We see into the life of things" (47-49) and the entreaty to Dorothy to lend him her eyes, which are still able to apprehend nature as an ontic entity. Dorothy is like the maid of Book 12 of *The Prelude*:

She welcomed what was given, and craved no more;
Whate'er the scene presented to her view
That was the best, to that she was attuned
By her benign simplicity of life,
And through a perfect happiness of soul,
Whose variegated feelings were in this
Sisters, that they were each some new delight. (158-64)

Borrowing Dorothy's eyes suggests re-gaining what Fish calls a "first-pass view," which is natural to Wordsworth the man, yet quite complicated, if not altogether impossible to Wordsworth the poet. "Tintern Abbey" goes far in establishing a new intellectual outlook that takes into consideration the struggle between the picturesque and the imagination. Wordsworth does not rule out the possibility of seeing with his bodily eye as he does in

“Intimations Ode”,⁸ yet he metamorphoses this way of seeing to bring it into line with his aim to demonstrate that the bodily eye provides a revitalized sense of embodied existence and a rematerialized manifestation of an occluded signification.

I also study the Blind Beggar episode in *The Prelude*, where the spectacle of the visibly written provides knowledge of self and human worth. The concentration on a commonplace sight in a London crowd suggests that the mind – wobbling back and forth on the “brink precipitous” (*To Dora* 26) finally regains access to the material world. I am interested in the blind beggar as a symbol which helps Wordsworth to break out of his isolation not so much to promote his social cohesion as to make him aware of the basic principles he shares with the rest of humanity. What is at stake is not simply mimetic sympathy but an impeachable interpersonal nature of communication between Wordsworth and the blind beggar as an emblem of humanity although the interiority of the beggar remains unknown to Wordsworth. As a visual emblem the beggar outflanks and dismantles the insularity of individualism. In this sense Stokes declares “in the faceless crowd the poet suddenly comes across the famous blind beggar with a written paper affixed to his chest. Out of disorientation, an act of symbolic decipherment is suddenly made possible when the beggar’s sightless face becomes emblematic and restores the values of the human to a dehumanizing city” (205). The paradox is that Wordsworth’s interest in this spectacle does not emerge from the visual aspects of the scene as from its affective dynamics.

⁸ “Intimations Ode” is centered around the loss of the “visionary gleam,” which is “a shadowy reminiscence, a lingering vision of the eternal which allows the poet to see earthly things in their heavenly aspect” (Smith “The Contrarities: Wordsworth’s Dualistic Imagery” 1186). The poet is clear on his position “the things which I have seen I can see no more” (The difference with “Tintern Abbey” is that the beholder does not grow away from the transcendental and eternal. Rather he distances himself and then revisits a material spot. The return to the visible is possible in “Intimations Ode” only when the poet recognizes and comes to terms with the mutability of nature and of human life. Smith notes that “the union is philosophical rather than psychological or poetical, and natural objects now inspire thoughts rather than glow with unearthly glory” (1188). The suggestion is that in “Intimations Ode” Wordsworth has denied the visible only to return to it by another route.

3 Modality of return: the discursive value

After establishing the ontological and epistemological values of the return to the visible, I shall study its discursive value. If this return means distilling the visible from the imaginative in the text, how can we handle this task if the visual and the imaginative overlap in the text? For Wordsworth, no less than for Friedrich Kittler, poetry's "language of the sense" represents a device for mediating sense-experience *in* language and establishes to the senses not despite but rather through the abstraction of its form" (qtd. in Jackson *Science* 12). The one feature of Wordsworth's intellectual landscape that is most salient to understanding his philosophy of language is Locke's theory that the "semantic instability" of language is neither accidental nor remediable. Because this predicament is inherent to language, Locke claims that there is no hope of reforming language.⁹ Although Wordsworth does not fully jettison the concept that language is unable to communicate meaning and in many ways endorses Locke's thesis, his reaction is quite revolutionary. In another, ultimately more important direction, he is so impressed by the syntactic and semantic properties of language that he introduces a profound shift to Locke's theory and even makes it lose its edge when he suggests that language completes the mind's epistemological structure.

His motives for trusting language lie somewhere on a continuum between his anchored belief that the active mind is interested in words as things "active and efficient," and his belief that language transcends the limitations of pre-mechanical associationism. In and through language Wordsworth hopes to recuperate the lost properties of the moment of experience.

⁹ For more on Locke's theory of language see Walter Ott's *Locke's Philosophy of Language*, Michael Losonsky's *Linguistic Turns in Modern Philosophy*, as well as Hannah Dawson's *Locke Language and Early-Modern Philosophy*.

The role of language is to articulate the experience in ways that are faithful to the original sensory experience. It is especially in “Tintern Abbey” and *The Prelude* that Wordsworth comes to a proper accommodation of this fact. In “Tintern Abbey” he is aware that his vision is intermingled in imagination. To get a sense of the former experience, he reads his former pleasures in Dorothy’s “wild eyes” because things in those eyes have an immediate signification while for Wordsworth they are only language’s indirectly determined reference.

I submit that this reading is also an act of writing whose value is the discursive reconstruction of the lost experience. The value of this discursive reconstruction is not to be dependent upon sense experience to gain knowledge. In pursuing the idea of discursive reconstruction my argument comes to a juncture where I assume that Wordsworth is interested in things as they are as opposed to my claim in the second part of this chapter that he is interested in things as they seem. I do not mean to suggest that Wordsworth keeps two sets of mental books: in one book things are treated as empirical beliefs subject to “reality testing,” and in the other, thoughts are treated as expressions of the many ways he experiences the world. What I propose is that through language Wordsworth hopes to gain an insight into the empirical reality of things jeopardized and largely outstripped by time.

Dorothy’s eyes are an epitaphic text which enshrines the knowledge that Wordsworth places in them and they are a less frail shrine than the books he mentions in the Book on Books in *The Prelude*. It is also a zone of contact between the living and the absent-to-be. Besides celebrating communal gathering and the sundering of bonds, the epitaphic text allows Wordsworth to reclaim and to revision his history in the future as part his healing process. Writing the epitaph is in this sense the opening of a future-yet-to-come. At the end of the first chapter I channel the discussion toward the relation of the “bodily eye” to the “inner eye”

which is described as the harvest of a “fair seed-time” (*Prelude* 1. 301) – a time referring to infancy and childhood – when only the “bodily eye” was operative. My aim is to demonstrate that vision and imagination intercept and invigorate each other.

My second chapter “Vision in the Alps: Book 6 Revisited” is about imagination’s enactment; its coming into its own in the episode of the Crossing of the Alps in Book 6 of *The Prelude*.¹⁰ I chose to study this episode because it is unique in Wordsworth’s oeuvre in terms of how imagination enacts itself or comes into its own as well as its particular relation to the “bodily eye.” It is to be noted that the imagination is cast in two different forms in Wordsworth. In a well-known passage in the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballad* (1815) Wordsworth writes, “imagination 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 those objects, and processes of creation or of composition governed by certain fixed laws” (*Selected Poems and Prefaces* 483). Wordsworth’s definition of the imagination does not provide answers to the traditional view of the imagination as the association of images, which is made possible through tracing specific sensations in memory. It is what Kant called “reproductive” imagination in its empirical usage and what Coleridge calls fancy; a faculty consisting in the mechanical association of “fixities and definites.”¹¹ “Reproductive” imagination has a limited potential. Kant does not dispense with it, yet discerns a more sophisticated form he calls

¹⁰ Wordsworth crossed the Alps and the Simplon Pass on August 16, 1790. He composed the lines entitled “the Simplon Pass,” incorporated in Book 6 of *The Prelude* in 1799 and last revised in 1839, to narrate the Alpine expedition he undertook with his friend Robert Jones with whom he also shared the ascent of Snowdon and whom he met in his “sentimental journey” (Hartman) to Devil’s Bridge, in North Wales in 1824. The episode has two important moments: the travellers’ sudden discovery that they have crossed the Alps and the famous apostrophe to the imagination.

¹¹ See I. Kant *Critique of Pure Reason* (181) and S.T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (I 202).

“productive” imagination, which is based on the principle of synthesis rather than mere association. In the second edition of *The Critique of Pure Reason* he writes

now in so far as imagination is spontaneity, I sometimes call it also the productive imagination, and distinguish it from the reproductive, the synthesis of which is subject entirely to empirical laws, those of association, namely, and which therefore, contribute nothing to the explanation of the possibility of *a priori* cognition, and for this reason belongs not to transcendental philosophy, but to psychology. (93)

Coleridge names this amalgamation of associative and synthetic quality “esemplastic.” I aim to demonstrate that the type of imagination Wordsworth experiences in the Alps is a mixture of both Kant’s “productive” and Coleridge’s “esemplastic” imagination. I make two claims in this chapter. The first is that the imagination is hermeneutically (not referentially) present since the beginning of Book 6. Without undermining the claim that the imagination is a phenomenon that occurs in the moment of writing in 1804, I argue that the apostrophe to the imagination does not mark an unprecedented consciousness of imaginative power. My second claim is that imagination comes into the full ownership of itself after it corrects and authenticates the experience of 1790 which has been “held loose” (Onorato) by memory. Basing my argument on the belief that when Wordsworth embarked on the project of revising the episode in Book 6, he had the intention of authenticating the experience that has been abused by memory, I study the revisionary writing in Book 6 as an already imaginative reconfiguration of the past experience.

1 The synergy of memory and imagination

I argue that Wordsworth’s purpose in revisiting the episode of his journey through the Alps is not merely to straightforwardly account for or to make explicit what happened in 1790. The hermeneutics of the imagination – at work since the beginning of the episode

– is conveyed and sustained by the complex of hoping and wishing. By mixing retrospective and prospective potentialities, wishing and hoping expose the narrative of remembrance to a host of undisclosed imaginative possibilities. The act of remembrance transforms into an act of reconfiguration, thus offering a “site” for the collaboration of memory and imagination. I propose that the dialectic of hoping and wishing serves the purpose of Book 6 by placing time (whose three dimensions are contained in the psychological states of hoping and wishing) as a witness to the poet’s imaginative power. The task assigned to the imagination accounts for the prelude anxiety in Book 6, which, in the history of *The Prelude*, is a new beginning.

As in Book 1 of *The Prelude* Wordsworth wishes to provide the ultimate proof of his creative genius. In Book 1 he tries to imitate Milton. Although he does not dwell on *Paradise Lost* as a point of origin, his headway to a subject that is at the same time heroic and subjective is hindered by it. To be a poet of Milton’s caliber and eventually to stake out a place for himself in literary history, Wordsworth invents a subjective theme that he deems equal in originality and genius to Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. He is troubled, however, by the fact that original as it is, his self-centered theme remains in his own judgment “a thing unprecedented in Literary history” (*Letter to Sir George Beaumont*, 586. May 1, 1805).¹² Halmi explains that “in this sense Wordsworth was the victim as well as the

¹² The main problem posed by this self-centered theme is that it lacks a tragic component. By “tak[ing] up the epic theme of a hero’s ordeal and apply[ing] it to the vicissitudes of the poet’s own imagination” (Clark 92), Wordsworth challenges the Miltonic epic convention. The enthusiasm and optimism conspicuous in *The Prelude* contravene epic conventions even as they draw on Milton’s quintessential optimism in *Paradise Lost*, which Blessington reminds us, “is the most optimistic of epics in spite of its tragic nature” (77). The ‘tragic nature’ of *Paradise lost* –which suggests that Milton did not completely sever his bonds to the basic structure of the classic epic regardless of his several adaptations – misses its mark in Wordsworth even though the latter gives a tragic character to the impediments on the way to self-consciousness. Tragedy would certainly be egregiously abused if employed to describe these impediments because they lead up to a happy resolution – that is, Wordsworth’s

beneficiary of Milton's conviction that epic subjects are not made but born" (590). He is a victim in so far as he feels compelled to share the new framework that Milton invented for the epic, and the beneficiary in that he does not feel constrained to strictly conform to generic expectations which, Teskey explains, "had in some way to refer to an aesthetic ideal drawn from the example of Homer and Virgil or understood by the abstract, neo-Aristotelian 'laws' of poetics" (141). From this perspective Wordsworth's deferral of the beginning in Book 1 might be seen not simply as an application of an epic convention, but as a genuine uncertainty about his capacity to compete against, let alone to surpass Milton.

The preludial anxiety that Book 6 shares with Book 1 leads to a "trial" whose aim is to demonstrate how imagination comes into the full possession of itself and eventually owns up to the promise made at the beginning of the epic and not yet fulfilled. This promise is anxiously reiterated at the beginning of Book 6 through the tumultuous interplay of hoping and wishing. I shall interpret this dynamic as a symptom of Wordsworth's uncertainty about his imaginative powers. Hoping and wishing are antithetical yet not completely irreconcilable states of affects. Their dynamic suggests that the mind is already conversing with itself and trying to fix its "wavering balance." Wordsworth announces that his purpose is not to narrate the minute details of the journey. Through this form of narrative economy he makes room for anticipatory insights, and more importantly, urges memories to produce anticipatory insights, or what Husserl calls "pro-tensions," roughly defined by Marjorie Greene as "ways in which the future pulls us toward it ... [a] foreshadowed end" (245). This ties in with the tendency of the past in

ultimate discovery of the apodictic truth about the power of his mind in the Snowdon episode in book 14 of *The Prelude*.

Wordsworth to have its “own proleptic expectations, its persistent self-forwardings” (Larkin 12). Larkin explains this tendency in more detail “Wordsworth’s nostalgia turns back on itself to arrive at, not a greater self-coincidence, but a more intense degree of reserve. It is a nostalgia compelled to absorb in its present plight (the plight of ageing) the past’s desire to terminate there as inheritance” (12). The intention to “retrace” the history of 1790, however economically, heralds the imbrication of imaginative variations within the narrative and presents it as a space of tension between experience and anticipation. Anticipation discloses Wordsworth’s underlying intention to use the framework of the past in order to experience something new, and if we accept Jarvis’s insight that “imagination is the capacity for experience” (217), actually to experience the imagination itself.

Wordsworth performs the self-assigned task of reconfiguration with some difficulty. He first engages in a picturesque description of nature. Insofar as they have a “singleness of aim” (*Character of a Happy Warrior* 40), Wordsworth and his fellow traveller are like Gilpin’s picturesque travelers who “seek [picturesque beauty] among all the ingredients of landscape” and “search after effects” (*Essays* II 42). This “singleness of aim” does not, however, validate Gilpin’s thesis that “after the pursuit, we are gratified with the attainment of the object” (48). The “soulless image on the eye” (6. 526) Wordsworth ends up experiencing shows that the deficiency of the picturesque aesthetic is that anticipation and expectation usurp the actual experience. The picturesque does not fulfill Wordsworth’s aim to encounter “storm / Or sunshine to [his] individual mind” (10. 122-23). Its invitation for the immediate consummation of pleasure ends up stultifying the creative impulse.

Wordsworth realizes that the pleasure felt in the Chartreuse derives mostly from thought, not from the spot – the Chartreuse. While the pleasure the place inspires is a temporary conscious pleasure, which is dependent for its perpetuation on the confrontation of eye and landscape, the pleasure of thought, existing underneath the visual pleasure, is prospective. It increases in the form of an idea, thus dispensing with the direct confrontation with the object. The picturesque pleasure is soon dismissed and Wordsworth revels in the pleasure of “living thought” until the latter is itself interrupted by the “soulless image” of Mont Blanc.¹³ In my comment on the state of pleasure and other correlative psychological states such as “melancholy regret” and “perfect enthusiasm” (*Letters* 35, 6 September 1790) I will alternate between Book 6 and the 1790 letter in order to trace the change in their mode and intensity. This change is symptomatic of the advanced strategies that Wordsworth implements in order to fend off the tyranny of the “bodily eye” and of memory in Book 6.

I read a passage from the 1790 letter where the sublime and the beautiful are used as aesthetic aspects of nature rather than aesthetic judgments in order to illustrate Wordsworth’s subtle discontent with the picturesque aesthetics. This discontent is mainly generated by the reliance of the picturesque on the eye, which in the passage under consideration, encroaches on the function of the mind in a way that interferes with the “conversation” with nature and mitigates the pleasure of thought. The lack of responsiveness to the categories of the sublime and the beautiful is conspicuous in their presentation as mere natural effects. Because they are not brought to the probe of the imagination in afterthought, they trouble rather than enhance Wordsworth’s pleasure. Why is Wordsworth melancholy about the cessation of the

¹³ Wordsworth is aware that he has to venture forth into the picturesque tradition popularized by most loco-descriptive writers of the time (mainly John Brown, Thomas Gray, and William Gilpin) and precursors of the genre such as John Denham though he considers the picturesque, for reason that I will elaborate on later, “the great infection of the age” (*Prelude* 11.156).

conversation and the pleasure it provides if the beautiful guarantees the perpetuation of pleasure in the eye and the sublime its perpetuation in the mind?

The answer might be that in the context of the letter melancholy is distressing and needs to be relieved, as opposed to the “Poet’s tender melancholy / And fond conceit of sadness” (6. 366-67), which refer to a “wise disease” that is able to elevate above the insensitive and uncreative. From this type of melancholy ensue “soft luxuries” (6. 557) of communication with nature. The suggestion is that for melancholy to enhance the conversation with nature, nature’s being as an entity independent from consciousness need first to be established. However, such awareness was little distinctive of, if not foreign to, Wordsworth’s sensibility of place in 1790. It only entered his thought in 1798, the time around which he wrote the two-book *Prelude* and “Tintern Abbey.”

In the same passage in the letter Wordsworth identifies himself as a “perfect Enthusiast in his admiration of nature and all her various forms.” I interpret perfect enthusiasm as enthusiasm brought to perfection in order to overcome the tyrannical power of the eye – which encroaches on perception – and to make up for the deficient memory. This double motive, I argue, invites the unconscious use of the imagination in Book 6. This motive was present even in *Descriptive Sketches*. Commenting on Wordsworth’s early desire to overcome the tyranny of the eye in *Descriptive Sketches*, Ramsey writes: “[Wordsworth’s] subjectivity, even while it is astonished by the objects which confront it, aspires towards a tantalizing experience of grandeur that lies ‘Beyond the senses and their little reign’” (33).

2 Imagination and the work of authentication

While in Book 6 the interplay of hoping and wishing stands for Wordsworth’s anxiety to prove his imaginative power, in the 1790 letter that same interplay is

symptomatic of his anxiety over the failure of his “memory to retain a more strong impression of the beautiful forms before me” (35). The relation of hoping and wishing in the letter bears on the problematic relation of the eye and memory from which Wordsworth tries to unburden himself in Book 6. I sketch the three important impediments caused by the dysfunctional memory, which makes the authentication of the 1790 experience quite problematic, if not impossible. I treat this failure along with the compulsion of the eye – which continues to seek a more porous engagement with nature – as the two difficulties that Wordsworth tries to overcome when he reconfigures the episode in Book 6.

“The soulless image on the eye” experienced in the encounter with Mont Blanc is, I argue, the result of the collision between the eye and the underlying “living thought.” The resultant disappointment is compensated by the vision of Chamouny, which suggests that Wordsworth has been cut off from “living thought” and now dwells again on an ontic plane. The sudden apostrophe to the imagination which quickly follows proves that during the process of perception, a simultaneous interpretative force has been at work and now manifests itself as an “awful Power” (6. 594). I then establish a brief comparison between the 1850 and 1805 versions of the apostrophe to the imagination with a special emphasis on the adverb “before” which has been deleted in the later version. The structure of the first part of the 1805 apostrophe which reads “Imagination!-lifting itself / Before the eye and progress of my song / Like an unfathered vapour” (525-27) causes a break in coherence because the vapour cannot be visible to an eye supposed to be shut or blinded by the sudden apparition of the “unfathered vapour.”

The immediacy of vision conjured up by the word “before” is dismissed in the 1850 version probably because it interferes with the reasoning that all is imagined rather than

firmly grasped. The one question I wish to raise is whence the difference in apprehension in the 1850 version if the same sense apparatus is used? In trying to sketch an answer to this question I will demonstrate that perception in the 1850 version is an imaginatively inductive process and that “before” is deleted because its spatial implications cause the trope of the “unfathered vapour” to lose much of its plausibility.

The sublime moment of the imagination approaches the Kantian dynamic sublime in so far as it puts a premium on power and dismisses the senses.¹⁴ This interpretation is encouraged by Wordsworth’s use of the expression “the power so called” to describe the imagination. This moment of power in which the imagination triumphs over all the impediments of the past is a perfect instance of “self-consciousness” that dramatizes, according to Hartman, “an objective attitude toward the self” (*Easy Pieces* 18). I dwell on Hartman’s interpretation in order to demonstrate that the “objective attitude” does not at all relate to Kant’s turn to reason in the sublime moment. I argue that Wordsworth gives the sublime a degree of importance in rational terms but makes it resist full rational control. This objective attitude also provides the self with a sense of being-in-the world, which in turn impels the imagination not to isolate itself and to relate again, for its own sustenance, to the external world. This is how I account for imagination’s return to the visible in this episode.

The third chapter, entitled “The Ear Between Harmony and Discord” is exclusively interested in the ear. It has two parts; the first addresses the ear as an “organ of vision” and

¹⁴ For Kant the senses play their crucial role of mediation and then are sealed off from the interest of epistemology though it is by virtue of their limitation that Kant is able to demolish reason’s pretensions to offer knowledge of a “transcendent” world, that is, a world beyond that revealed by the senses. Kant maintains that only once there is judgment can there be error: “It is correctly said that the senses do no err; yet not because they always judge correctly, but because they do not judge at all” (*Critique of Pure Reason* 384).

visionariness in both *On the Power of Sound* and in *The Power of Music*, and the second concentrates on the impairments of the ear through the examination of the phenomenon of hallucination.

1 The ear as an “organ of vision”

The ear has spawned a vast body of literature on its own not only because, like the eye, it is an external loop for orientation, exploration and adjustment as well as an internal loop, but most importantly because it redeems the eye’s tyranny and fosters moral consciousness and reformation. Many examples could readily be used to demonstrate the redemptive function of the ear. The “ghostly language” in Book 1 of *The Prelude*, is manifested by the “power in sound” that produces “an elevated mood, by form / Or image unprofaned” (2. 305-6). *On the Power of Sound* shows that once they enter the ear, natural sounds are interpreted as sacred language.

In my analysis of *On the Power of Sound* I first draw attention to the fact that as an illuminated organ – inhabited by a “Spirit Aerial” – the ear is also illuminating. Its divine illumination promotes its capacity for perception, intuition and intellectual cognition. My second claim is that harmonious natural and human sounds, rather than light, stand in a privileged relation to the divine logos. The “formal auditory system” of the poem, which is harnessed to a larger category that Chandler calls the “cosmic regime of sounds,” suggests, I argue, that sounds are harmonious rather than orderly by virtue of being natural. In assuming that natural and human sounds constitute a harmonious whole, Wordsworth imitates Pythagoras who claims that all sounds represent a kind of music. I then show how Wordsworth adapts Pythagoras’s idea of the “harmony of the spheres” to his own purposes by substituting natural and human sounds for the heavenly sounds that in Pythagoras’s

thinking contribute their share to the heavenly music as they move. Instead of the body of heavenly sirens making music, it is now nature that makes music. Wordsworth bereaves sounds of their metaphysical associations only to value them as mediators between the heavenly and the human through the natural.

In discussing harmony I show that natural sounds are superior to human sounds. In “Tintern Abbey” Wordsworth acknowledges

I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity (88-91)

In this example the music of humanity is inferior to the voice of Nature. Yet insofar as it is harmonious the human voice approximates natural perfection and has its counterpart laid up in divine nature manifesting the perfection of divine will. The suggestion is not that human voice and divine logos are commensurate in value, but that insofar as they are harmonious, they approximate divine perfection. After I establish that the ear in Wordsworth is related to the divine, I set myself to answer the question of how this relation is established.

2 The impairments of the ear

In this part I show that the problems of the ear are its extreme sensitivity and openness. These problems induce delusional hearing and hallucinations. First I show that hearing is as persistent and as pervasive as vision. Extreme auditory sensitivity is part, and a formative part, of Wordsworth’s conscious experience of the world, and plays a role in what he takes to be real. Sometimes this extreme auditory sensitivity, which should be properly called hallucination, is offset by other tendencies. Yet most often it leads to

fabrication of phenomena that require varying degrees of psychic occlusion and putting sectors of the inner life out of the play.

A phenomenon of interest to me is that hearing spoils the authenticity of sounds. The prayer “may these sounds / Have their authentic comment”(833, *Selected Poems*) suggests that a proper heed should be paid to the ear rather than to the interpretive action *per se*. The problem that immediately presents itself is that we cannot possibly know which of the ear or the interpretive faculty produces real meaning for us because ear can be compulsive “We cannot bid the ear be still” (“Expostulation and Reply” 18), and that it contributes to the cognitive input. What it imparts to the mind does not completely depend on the mind’s makeup and interpretation, but on its own as well. The ear’s function is not merely physiological for it transcends mere passive transmission by providing collateral information and interpretive elements. The ear fulfills its epistemological task by being the basis for cognitive elaborations and not simply a passive physiological conduit. This is inferred not from its contribution to the ultimate cognitive input (that’s the task performed by the mind), but from its potential to distort sensory content.

The other impairment of the ear is that it induces psychotic hallucination.

Wordsworth experiences the phenomenon of paracusia in Book 10 of *The Prelude*:

And in this way I wrought upon myself,
Until I seemed to hear a voice that cried
To the whole city, “Sleep no more.” The trance
Fled with the voice to which it had given birth;
But vainly comments of a calmer mind
Promised soft peace and sweet forgetfulness.
The place, all hushed and silent as it was,
Appeared unfit for the repose of night,
Defenceless as a wood where tigers roam. (85-93)

Paracusia is defined as the misattribution of an internal cognitive event to an external source (Bentall, 1990; David, 1994; Frith, 1992; Hoffman, 1986; Morrison). The voice heard has no relation to the external world, is not one of its constituents. The experience of hearing lacks, therefore, the most fundamental kind of phenomenal character by which a veridical experience is determined. The voice in the mind is a most substantial constraint to the perception of reality. The psychological nature of this experience is such that it is impossible to know, just by reflecting, what triggered off this falsified perception of reality; whether it is the vulnerable nervous system or the proneness of the ear to hear internalized sounds. In focusing on this passage as an instance of hallucinatory psychopathy I uncover the mania that permeates the ear's will to hear voices that rather distort reality. I do not, of course, infer that this example should be taken as a testimony to the ubiquitous presence of something approaching hallucinatory habit in Wordsworth although I do not exclude the fact that there is something hallucinatory about Wordsworth's consciousness. I mean that hallucination permeates judgment and plays a role in how Wordsworth frames experience, his slant on things.

In the last chapter, "Synaesthesia or the end of the sensuous dialectic," I explore the indefinitely expanding resonance of implications initiated by the give and take of the eye and ear and, again, their interaction with the mind – which came to be understood as a model of *sensorium commune* – and with nature. I propose that synaesthesia – the phenomenon in which the stimulation of one organ results in the stimulation of another or more others – answers the indeterminacy governing the dialectic of the senses which, according to Hartman, "is psychagogic and can be analyzed even if we are not sure where it leads" (*Unremarkable*

24). The passage from one order of sensation to another, I argue, does not entail loss of intensity because it is predicated on the principle of equivalence and compensation. In the first part of the chapter, entitled “Principles of Wordsworthian synaesthesia: Equivalence and Compensation” I argue that seeing and hearing are mutually supportive. The voice is sometimes informed by the image and projects something of the visual into itself. Similarly, the unsubstantial sound is often substantiated as an image. I focus on the principle of equivalence in its active and passive modalities. The eye and the ear, I argue, can be synaesthetically animate whether they are active or passive.

In the second part “light and sound,” I study “An Evening Walk”, “Three Years she grew in sun and shower” as well as the Boy of Winander episode. “An Evening Walk” is very particular because the picturesque splendor is not soulless as it is in the Alpine expedition detailed in the second chapter, for instance. The capacity of the mind to seamlessly transcode the sounds and sights from one sense domain into another provides Wordsworth with an interesting opportunity to reintroduce ideas of synaesthetic acts into new practices through the malleability of his text. Because correlations between 18th Century neurophysiology – familiar to Wordsworth through Coleridge – provide substantial foundations on which to base an explanation of Wordsworth’s synaesthetic literary language, I devote some space to the revision of the major influences on his work.

In the third part “image and voice,” I investigate the images of interaction between the image and the voice and their respective roles in mapping concrete aspects of subjective bodily experience onto images and images onto subjective experiences. I first explain that as forms of representation, the image and the voice are mediated phenomena. Then I try to answer two central questions: How can we account for Wordsworth’s

imagistic engagement with and representation of an auditory subject matter? What are the conditions for the possibility of aurally representing a visual act? The poems I study in this section are *The River Duddon* where the voice of the cataract flowing from Seathwaite Tarn into the Duddon is portrayed as an image and “the Solitary Reaper” where the image is translated as a voice.

The dogmatism I set myself to discredit in this thesis is that the eye is tyrannical and the ear is redemptive. I offer a contribution in perspective, which, I hope, will shake the conventional hermeneutic grove in which the criticism of Wordsworth’s aural and visual apparatus has settled.

Chapter One

The Return to the Visible

“The Poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our
visible friend and hourly companion.”
(William Wordsworth, “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*)

Noel Jackson rightly notes that Don Gifford has chosen 1798 – the year when *Lyrical Ballads* was published – as the opening year of his “natural history of perception” (67). Gifford’s monumental claim that Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s poetry triggered off the modern culture of sensation might be based on Wordsworth’s own intention to “arouse the sensual from their sleep / Of Death” (*Home at Grasmere* 813-14). Wordsworth’s definition of sensibility is markedly different from the valence that the notion embodies in the thinking of the early Romantics, namely Blake who wishes “the doors of perception were cleaned” so that “every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all thro’ narrow chunks of his cavern” (39). Nevertheless, sensation has had a controversial status in Wordsworth scholarship. Noel Jackson argues that “by a number of critics Wordsworth has and continues to be read as an author far-removed from the immediacy of physical sense experience despite his own repeated claims to the contrary” (10). He is thought to prioritize the past and the future. “Wordsworth’s failure to retain immediacy” Larkin writes “is due to his overemphasis on the power of retention itself” (12). Marjorie Levinson, for instance, claims that in “Tintern Abbey” the poet communicates his mistrust of bodily sensation lacking the assistance of thought. “It is ... on this basis,” Jackson explains, “that Levinson builds a case for reading the poem as an effort to displace or suppress ‘sensuous concrete reality’ through the idealizing operations of the imagination” (Jackson 31).

Levinson sketches the most basic antithesis in Wordsworth’s poetry between sensation and imagination. Of the eye and the ear, it is the former that is believed to be the

most significant impediment to the imagination as Wordsworth explicitly denigrated it as “the most despotic of our senses” which “gained / Such strength in *me* as often held my mind / In absolute dominion” (*Prelude* 12. 128-31). Yet, as Richardson notes, “Wordsworth’s comment on the ‘despotic’ tendency of the eye ... still does not seem to square entirely with his contrary insistence on looking steadily at his poetic objects” (*The Neural* 48).¹⁵ While he inveighs against the tyrannical bodily eye, Wordsworth still values it as the premise of poetic vision. In the language of David Pirie the “eye of nature” is the premise of both the “mind’s eye” and of the “philosophical eye” which Wordsworth calls an “eye among the Blind.” This “distinct residue of ambivalence toward the bodily eye and quotidian vision,” as Richardson again remarks, “demands critical attention” (*Neural* 48).

My intention in this chapter is not to downplay the importance of the imagination in favour of visual perception or vice versa for Wordsworth makes clear that the “bodily eye” is a means whereas imagination is a faculty. The latter has a “higher” epistemological standing in the scheme of vision, yet still needs the eye to round up the “hermeneutic circle.” What I would like to determine is that in its return to nature, the “apocalyptic” imagination does relate to the eye again. Even as a full-fledged power, imagination warrants its perenniality by returning to the “visible” for purposes of regenerative sustenance.

The experience of transcending nature, which Hartman calls “apocalypse” is necessary for the imagination to emerge, yet *akheda* (the binding principle) is necessary for the imagination to sustain itself. Hartman maintains that “Wordsworth continually

¹⁵ On the pre-eminence of vision in the hierarchy of the senses see Jutte who claims that the “privileged position of the sense of sight is in no way a by-product’ of modernity but dates back at least to antiquity” (61).

displaces and interprets apocalypse as *akheda*” (*Wordsworth’s Poetry* 225) because the poet’s imagination can only work from within its relation to nature which is initially apprehended by the senses. The cost of the imagination realizing its sovereignty is not then the divestiture of the sovereignty of nature. Alfred Corn argues in this sense that “a tripartite model for many of Wordsworth’s poems” is

unreflective fusion with Nature, estrangement from Nature, and a final phase involving an imaginative *return* to Nature. In the poet’s return, which is a mark of his maturity, Nature is being reaffirmed, but from a superior plane. Value is lent *to* material reality by the spirit, and not the reverse. (70)

Nor does this return to nature involve a dispensation with the senses because “nature and the language of the sense” remain “the anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse, / The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul / Of all my moral being” (“Tintern Abbey” 109-11). The benefit of the experience of transcendence is an all-encompassing insight into “heart, and soul” and “moral being.” This experience, according to Barth, “can only be articulated through images of sense” (27). In examining the deconstructive dynamics whereby vision is the premise of the imagination and whereby the ultimate aim of the imaginative act is the recuperation of a second vision, I articulate my argument in terms of three modalities of return; ontological, epistemological, and discursive.

To describe Wordsworth’s “imaginative power” Coleridge uses expressions which merge the ontic and the imaginative such as “ a meditative pathos, a union of deep and subtle thought with sensibility” (*BL XXII*. 408). This synergy of sensibility and imagination, which places Wordsworth “nearest of all modern writers to Shakespeare and Milton,” (*BL XXII*. 410) is a contributing cause of a critical disarray. On the one hand, a number of visionary critics such as Scott Masson believe that the “ability to *transcend* ... sensual input” in “Tintern Abbey” is “an ability to achieve a state of *redemption* within”

(*emphasis original* 98). In place of transcendence, I believe that attention to the function of the “bodily eye” is the only orientation which does not run the risk of ignoring the material nuances of the imagination. In “Tintern Abbey” particularly Wordsworth is eager to recuperate a literal sense of vision. He elegiacally longs for a time when there was “no need of a remoter charm, / By thought supplied, or any interest / Unborrowed from the eye” (81-83). The crisis in this poem of re-visitation is that imagination usurps the eye, and not the opposite. Redemption, therefore, is achieved through a return to the visible plane. An interpretive blindness to the function of the “bodily eye” as encouraged by Masson does not square with Wordsworth’s conception of truth as “our visible friend and hourly companion” (“Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*, 456). Subterranean sensible and cognitive structuring principles at work in infancy and childhood, and their “reenactment” (Lindenberger 64) in adulthood complicate and undermine Masson’s argument.¹⁶

On the other hand, another group of critics comprising Peter Simonsen, William Galperin, Alan Richardson and James Robert Allard among others, who all represent a materialist trend, believes that imagination guards against the slippage into nature.¹⁷ Peter Simonsen goes so far as to categorize Wordsworth’s poetics into two decades, the imaginative and the visible. He has it that

bad eyes ... contributed to the foregrounding of the visible and the turn to descriptive and ekphrastic writing in the later career ... in certain texts and passages, Wordsworth describes external, physical nature less to find himself reflected than to render the seen world and the pleasures it gives as accurately as possible. This descriptive/ekphrastic aspect of his poetic practice should

¹⁶ All the critics who tend to align Wordsworth with an opposition to materiality and visibility argue for his allegiance to an orientation in Romanticism that W.J.T. Mitchell thinks is based the Platonic and Protestant position that “the deep truth is imageless” (114).

¹⁷ For accounts of the visual aesthetics in Wordsworth see Kenneth Johnston “the Idiom of Vision”, L.J Swingle “Wordsworth’s ‘Picture of the Mind’” and excerpts from Frank D McConnell’s *The Confessional Imagination*.

not be understood in terms of a failure to achieve ‘vision’ or as a mere first step in a dialectic leading beyond the visible, but as of value in itself. (12-16)

“To find himself reflected” is, of course, a clear reference to the “visionary” critical tradition which runs from Coleridge to A.C Bradley to Hartman, Bloom, and beyond who, from the rival highpoints of Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria* and Wordsworth’s Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* – the opposition between fancy and imagination in both its “primary” and “secondary” versions – founded the critical dissociation between the visible and the imaginative. In bringing to Wordsworth’s scholarship a pull downward to the ontic level, Simonsen follows the lead of William Galperin with whom the absolute “visionary” power came under pressure. Although both critics are right not to consider perception a fixed origin or degree zero in the architectonics of creative thought, they overlook, in my judgment, the implication of returning to the ontic level by way of the imagination.

My argument is that the return to the ontic by way of the imagination frees Wordsworth criticism from the fallacy of a fixed origin (be it perception or thought) and stakes a middle ground between the visionary and the materialist trends. I am indebted in this orientation to Caruth, who remarks that for “Kant and Wordsworth, this apparently simple notion of empirical origin will not account adequately for the power of thought to turn upon itself, to detach itself from the laws of the empirical world,” and that they “overcome empirical shortcomings by replacing the observed empirical origin with a kind of lack or absence” (133). I shall, however, treat the empirical origin or beginning not exactly as absence but as desire: “something ever more about to be” (*Prelude* 6. 608), which Larkin outlines as part of the many sublime “formulas” in Wordsworth. He explains that “such formulas, though recessive in their emptying of the present are as formulas

attempts at stabilization, making off a climax hence presumed to have its own future, a capacity to become a text and to become for other texts a foundational and recoverable past” (15).

Before dealing with Wordsworth’s thoughts proper, I would like to take a brief historical overview of the already intermingled and highly nuanced philosophical discourses of empiricism and associationism on the one hand, and the more formal scientific discourses emphasizing the idea of the active mind, on the other, because these bear directly on Wordsworth’s aesthetics of vision.¹⁸ By way of confirming the primacy of the eye, Hartley suggests:

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 . . . our intellectual pleasures are not only at first generated, but afterwards supported and recruited, in part, from the pleasures affecting the eye. (131)

For Hartley the interaction between the eye and the mind has an indefinitely expanding resonance of implications for the way knowledge is transmitted.¹⁹ In *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge explicitly charges Hartley with expounding a “despotism of the eye” when the latter claims that invisible things are objects of vision, which, in Coleridge’s view, results in “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” (VI. 213). Coleridge’s main concern with Hartley’s

¹⁸ On the influence of the cutting-edge seventeenth-century neurophysiological literature on Wordsworth’s poetics see *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind*.

¹⁹ Wordsworth found Hartley’s associationist theory appealing because the latter attributes it to physiological causes (that physical impressions occur on the brain through the vibrations circulating along the nerves). “[Hartley’s] temperament” Brett and Jones argue in their “Introduction” to *Lyrical Ballads* “had always caused [Wordsworth] to rely more on sensory observation than rational principles” (245).

definition of the eye is the materialism involved in the transmission of impressions from the object to the mind. The theory as a whole reduces mental functioning to a “blind mechanism” depriving the mind of “distinct powers” (*BL* VII 218). Instead of sheer mechanical dynamics, Coleridge proposes that there is a mental and cognitive work involved.

Wordsworth’s comprehensive treatment of vision also resembles Locke’s definition of the eye as a means of perception that becomes conscious of itself within a model of reflection. Comparing the eye to knowledge, Locke claims, “whilst it makes us see and perceive all other Things, takes no notice of it self: And it requires Art and Pains to set it at a distance, and make it its own Object” (4). The modality of reflection in Locke’s associationism remains inherently materialistic though superior in many ways to Hobbes’s pure sensationism. “In place of the Hobbesian empiricism founded merely on sensation,” Raparpot argues, “[in Locke] psychic activity is twofold: reflection absorbs the material supplied by sensation. Mere sensualism is transformed into empiricism” (271). Locke’s advanced definition of empiricism provides Wordsworth with a formative understanding of the reflection involved in the relation of eye and object, yet “what [Lockean reflection] observes is not precisely its own activity of reflecting, but other mental activities such as ‘thinking,’ ‘believing,’ and so on” (Caruth 16).²⁰

The important end achieved by Locke’s postulate of “reflection” is that one has the capacity for an accurate critical investigation that transcends the basic, albeit fundamental, plane of sensation. The mind, for Locke, is not merely organizational because it does not depend on empirical data for its own possibility, but on its own interpreting faculties. This

²⁰ Paul Fry calls Empson, Basil Willey, and Hugh Sykes Davies the “Cambridge Wordsworthians” who “say that Wordsworth is a monistic empiricist in the tradition of Locke” (184).

activity does not, however, entail that the mind is creative. “The other formation,” says Locke,

is the perception of the operations of our own minds within us, as it is employed about the ideas it has got; which operations when the soul comes to reflect on and consider, do furnish the understanding with another set of ideas which could not be had from things without; and such are perception, thinking, doubting, believing, reasoning, knowing, willing, and all the different acting of our own minds, which we, being conscious of, and observing in ourselves, do from these receive into our understandings as distinct ideas, as we do from bodies affecting our senses. (*Essay* Book II. 1.34)

Perception as opposed to imagination, the moment when the directional force in apprehending nature is the “bodily eye,” is the only moment in Wordsworth where empiricism is allowed and justified, for Wordsworth rejects the fundamental Lockean premise that the mind has a materialist substratum where “corpuscular ideas obey mechanical laws” (Caruth 9), and that it is a “tablet upon which the outer world engraves its message, a mirror on which things are reflected and ideas are mere images of things” (Lange 1).²¹ Although “organic sensibility” as Wordsworth declares in the 1802 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* is the poet’s prerequisite, the notion of strict organicism, admitting only of the mechanico-corpuscular philosophy whose line runs from Locke through Paley to Bentham, only spells out the relation of the eye to nature that Wordsworth calls “primal sympathy” (“Intimations Ode” X 181).

²¹ The idea that the mind is an active dynamo rather than a passive receptor of sensation was very popular in the scientific circles in Wordsworth’s time both in Britain and in the continent. Alan Richardson argues that F.J. Gall, Pierre-Jean-George Cabanis in France, as well as Erasmus Darwin and Charles Bell in England “agree in locating the mind in the brain, the ‘cerebral organ’ or organ of thought. They all emphasise that the mind is an active processor, rather than a passive register, of experience, holding this in common with German idealist philosophy and with Scottish ‘common sense’ psychology but uniquely seeking to elucidate the active mind in neurological terms ... They all stress the complexity of the brain, often envisioning it as a collection of ‘organs,’ and exhibit a cautious fascination with the role of electricity in neural transmission” (*British Romanticism* 5-6).

While the poet needs to be able to work on organic premises, being “originally possessed of more than usual organic sensibility” (*PLB* 1800 448) and having his understanding “in a healthful state of association” he still needs to be “affected by ... absent things as if they were present” (*PLB* 1800 453). This mediation, the fact of being affected by absent things, is what in “tranquillity” provides the “spontaneous overflow” (*PLB* 1800 448). In this regard, Allard notes that “the poet renders for himself that which is absent, imaginary, abstract, or immaterial, and in that sensibility renders it knowable and communicable” (47). Not only communicable but also imaginable and affective. Joel Pace declares that “during the process through which Wordsworth creates poetry, the term reflection takes on a new meaning. When he looks back on incidents in time he reflects these scenes in the imaginative mirror of his mind. These reflections sometimes differ from the former reality, but primarily they tend to be given an emotional dimension” (3). In the interim between perception and composition, Wordsworth explains: “our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts” (*PLB* 1800 448). The driving force for this endless repetition – “continued influxes” – is in conflict with a classical definition of organicism. The “hermeneutic circle” formed by endlessly constructed and deconstructed thoughts, allows for the use of “organic sensibility” only in so far as it expresses unity with nature, yet its very aim remains thought.

Despite provisional shifts in thought, there is always an accretion of thought. Thought does not tend toward a new standpoint, but toward its own consolidation, yet, again, not as pure thought but as a form of cognition imbued with sensuous content. Thought is not merely a supplementation of perception or physical prehension, something that adds to the corpuscular activity, which itself yields to mechanical laws. Rather it is a

form of cognition imbued with corpuscular drive. As Jarvis puts in in *Wordsworth Philosophic Song*, Wordsworth's thinking has an "affective substance" (173). Locke's corpuscular philosophy does not then cover Wordsworth's monumental operation of twofold reflexivity: temporal reflexivity; a projection backward (Platonic *anamnesis* or recollection), and forward (imagination), and hermeneutic reflexivity – "thinking about thinking" (Bennett). Wordsworth calls on a non-denotative way of thinking which transcends the notion of associationism in foregoing the Lockean "unicameral and material" (Fry 122) one-to-one correspondence between nature and image.

1 Return: the ontological value

In this part I argue that the return to the visible advances the poet's ontological enquiry. Yet arguing that the return to the visible is necessary requires first an account of the beginning by virtue of which the return is. In Book 1 of *The Prelude* Wordsworth tries to give an account of the origin of the imagination which itself "has the power of originating" (Brisman 2). This origin is hard to recover retroactively for the reason that, as Heidegger notes, every "genuine beginning" "as a leap, is always a start in which everything to come is already leaped over" ("The Origin of the Work of Art" 76).

"The earth is all before me" (*Prelude* 1. 14) suggests that Wordsworth wishes to disengage from any spatiotemporal specification beyond the vague fact that he is roaming in nature. That he defers the probation of the phenomenon of origination by using *medias res* suggests that he is skirting the problem of ontology. While puzzling out a suitable form and a subject matter for the song, his "Soul" comes face to face with the ontological issue it has skirted so far with regards to the historicization of the imagination. Should the "Soul" find (more in the sense of "trace/track") or found correspondences between the "seed" – now lost

to the “Soul” in every sense – and the present form the “seed” has taken. While finding involves “tracing” the minimal repeatability of the experience in the present, founding suggests an “intention” which inherently establishes an ascendancy over thought. The problem related to the alternative of finding is that it goes beyond the phenomenology of presence since it draws on the presence of absence. The problem with the alternative of founding is that it ascribes to the phenomenal a property that is not its own. Wordsworth is suddenly halted by the “anxious eye / That with intrusive restlessness beats off / Simplicity and self-presented truth” (*Prelude* 1. 247-49). Instead of smoothly permeating the phenomenon that “shows itself,” that which could otherwise be apprehended as “simplicity and self-presented truth”, the eye forces itself on it. It extrapolates from immediate experience and prematurely pretends to some imaginative rather than operative power. The eye’s anxiety to become imaginative cannot be offset. This compulsion increases anxiety to such a degree that it “vex[es]” the creation of poetry:

For I, methought, while the sweet breath of heaven
Was blowing on my body, felt within
A correspondent breeze, that gently moved
With quickening virtue, but is now become
A tempest, a redundant energy,
Vexing its own creation. (*Prelude* 1. 33-38)

The progress of the song is broken off by the fervidness and vividness of the “anxious eye.” A similar example is provided in Book 12 where the eyes “still craving combinations of new forms, / New pleasure, wider empire for the sight” (144-45) end up “defeat[ing] themselves by looking everywhere” (Hartman, “Wordsworth’s Descriptive Sketches” 523). The reason why the immediacy of visual perception in Book 1 is inimical to the production of poetry is that Wordsworth is “not used to mak[ing] / A present joy the matter of a song”

(*Prelude* 1. 46-47). F.A Pottle's description of the process of vision in Wordsworth might explain why the "bodily eye" poses a problem when it thus intrudes on the "self-presented truth." Wordsworth "starts with the mental image of a concrete natural object ... As he looks steadily at it, he simplifies it and as he simplifies it, he sees what it means" (280). The tension between the tyrannical eye and the mind seeking composure is the source of the anxious interrogation that aims to distinguish genuine "trances of thought and mountings of the mind" (*Prelude* 1. 19) from a false or "redundant energy / Vexing its own creation" (1. 37-38). The incident provoked by the eye's intrusion suggests that simple literal vision neither triggers off the creative impulse nor teaches about the origin of poetic power.

Yet if the eye is an uncomfortable oddity in Book 1 because of its intrusiveness and usurpation, it is also, paradoxically, instituted as essential to the imagination. Although "sedulous" to "trace ... / How Nature by extrinsic passion first / Peopled the mind with forms sublime or fair, / And made me love them", Wordsworth is also careful not to "omit"

How other pleasures have been mine, and joys
Of subtler origin; how I have felt,
Not seldom even in that tempestuous time,
Those hallowed and pure motions of the sense
Which seem, in their simplicity, to own
An intellectual charm; that calm delight
Which, if I err not, surely must belong
To those first-born affinities that fit
Our new existence to existing things,
And, in our dawn of being, constitute
The bond of union between life and joy. (1. 544-58)

Wordsworth does not disclose the identity of these "other pleasures" but we might surmise they are the "feelings" drunk in his "Mother's eye" (*Prelude* 2. 237). This speculation is encouraged by "fit / Our new existence to existing things." These pleasures are a primal

adjustment to life to which the mother undeniably contributes. Because the soul turns onto a certain idea of itself in relation to humanity after it sprouts in a rich human soil, it finds itself prepared to initiate the relation to nature. The “feelings “drunk in the “Mother’s eye” are a portal opening up toward a future of “ennobling interchange” (*Prelude* 13. 375) between the “object seen, and eye that sees” (13. 378), and is “the first / Poetic spirit of our human life” (*Prelude* 2. 260-61). In Richardson’s vocabulary infancy is “a process of ‘active’ grasping, constructing, and representation of the world” (*Neural* 470). The episode poses a conundrum, however, because it comes on the heels of the critique of pre-positivist Enlightenment philosophers’ presumption to know “the individual hour in which / [One’s] habits were first sown, even as a seed” (*Prelude* 2. 206-07). This critique is obliquely emphasized a little later in Book 2 through the rhetorical question: “How shall I seek the origin?” (346). Seemingly, the origin of the creative imagination is forever receding from the soul, for once known, it is already altered by the time-creating faculty of the imagination. My sense is that instead of Enlightenment sensationalist psychology, which is largely based on the chronological ordering of sensation, Wordsworth establishes that “the hallowed and pure motions of sense” along with the active mind form the foundations of the “poetic spirit.” The “feeling” drunk in the mother’s eye “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. (*Prelude* 2. 255-60)

Wordsworth here departs from both Locke and Hartley. For Locke, Madigan explains, “sensations are clear and distinct, and constitute knowledge by themselves; sensations in fact constitute the norm and standard against which all ‘higher’ types of knowledge

(complex ideas) are to be judged” (29). Wordsworth departs from Locke when he suggests that sensation is not a “norm” and argues instead for a merger of sensation and intellect.²² He also departs from Hartley – considered the first physiological psychologist – because the latter largely undermines the innate faculties of the mind which, according to him, only receives “mechanical impressions.”

Wordsworth commits instead to the theory of innate faculties that in Coleridge’s vocabulary guards against the mere “chaos of association” (*BL VII*: 218).²³ The infant lives “emphatically” because he is endowed with “animal sensations,” the loss of which beyond childhood results in the flattening of the poet’s responsiveness to nature. This impressive organic sensibility presents nature to the mind not as an already prehended object, but as an autonomous being that can significantly contribute to man’s mental growth. Basil Willey claims that Wordsworth’s “creative sensibility” has taught him that nature is not an “inanimate cold world” but “an active universe” (273). Hefferman explains how “creative sensibility” functions. It

enables the poet to receive the impulses of nature, to create in harmony with these impulses, and to distill them – usually by means of recollection – in the ... meditative feeling... Properly understood, the concept of creative sensibility establishes the role of feeling in the production of poetry. Feeling is the crucial link between the passive response and imaginative transformation. (93-4)

²² Alan Richardson claims, however, that Wordsworth is influenced by Herder in this episode and concludes his analysis of the analogy between Wordsworth and Herder’s texts by affirming that the two thinkers “are engaged in overlapping projects, each drawing eclectically on Lockean sensationalist psychology, Enlightenment anthropology, the vein of French radical thought running back to Diderot, and the new naturalistic and biological approach to mind then prominent in scientific and radical circles” (*British Romanticism* 67).

²³ Wordsworth and Coleridge modify Hartley by dwelling on the unconscious aspects of the associative process. Thus Coleridge, in turning against Hartley, says that “association depends in a much greater degree on the recurrence of resembling states of Feeling, than on Trains of Idea,” and that “Ideas *never* recall Ideas ... - any more than Leaves in a forest create each other’s motion - The Breeze it is that runs thro’ them / it is the Soul, the state of Feeling.” (letter *To Robert Southey 7 August 1803*, 515).

In the parlance of Nicholas Halmi, nature is approached as a “symbol.” He contends that the Romantics’ definition of the symbol is influenced by that of the Enlightenment philosophers who were “confronted with the challenge of claiming the naturalness of a symbolism whose very existence was not intuitively obvious.” To face this burden, “[The Romantics] resorted ... to a reciprocally affirming metaphysics of participation and semiotics of identity” articulated in Wordsworth in the quasi axiomatic phrase: “our first-born affinities” “fit / Our new existence to existing things” (25). Two ideas are conflated in Halmi’s pronouncement. The mind’s relation to “existing things” calls for a never-ending dynamic of reciprocity between the senses and nature, and this dynamic is the only guarantor of the experience of proximity and affinity. Sensibility – the proper endowment of the newborn – opens a beyond-being, a plane where the apprehension of being is *de facto* established through the senses. Until Book 6 of *The Prelude*, where imagination is laid out, defined and proven to the understanding, a plethora of intense images of sensual interaction with nature shows that even if the dynamic bracing of the senses and nature does not always sustain and consolidate the poet’s ontological inquiry, it contributes tremendously to its make-up.

2 Return: the epistemological value

Most of what I have sought to bring out pertains to the fact that returning to the visible is instrumental to being. In this part I argue that the epistemological value of the return to the visible is sorting out the relation of subject and object, and that this relation influences the ontological question. The relation of subject and object is the main joint business of Coleridge’s theoretical writings and Wordsworth’s poetry. Therefore I will start my analysis by drawing on Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s nuanced positions vis-à-vis

this relation. In the plan they envisaged together for *The Recluse* Wordsworth, according to Coleridge,

Should assume the station of a man in mental repose, one whose principles were made up, and so prepared to deliver upon authority a system of philosophy. He was to treat man as man – a subject of eye, ear, touch, and taste, in contact with external nature, and informing the senses from the mind, and not compounding a mind out of the senses ... It is, in substance, what I have been all my life doing in my system of philosophy. (*Table Talk* 599)

Many scholars such as Frederick Burwick and Simon Jarvis showed that this plan remained an ideal that Wordsworth could never achieve.²⁴ Systematizing the relation of man as a subject of eye and ear on the one hand, and nature as an object on the other put too much strain on him. He could not deliver it in the form of a pandect. In his own “system of philosophy,” Coleridge amalgamates subject and object. The example he provides is that of a table.

It is the table itself, which the man of common sense believes himself to see, not the phantom of a table, from which he may argumentatively deduce the reality of a table, which he does not see. If to destroy the reality of all, that we actually behold, be idealism, what can be more egregiously so, than the system of modern metaphysics, which banishes us to a land of shadows, surrounds us with apparitions, and distinguishes truth from illusion only by the majority of those who dream the same dream? (*BL.12. 294*)

²⁴ Wordsworth’s problem with systematizing his thought has been explained by Jarvis as “the poet’s own dissatisfaction with any of his own efforts which did not do more than merely report a feeling or clothe a theory” (23). Hickey provides an insightful explanation of the drawbacks of systematization in Wordsworth’s time. It is worth quoting in full: “In the 1790’s, “system” was associated with a dangerous abstraction or generalizing tendency harboring the potential to erase ancient hierarchies – with the sort of detachment from grounded institutions that Burke abhors as the “barbarous philosophy” of a “new conquering empire of light and reason.” “System” conjured up anxieties about the supposedly denaturing energies of the French political metaphysicians (the Baron d’Holbach’s *Systeme de La Nature*) and was used to express and create suspicion of Jacobinism at home – suspicion and anxieties that persisted with the spread of Napoleon’s “Continental System.” Commenting on the potentially beneficial effects of the “religious habits” of the Spanish nation in the *Convention of Cintra* (1809), Wordsworth remarks approvingly “A Spanish understanding is a hold too strong to give way to the meager tactics to the “Systeme de La Nature”; the “pestilential philosophism of France” and its military cognate are unnatural to the Spanish ground (*Prose Works* I 332). A strong, “natural” imagination is capable of warding off a diseased abstract system of philosophy affiliated with imperial aspirations” (20).

Coleridge's critique is directed to the natural philosophers who conceived of realism as a universe of "dead" and "fixed" objects (BL12.299). As a corrective of this vision Coleridge proposes that "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 ... both are coinstantaneous and one" (BL 12. 291). Subject and object are for Coleridge coextensive and coincident. Burwick states "Coleridge ... proposed a reconciliation of these Platonic and Aristotelian traditions by beginning with the moment of cognition, the coincidence of subject and object" ("Reflections"124). Their contingency is so prominent in his epistemology that he calls it truth; we "*know* that only which is true: and the truth is universally placed in the coincidence of the thought with the thing, of the representation with the object represented" (BL12. 291). Wordsworth could not contort himself into inventing patterns expressive of Coleridge's plan: "true Idealism necessarily perfecting itself in Realism, & Realism refining itself into Idealism" (*To William Wordsworth*, 30 May 1815). The reason, according to Jobe, is that he found Coleridge's epistemology inherently self-antithetical. On the one hand, nature is conceived of as an object: "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" (BL12. 291). On the other hand, nature is not an ontic element, but an extension of consciousness grasped by the senses, which are themselves "living growths and developments of the Mind & Spirit" (*To William Wordsworth* 30 May 1815, *The Major Works* 524). As extensions of the mind the senses can only relate to nature in mediation. In the words of Jobe "they become extensions of consciousness created by a subject in the act of creating itself as an object to itself" (591). This antithesis was very

difficult to handle for Wordsworth for whom “organic sensibility” is a premise of knowledge, which itself has a tentative epistemological standing. In his “Reply to ‘Mathetes,’” published in *The Friend* in 1809 Wordsworth contends that “the way to knowledge shall be long, difficult, winding, and oftentimes returning upon itself” (*Prose Works* 2 23). The tentativeness of knowledge is also clearly articulated by the Priest in *The Excursion*:

Knowledge, for us, is difficult to gain-
Is difficult to gain, and hard to keep-
As Virtue’s self, like Virtue is beset
With snares; tried, tempted, subject to decay.
Love, admiration, fear, desire, and hate,
Blind were we without these, through these alone
Are capable to notice or discern
Or to record; we judge, but cannot be
Indifferent judges. (5. 487-495)

“We judge” suggests that we freely apprehend the object. And this freedom in turn suggests that the object is apprehended as it appears to us as perceiving subjects and not as it is in itself. In the “Essay, Supplementary to the Preface (1815)” Wordsworth puts special emphasis on things as they appear:

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*. (641)

Wordsworth’s apprehension of the object as it is perceived and not as it is in itself is not, of course, bereft of application or use. Whereas the act of seeing proper involves the projection of possibilities to comprehend and may be manipulate experiential reality, seeing things “as they appear to the senses and to the passions” implicates efforts to

comprehend the perceiving consciousness through its own interpretation of what is presented in the sensible manifold. Wordsworth's take on the relation of consciousness and reality reminds us of William Earle's famous definition:

Consciousness is nothing but the appearance of reality to some subject. And therefore reality is both in and out of the mind simultaneously; for the mind is related to reality by apprehending it. The mind is therefore not simply related to itself, or to its ideas, or to images of reality, or representations, or signs, or effects of reality. It is related to reality itself. (*Objectivity* 69)

Both Earle and Wordsworth pinpoint the double-significance of ontology as phenomenology, which implies that there is no representational mediation between what manifests itself as itself, and the subject's consciousness of that manifestation. The object is, accordingly, dependent on consciousness in order to appear as it is. This claim is slightly tricky, however, precisely because Wordsworth presupposes that objects in nature are independent of our consciousness, and that it is by virtue of their independence that objects present themselves to us. In other words, he considers the external world independent of our disclosure of it. One way to understand this antithesis, which should come prior to our definition of the vexing notion of realism itself, is to consider that Wordsworth makes a hermeneutic claim, which means that he posits that there are certain conditions under which objects are intelligible to us and not a causal claim, *i.e.*, that without the observing consciousness, there would be no objects. With this distinction in mind, we can proceed to interpret the definition of realism for Wordsworth and try to get at what grounds the ontic nature of objects.

The particular status of realism for Wordsworth is that it is only defined through appearance because the self has no way of grasping the reality of an object it does not appropriate. It is by looking out at the object and allowing change to operate in

consciousness according to this perception that the Wordsworthian subject appropriates its own perceptions and itself as an original and unique observing subject. In *The Excursion* the Wanderer holds that it is possible to understand “not human Nature only, but . . . / All natures” (4. 336-37). This knowledge yields an understanding of the “kind and degree” and “every class” of visible beings, and of their inner “constitution.” It is perhaps at this level – wherein he considers the self as a monistic unity – that Wordsworth commits himself to preserving Coleridge’s idealism which is premised on the principle of the absolute I AM as the condition for the possibility of knowledge: “if we elevate our conception to the absolute self, the great eternal I AM, then the principle of being, and of knowledge, of idea, and of reality, the ground of existing, and the ground of the knowledge of existence, are absolutely identical” (BL12 298). For Wordsworth, the very basic phenomenological standpoint presupposes a basic form of selfhood given that it is only the self that can both see the object and think about its experience in terms of a self-reflective agent. The idealistic paradigm is precisely that the transcendental conditions of the intelligibility of being as being depend on that same being. The hermeneutic condition for the possibility of meaningful being is the existence of being itself.

Given these ontological conditions, the intrinsic value of the object, that for lack of a better concept we call its “realism,” depends on the perceiving consciousness as interpreter and owner. Wordsworth writes in a letter to Francis Wrangham, dated 18 Jan 1816, that “objects . . . derive their influence not from properties inherent in them, not from what they are actually in themselves, but from such as are bestowed upon them by the minds of those who are conversant with or affected by those objects” (*William and Dorothy Wordsworth. The Middle Years* 276). Reality is construed as the making manifest

of objects through their interpretation and appropriation by the subject. In turn, the most basic self-interpretation feeds back on its own object-interpretation. This is perhaps why the apprehension of the existence of a corresponding external object is established by the “affinity” between the object and the mind and not through the objects themselves. This circularity might explain why Wordsworth says that “the way to knowledge ... [is] often returning upon itself.” It is always the consciousness of the object that starts off and legitimates the ontological inquiry, yet definitely the subject that structures the basic hermeneutics of both the object and self-interpretation. Wordsworth doesn’t only seek to establish a crude form of ontic realism. The ultimate purpose of his project is not solely to determine the reality of the object, but to understand the consciousness that interprets that reality even if the interpretation of that consciousness is always deferred, is “something ever more about to be” (*Prelude* 6. 542). With this argument – that object-interpretation and self-interpretation are anchored in time – we come to a conception of the self that isn’t quite as transcendental or idealistic.

The strenuous drama of idealism and realism within which is imbricated the question of ontology is staged in *Peele Castle*, a poem composed after the death of Wordsworth’s brother John in 1805.²⁵ The pervasive preoccupation with reality versus appearance is conducted through a comparison between Wordsworth’s vision of a castle – which stands for perceiving the object as it appears to the senses and to the mind – and

²⁵ It is to be noted that the loss of John has led to the stultification of Wordsworth’s poetic powers. He wrote to George Beaumont on 20 February 1805 “I trust in God that I shall not want fortitude; but my loss of great and irreparable”; to Richard Wordsworth “I cannot say that the burthen of our affliction ... is yet much lightened” (4 March 1805). To Walter Scott he confessed, “This affliction weighs so heavily on the heart of all in this house that we have neither strength nor [?] for anything” (7 March 1805). Most importantly he admitted to George Beaumont “Time was stealing away fast from me and nothing done and my mind still seeming unfit to do anything ... I had a strong impulse to write a poem that should record my Brother’s virtue, and be worthy of his memory...., but I was overpowered by my subject and could not proceed ... This work must therefore rest awhile till I am something calmer” (1 May 1805) (*Early Letters* 446-88).

Beaumont's corrective perception of it, which stands for perceiving the castle as it is in reality, in the midst of a storm.²⁶ "The castle," Patterson notes, "serves as objective correlative to the poet's inner feeling. By means of this single dominant symbol, looming throughout the poem in stark prominence, he objectifies the drama of his spiritual conflict with the demands of time and tragedy" (2). The effect of surprise builds up since the beginning of the poem which is misleadingly nostalgic.²⁷ Ironies about the steadiness of the castle as pictured in his mind are so deft and so confined to the significant word "truth" that it is impossible not to note the implicit admonition:

Such, in the fond delusion of my heart,
Such Picture would I at that time have made:
And seen the soul of truth in every part;
A faith, a trust, that could not be betrayed. (29-32)

This stanza expresses a self-lacerating moment. The beliefs that are bound up with Wordsworth's closest personal attachments come into conflict with the sudden realization that his perception of the castle and the steady sea is illusory. Bloom asserts that: "Until 'Peele Castle,' natural seeming and reality are one for Wordsworth" (141). Beaumont's painting pinpoints the wish fulfilment in Wordsworth's vision and demonstrates that it is not "truth" in nature that is delusive, but Wordsworth's perception of it. By accepting Beaumont's portrayal of the castle as a corrective vision, Wordsworth suggests that his eye

²⁶ Wordsworth's picture of a castle on a calm summer day is inspired by his actual perception of a castle close to which he lived during a month visit to Rampside, Lancashire with his cousin Mrs Baker in 1794.

²⁷ In a footnote Patterson explains how it is not possible for Wordsworth to have seen Beaumont's painting before although he might have seen "an engraving of the picture earlier" and affirms that Wordsworth stumbled on it in his visit at Beaumont's in Grosvenor Square in April May 1806: "In his letter, references to poems about his brother's death suggest that Wordsworth might not have composed *Peele Castle* (always dated 1805) until some time between June 3 and August 1, 1806; for it is incredible that he would, in letters to the Beaumonts, frequently mention his efforts to write a poem about his brother and never mention Beaumont's painting that inspired Wordsworth's favourite poem of the group and gave it content, especially since the poet wrote so warmly about poem and picture when he finally did mention them" (2-3).

has invented “The light that never was, on sea or land” (15), and that it has been so ensnared by its own desire to be at one with the object of vision that it ended up being blind to it.

The Excursion denounces such an illusory vision especially when the Wanderer agrees with the Pastor that “angels may weigh and fathom: they perceive,/ With undistempered and unclouded spirit, / The object as it is” (5. 480-82) while for human beings “darkness and delusion round our path / Spread, from disease, whose subtle injury lurks / Within the very faculty of sight” (5. 507-09). This “disease” makes us “see, then, as we feel” (5. 559). Although the inordinate share of the sense of vision in the neural resources available to the sensory system is, according to Diane Ackerman, “seventy percent of the body sense receptors” (230)²⁸ sight is still believed to be the most delusional of the senses. The reason is not that the “bodily eye” is incapable of grasping the sublimity and infiniteness of nature,²⁹ but that vision in Wordsworth is contingent on feeling. Such contingency is provisioned as the solution to get a grasp on the object and at the same time not to apprehend it as a mere ontic entity bereft of a consciousness of its own, thus having no relevance to the mind. It should be recalled that the external world or nature in

²⁸ Jay supplements this knowledge when he writes that “having some eighteen times more never endings than the cochlear nerve of the ear, its nearest competitor, the optic nerve with its 800,000 fibers is able to transfer an astonishing amount of information to the brain, and at a rate of assimilation far greater than that of any other sense organ” (6).

²⁹ Merleau-Ponty has a different point of view. He explains the limitedness of the sense of vision in terms of its “belong[ing] to a certain *field*. To say that I have a visual field is to say that by reason of my position I have access to and an opening upon a system of beings, visible beings, that these are at the disposal of my gaze in virtue of a kind of primordial contract and through a gift of nature, with no effort made on my part; from which it follows that vision is prepersonal. And it follows at the same time that it is always limited, that around what I am looking at at a given moment is spread a horizon of things which are not seen, or which are even invisible. Vision is a thought subordinated to a certain field, and this is what is called a sense. (*Phenomenology of Perception* 217). He reiterates the same claim in *The Structure of Behaviour* “what is certain is that the perceived is not limited to that which strikes my eyes. When I am sitting at my desk, the space is closed behind me not only in idea but also in reality” (249). Commenting on the last quotation Jay writes “sight, in other words, had to be integrated with the other senses in order for us to ‘make sense’ of our experience of the world” (306).

Wordsworth is not simply reduced to an object of human representation. It is, to use Heidegger's terminology, a thing – a positive term referring to entities in their proper reality – and not an object – a negative term used to describe entities in their presence-at-hand.³⁰

The eye which apprehends nature as an object is the atomistic and mechanistic eye which “divides a coherent whole into fragments and seeks to explain nature through cutting it apart” (Estor 113). It is “threatening” (*Excursion* 7. 222). On the other hand, the eye which perceives nature as an entity endowed with consciousness also exposes itself to the danger of being manipulated by it. “The fact that subjectivity is inseparable from perception ... and ... the mind is a symbolizing agent,” John Turner explains, “suggests that, for Wordsworth as for Hume, ‘nature’ commits us in part, to a world of ‘illusion’” (632). Wordsworth calls upon himself to debunk this illusion and to face the fact that the external world has indeed betrayed the senses. He does not “sublate” nature for any transcendent imaginative consolation as in *The Prelude* or “Tintern Abbey” but altogether forsakes it. This act puts us in the framework of a comparison between a self-exalted vision of nature typical of the poems of the Great Decade and a literal vision which sees nothing redeeming or consoling about nature. Instead of seeing “a sense sublime / Of something” (“Tintern Abbey” 95-96) that was not really there in nature, but that was nonetheless apprehended by the mind – which is “wedded to this goodly universe / In love and holy

³⁰ In his *Heidegger Dictionary* Inwood defines “thing” as “a ‘bearer of properties.’ [Heidegger] takes *dingen* to mean the means ‘to assemble, gather’ and takes a thing to be something that ‘assembles’ the ‘fourfold’, earth, sky, gods and mortals. ‘The jug is a thing not in the Roman sense of *res*, not in the sense of an *ens* as the medievals represented it; not in the modern sense of a represented object. The jug is a thing insofar as it things’ (D. 170/177)” (214-15). Graham Harman further explains that the term “thing” is counterposed to the term “object” – generally speaking, “thing” is a good term for Heidegger and “object” not a good one. What makes the jug a thing rather than an object is that it stands independently in itself “As the independent stance of something independent, the jug differentiates itself from an object (Heidegger 1994, p 5)” (24).

passion” (*The Recluse* 806-7) – there is at the core of *Peele Castle* a cleaving toward seeing nature as it really is. Standing back from the imagination Wordsworth also sets aside the myth of the correspondence between nature and the mind. This kind of objective perception affects the relation of subject and object as it alleviates the faith of the former in the latter and along with that faith, the possibility of knowing the object. As opposed to the classical model wherein “visual perception gives rise to subjective experiences with a peculiar phenomenal character and ... yields objective knowledge of the world” (Jacob and Jeannerod 10), in Wordsworth faith in nature is crucial not only for the relation with nature to be, but also for establishing self-relation.

Before *Peele Castle* Wordsworth did not have what Kierkegaard calls the “risk of faith,” which philosophically suggests an intellectual calculated conjecture. Rather he had a spiritual faith premised on the belief that “Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her” (“Tintern Abbey” 122-23), and made possible the ascendance of the “invisible world” over the visible “light of sense.” In *Peele Castle* Wordsworth resolves not to trifle with the temptation to see with the “inner eye” any more: “a power is gone, which nothing can restore” (35). What he wants to achieve aesthetically is a turn from idealism to realism. The “power”³¹ that is “gone” points to the magnanimous capacity for devotional belief in nature as well as in the eye that apprehends nature. The relational dynamic is broken off because faith, which has so far sustained the relation of perceiving consciousness and the object, was shattered. The absence of this faith leads to what Jarvis describes as “a sense of puncturing, of the material breaking in upon the ideal” (8).

³¹ Whereas Hartman believes that the lost “power” is the wishful imagination, Bloom believes that it is nature. The latter assumes that: “‘Elegiac Stanzas’ form Wordsworth’s palinode on his gospel of nature” (195).

A fuller investigation of the epistemological value of the return to the visible may be established by way of discussing the different modalities of vision in “Tintern Abbey” for they represent different discernible moments in the experience of knowledge and of self-knowledge. The poem is a controversial piece for while it emphasises the imagination as a form of maturation beyond the picturesque tradition, it also values literal vision. It allows the viewer to access the deeper truth of feeling through the faculty of the imagination: “A presence that disturbs me with the joy / Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused” (94-96), yet focuses on “colors” and “forms” which speak only to the “bodily eye.” This paradox remains in force throughout the poem and is sustained by the claim that knowledge of the world is produced and delivered by the “eye and ear, - both what they half create,/ and what perceive” (106-7). The suggestion is that the other half is supplied by the imagination, which itself interacts not with an “inanimate cold world” but with an “active universe” (*Prelude* 2. 254).

Wordsworth does not sift the past for significant accounts of the present as he does in the poems written in the same decade. The present is rather punctiform, an instantaneous point and an extensionless now. The dating of the poem – July 13, 1798 – consolidates the effect of instantaneousness. The title, according to Andrew Bennett, is “concerned, first of all, to affirm the geographical and temporal stability of its compositional moment” (45). It is punctiform in the sense that its composition marks a specific point in time that is not, paradoxically, independent of the prior impressions that the place inspired. The punctiform present re-invents its relation to the past through a sort of perceptual memory, which is not imagistic, meaning that it doesn’t rely on the reinvigoration or revival of what are called “memory images.” Its images interact and intermingle with what is presented in the

sensible manifold in such a way that the objects are perceived and imagined at once.

Equipped with this memory the sentient speaker perceives the object in a new light, and not merely as a copy of an initial image.

There is no strict Empirical employment of memory as a contributor to the associative combination because in that role memory would fall short of contributing to synthetic imagination, which is here different from imagining – understood from a restricted Empiricist standpoint as the act of associating images which are all traceable to specific sensations through the intermediary of memory.³² Andrew Bennett uses the cinematographic word “montage,” which he defines as “a superimposition of one experience upon another,” to describe the process by which present and past are united in both memory and imagination. “Montage” suggests the combination in a single composition of pictorial elements – deriving from various images of the landscape recorded in the mind and carried for future viewings – to give the illusion that they belong together. It puts emphasis on the imagination as productive synthesis involving the streaming backwards of visual and aural experiences and the synthetic construction of a new experience through these harmonized snapshots.

Unlike “Immortality Ode” for instance, where the loss of “Light” is compensated by what J.B. Owen and J.W. Smyser describe as a return “to nature, and with trustworthy hopes, founded less upon [Wordsworth’s] sentient than upon his intellectual being” (16), the return to nature in “Tintern Abbey” is “founded” more upon sentience than upon the

³² In the Empiricist tradition, the act of imagining involves the construction of “complex ideas” on the basis of “simple ideas,” which are themselves copies of impressions and sensations. Kant calls it “reproductive” imagination as opposed to “productive” imagination, which is responsible for the synthetic character of imagined objects. The counterparts in Coleridge are “fancy,” defined as the mechanical association of “fixities and definites” and “esemplastic”; the synthetic quality of the imagination.

intellect, for while imagination is underway, the speaker reacts to the scene with rejuvenated sentience. Bennett argues that the immediacy of sensation is conveyed through the use of the deictic in “*these* waters (line 3), “*these* steep and lofty cliffs” (line 5), “I again repose / *Here*, under *this* dark sycamore and view/ *These* plots” (lines 9-11). These are all “examples of ... insistent presencing” (Bennett 50). The deictic signals a protracted moment of vision through which the viewer fixes the specific images of the landscape and gradually establishes contact with them. In the moment of perception, the two acts of perception and imagination acquire significance not in isolation from each other, but precisely in their conjoint action. When the poet says that the “steep and lofty cliffs / ... impress / Thoughts of more deep seclusion,” (5-7) he captures an observing and imaginative consciousness remembering what it already knows of what it is actually beholding:

And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought,
With many recognitions dim and faint,
And somewhat of a sad perplexity,
The picture of the mind revives again (58-61)

At face value, the revival of the “picture of the mind” suggests that the bodily eye is losing its prerogatives because while vividly beholding its object, it confronts its own outworn presence. Yet since the motive of the revisit to the Wye is not to gain an inroad into empirical reality, visual perception should not be measured according to how much material change in the scene – already acquainted with – could be captured. The aim is not to have a more encompassing grasp of the perceptual experience in order to improve apprehension. Rather Wordsworth hopes to know what the rejuvenated sensation can teach him about himself. His aim is not to derive a new “emotion” but to rejuvenate an old

disposition for feeling. Self-understanding is the value he hopes to achieve through a compound of vision and recollection. This value can be confirmed or discredited only by perceptual experience, hence the basic indispensability of the eye in this operation. Of both visits to the Wye Valley, it is the second that records literal vision. Bennett rightly argues that:

Curiously, perhaps, in the first visit there is a sense in which the scene *was*, precisely (and paradoxically), something like a ‘landscape to a blind man’s eye’: Wordsworth was then blind to what he now perceives, unable to interpret it, to properly or fully bring it to the senses. Although he lived then –as Keats was later to say of his visit to the Lake District- ‘in the eye,’ it was a curiously imperceptive perception, more a passion, a “feeling and a love’ than something seen. (53)

The initial vision is sensitive to nature as an identifying reference while the second vision – the occasion of the poem – is so much of an intentional act that it requires the physical presence of the object to complete its intentional structure. The second vision is indubitably more comprehensive because then Wordsworth seeks onto-phenomenological knowledge. “What is missing from this [first] experience,” Bennett again argues

is precisely experience in the complex Wordsworthian sense that combines perception with acts of memory, of thinking, of imagining. Nature is experienced only as a kind of haunting or a kind of appetite, or if ‘in’ the eye, in the eye of a blind man because sight is itself and nothing else, devoid of difference, of deferral, of, finally, meaning. (54)

In the second visit, Wordsworth grasps a materialistic dimension of the object that has been largely overlooked during his first visit and, along with it, a dimension of his own vision, which is now a synthetic unity. What has been unperceived is now perceived both as an object that is present before the eye and as a mental image. The word “again” (in “the picture of the mind revives again”) establishes in the present an overextension between

present perception and memory, which itself cannot be stripped clean of its own imaginative components.

Recent work on the crossover of neural physiology and literature has demonstrated how imagination is implicated in perception. In her reading of “I Wondered Lonely as a Cloud” Elaine Scarry “restores the continuity between visual images and creative imagination that “antipictorialist” accounts of literary imagery deny or discount” (qtd. in Richardson *Neural* 46). She demonstrates that the moment of sensation is itself a hybrid event involving both mental processes of recollecting and imagining. Her point is not that imagination is derivative from perception although perception is admittedly a general precondition of that act of the mind. Rather perception is a specific cause of the act of the imagination. She is inspired by Stephen Kosslyn’s research on visual imagery. The latter contends that “mental images have physical properties akin to perceived visual images” (qtd. in Richardson *Neural* 46). The advance in understating that Scarry and Kosslyn provide is that “visual perception itself is already ‘creative’” (Richardson *Neural* 47). In light of Scarry’s and Kossly’s insights, we can safely assume that there is no conflict between perception and imagination in “Tintern Abbey” because the latter does not herald the advent of a new element, something that has not been seen or experienced before.

This brings my trajectory to the collaboration between imagination and memory. They function as a single though often an internally complex unit of mental activity which does not interfere with the incessant struggling for the pleasure “unborrowed from the eye.” For Wordsworth the epistemological value of the visual return to nature is to find inspiration in nature primordially as a man, then as a poet, the reason being that vision contributes to the development of human subjectivity. In “William Wordsworth and

Photographic Subjectivity” Hess argues that “there is an implied autonomous subject or consciousness, looking on from outside the world of the image, but by the same token, the autonomous subject depends on the pictorial perspective and stability of this subjective world in order to construct its own sense of unity and interiority” (294). The eye is so instrumental to the construction and maintenance of subjectivity that Wordsworth wishes to borrow Dorothy’s “wild eyes” which are still sensitive and responsive to nature as an ontic entity. He does not discriminate between the eyes of the poet and the eyes of a common individual because as he says in *The Excursion* “the infinite magnificence of heaven” is “within the reach of every human eye” (9. 212-13). The democratic appeal of the Wordsworthian eye is absent from former eighteenth-century discourses on the eye. In the *Pleasures Of the Imagination*, for instance, Akenside presents the concept of the “chosen genius” (1. 38), a man endowed with the faculty of the Imagination “ordain’d / through life and death to dart his piercing eye / With thoughts beyond the limits of his frame”(1. 152-54). The imaginative man – the poet – according to Akenside is endowed with holy powers by means of which he can understand the much superior power of God through yet uncreated works of beauty: “From earth to heaven he rolls his daring eye / From heaven to earth” (3.384-5).³³ Yet although for Wordsworth perception is the endowment of all men, not all of them have the means of recreating that visual experience. Only the poet is able to re-image the object in the retrospective light of his memory because for him vision is nothing but a first movement that is subject to progress.

³³ Both Mark Akenside’s *The Pleasures of the Imagination* (1744) and Samuel Roger’s *Pleasures of Memory* (1792) popularized association and exerted influence on Wordsworth’s early poetry. For an elaboration of this influence see Arthur Beatty’s *William Wordsworth: His Doctrine and his Art in their Historical Relation*.

The sudden spectacle of a blind beggar in Book 7 of *The Prelude*, supervening after the London spectacle, sheds light on these two modalities of vision – direct vision and recollected vision – yet as a coherent way of “approaching the visual which can include both antitheses of the paradox of seeing” (McConnell 106). After describing the “everyday nature” of the beggar as being “set off here by the crowd of sights among which he moves” McConnell declares that “sight, in fact, through the medium of memory, is being used to baffle sight: the beggar, who would normally be invisible through his very obviousness, is rendered surrealistically clear by the swarm of life which surrounds him” (106). If every other epiphanic apparition in Wordsworth was intriguing, leaving him to discern whether it symbolizes retreat from the world, a partial break with its bonds, or a direct confrontation with it, the spectacle of the blind beggar is a version of Wordsworth’s containment in the world. William Galperin claims that

the ‘[o]ther world’ from which the speaker is ‘admonished’ is no longer some transcendental or metaphysical order apprehended by imagination. Rather, in a total recanting of the ‘passage’ from ‘earthly’ to the ‘celestial,’ this world is the sublunary, visible, historical world whose ‘knowledge’ is suddenly accessible thanks to the sights and shows of London. (120)

The gist of Galperin’s argument is that the sight of the blind beggar brings Wordsworth back to reality. Galperin rules out the possibility that the beggar is a symbol because of his material manifestation. In *The Genealogy of the Romantic Symbol* Nicholas Halmi provides a different definition of the symbol, which could apply to the blind beggar more adequately: “the purpose [of the symbol] ... was not to describe objects of perception but to condition the perception of objects” (1). The poet’s mind was smitten by the sight of the blind beggar in ways that triggered off his reflection on the symbolism of being and life. Nobody in the London crowd could inspire Wordsworth and much less condition his

perception. He confesses “the face of every one / That passes by me is a mystery” (628-29) and describes city dwellers as “melted and reduced / To one identity”(726-27). This massive corporalization of vision has led to the presentation of London as a “blank confusion” (722) where all the bodies are interchangeable.

Wordsworth felt alienated from this collective identity because it did not inspire him about his own identity.³⁴ Unable to know himself by projection and affinity with the many sighted individuals he met in London, he could not help but submit to the compelling authority of a label on a blind man’s chest to get a sense of self and worth. Insofar as he is a symbol, the blind beggar brings Wordsworth back to a familiar natural setting and provides essential knowledge about self and world. The urban spectacle is transformed into a natural one where the observing consciousness is left to decipher the symbolic components of that world. Like nature in Wordsworth’s childhood, the blind beggar is represented as an “open book.” It is interesting that the character who occasions Wordsworth’s admonishment is himself blind and presumably unable to share with the observer what the latter knows about the natural world.

3 Modality of return: the discursive value

In this part I am interested in the role of figuration and the rhetorical reconstruction of the visual experience in Wordsworth’s poetry. It is worth noting initially that unlike his firm stand on aesthetics – which involves a departure from the empiricist view of the relation of subject and object – Wordsworth’s intricate analyses of visual objects and language has a quite controversial relation to the prevailing Lockean philosophy of

³⁴ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White argued that “Wordsworth’s remote and observant solitude, his lack of intimate concern for the collectivity [as described in Book 7]” suggest “despite [the poet’s] *own* kind of avowed democratic populism” his animosity toward the “bourgeois progressive and idealist strand of thinking about popular festivity to which Bakhtin” belong” (120-21).

language, which in its most general terms established “the new epistemological orientation of semantics” as opposed to the earlier emphasis on “logic and grammar” (Kretzmann, 175). According to William Hatherell, “following Locke’s linguistic turn, eighteenth-century writers on language frequently used linguistic theory as a battleground for deciding epistemological and metaphysical issues” (225). The most prominent of these issues is the unreliability of language to convey not only meaning, but also to faithfully reproduce the impressions generated by visual and aural perceptions.

“Words are notoriously unreliable for Locke,” Richardson explains, “precisely because they tend to drift away from the perceived (or mentally represented) objects, losing the clarity and distinctness of sensation” (*Neural* 39). Wordsworth seems to accept Locke’s argument when he refers to “the sad incompetence of human speech” (*Prelude* 6. 593), thus attesting to the failure of language to secure the intrinsic characteristics of his vision. In using “human speech” instead of language, Wordsworth emphasizes this predicament because if “human speech” (comprising the language of the rustic as well as more intellectual people) is unable to warrant the authenticity of impressions, metaphorical language does not either for the reason that literal speech is the genesis of the metaphorical language. As Bilaostosky explains “nothing has a significant name and words are empty when the idea of metaphor is cut loose from its moorings in literal speech” (916)

Wordsworth agrees with Locke that the incompetence of language is mainly caused by its mediating role. As a necessary translation and interpretation of vision, writing allows for the identification of different kinds of visual achievements, yet is paradoxically vision’s most repressive medium since it translates it with a certain economy of form. Before it is

composed, literally written down vision is polymorphous. Composition not only destroys the variform aspect of vision, but also threatens to muddle the visual and the imaginative, being itself a “junction where conception and expression are indistinguishable and immune to adulteration” (Galperin 20). The ambiguity of the ratio between perception and imagination is conveyed in such statements as “all the mighty world / Of eye and ear, - both what they half create, / And what perceive” (“Tintern Abbey” 105-7).

Although Wordsworth says that the text is made up half by the original visual experience and half by the imagination, he does not seem to corroborate this claim in his whole corpus. On the one hand, he claims that the poet “delight[s] to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them” (Preface 1800 453), and on the other hand “volitions and passions” should be bound up with “the elements and the appearances of the visible universe” (Preface 1802 607).³⁵

The contemplation of external phenomena similar to those existing within (first argument) is a passive capability identified in “A Poet’s Epitaph” as “the harvest of a quiet eye” (51). This contemplation is not vision *per se* for it is in a literal sense blind to the ontic material. It is an insight understood as in-sight or reflexive sight which necessitates a state of anamnesis – as when “the bodily eyes / Were utterly forgotten, and what I saw / Appeared like something in myself” (*Prelude* 2. 49-51). The gist of the first argument is

³⁵ I am not suggesting that the search for a definite answer to this antithesis discloses a pervasive uncertainty in the language of the poem. As John Hillis Miller notes there is no “pattern of irreconcilable self-contradiction ... Wordsworth’s thought in fact is not dialectical. The early stages of his experience are not transcended in the climax of his poems. They are held suspended in a vibration among alternative ways of thinking that it is impossible to think in a single unequivocal formulation” (43-44).

that something beyond bodily vision gathers momentum and gradually displaces vision from the eye to the text.

Now the second argument dismantles the first one for it suggests that in-sight must explicitly state its ontic reference because only the exact correspondence and reciprocal endowment of “*things*” and “*thoughts*” – “all thinking things, all *objects* of all thought” (“Tintern Abbey” 101) generates “*good* poetry.” In this context Wordsworth warns in *Essays Upon Epitaphs* III that:

Words are too awful an instrument for good and evil to be trifled with; ... If words be not ... an incarnation of the thought but only a clothing for it, then surely will they prove an ill gift ... Language, if it do not uphold, and feed, and leave in quiet, like the power of gravitation or the air we breathe, is a counter-spirit, unremittingly and noiselessly at work to derange, to subvert, to lay waste, to vitiate, and to dissolve. (*Selected Prose* 361)

Commenting on Wordsworth’s statement Wlecke writes that “the relationship between word and thought is analogous to the relationship between body and soul: words “body forth” an otherwise hidden activity of the mind, they are one with that activity, and their progression is expressive of a certain progression in consciousness” (14). Many critics have been sensitive to Wordsworth’s handling of the ratio of perception and imagination, notably Paul de Man, who in “The Intentional Structure of Romantic Image” draws attention to the conflation of perception and imagination. “At time ... it becomes difficult to distinguish between object and image, between imagination and perception, between and expressive or constitutive or literal language. This may well be the case in some passages in Wordsworth ...” (7). If we suppose that perception is subsumed in imagination, the right critical move would be to trace perception in imagination. Yet de Man warns “the very fact that [the relation between matter and consciousness has to be

established within the medium of language indicates that it does not exist in reality” (8). Our initial enterprise of “distinguish[ing] between perception and imagination should not then start are what “consciousness” communicates about “matter – since this relation is negated- but at what poetry discloses.³⁶

Language does not regenerate as much as it engineers an otherwise non-existent relation of matter to consciousness. In other words, it is language and not the eye which makes matter “visible” to consciousness in the same way that it is the imagination and not mere sensuousness which makes the visible world intelligible. In his analysis of the role of writing in “Tintern Abbey” Andrew Bennett submits that “The hedgerows are only ‘present’ to the perceiving mind ... - only in language, which *means* in ‘writing’, can they be apprehended as present: only by absence” (52). Bennett casts light on writing not as a means of preserving the authenticity of the initial impressions, but as a means of inventing them. The crisscrossing of matter and reality on the one hand, and consciousness and language on the other unnerves the relation of immediate connectedness and reference between the eye and the imagination in a way that complicates Hartman’s claim that “vision is always continuous with sensation” (*The Unremarkable* 11). This crisscrossing obfuscates the truth of their relation and establishes that it is in language that this relation is reformulated, renegotiated, though never resolved according to de Man’s claim that the text “does nothing but originate anew” (6). The last quotation from de Man uncovers a third challenge, which is that Wordsworth’s text does not allow for a readability of the vision at its core because it incessantly unleashes what it ties up. Although the

³⁶ For important insights about the “compositional poetics” see David Perkins’s *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Sincerity*; J. Douglas Kneale’s *Monumental Writing: Aspects of Rhetoric in Wordsworth’s Poetry* and Kenneth Johnston *The Hidden Wordsworth: Poet, Lover, Rebel, Spy*.

indeterminacy of language debars the conception of poetry as closure or steadfast meaning and makes the “language of the sense” viable, it is perceived as a threat to meaning insofar as it relentlessly questions the referential status of language; what words refer to.

Yet despite his mistrust of language – largely inherited from Locke –in *Note to the Thorn* Wordsworth draws attention to “the interest which the mind attaches to words, not only as symbols of the passion, but as *things*, active and efficient, which are of themselves part of the passion” (*The Poetical Works* 830).³⁷

Language has relevance to the mind because it completes its epistemological structure. With this argument, Wordsworth departs from Locke on at least two major levels. The first is that the mind is active because it is interested in words as “*things*, active and efficient ” and because it considers them as “part of the passions.” The second is that language transcends the limitations of pure mechanical associationism because only by virtue of being active do they come to have relevance to the active mind. Now because the poet’s mind is active and sensitive to “active and efficient” words, the poet can write poetry about “absent things as if they were present” (Preface 1800 453). What is at stake here is giving presence to “absent things,” and not the invention of new ones.

The poet is able to perform this task because, as Wordsworth explains in the Preface 1800, he is “endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and

³⁷ This is in reality a reformulation of Coleridge’s postulate in one of the Wedgwood letters that the autonomy of language stems from the sensuous presence of words “as themselves images and sounds” which have the ability to excite “Passions & Feelings without the regular intermediations of images.” Coleridge notes his discontent with Locke’s hostility to figurative language – on account of the fact that it is a source of error – and disregard for “the Law of association.” William Keach aligns Coleridge in the idealist tradition when he insists on “destroy[ing] the old antithesis of Words & Things” within a view of language as “an expression of the coalescing of things and thoughts, of nature and mind, in a transcendent power called “the Logos.” For an elaboration of Keach’s position see “Romanticism and Language” (95–119, 112).

tenderness” than common men (Preface 1800 453), and his intention is to fit into poetry “a selection of language really used by men in a state of vivid sensation,” (Preface 1800 445), which, Bialostoky rightly argues, should be clearly distinguished from “vivid excitement” (447). While the former expression “refer[s] to an object’s making a strong and quite possibly a clear impression,” the latter “refer[s] to a strong and possibly blinding passion” (919). In the Preface of 1800 Wordsworth adds that the men whom he will depict “in a state of vivid sensation” also “feel vividly and see clearly” (457). “See[ing] clearly” has a deeper meaning when juxtaposed to the postulate that he has “at all times endeavoured to look steadily at [his] subject” (Preface 1800 450).

Steadiness could be said to have two advantages. Firstly, it remits the transcendent tendency of vision and grounds it to earth. Secondly, it mitigates the exuberance of the sensuous experience allowing, therefore, for its mediation to the mind. Disciplining vision (prescribed steadiness) and salvaging the present visual experience for a potential future usage stem from the self-prescribed duty to think because poetry is “severe thought” not slavish imitation (“Advertisement” to *Lyrical Ballads* 1798 443). The purpose of the postponement is to make the poem commensurate not with the original visual experience – because whatever that experience may be is irremediably gone – but with the experience as it has become after thoughts had been “steeped in feeling.” Steadiness hinges on the synergy of sensibility and thought where thought confidently relies on the eye, and the eye enhances instead of obstructing thought. Since steadiness is only realizable over time, it casts light of the instrumental role of time in the act of object-interpretation. Object-interpretation gives the self the chance to refashion itself according to a dynamic flux and consolidates a sense of reflexive self-interpretation.

Of course, these sparse declarations about the importance of sensation in the written text and the postponement of its inscription culminate in Wordsworth's famous definition of poetry as:

the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. (Preface 1800 460)

It is not the emotion felt in the moment of perception that is important and valuable to poetry because in that moment Wordsworth has only a mental disposition which, Richard Wollheim warns us, should not be confused with consciousness: "By mental disposition I mean those underlying modifications of the mind which are possessed of intentionality but not of subjectivity" (qtd. in Ben-Ze'ev 20). Rather it is the "kindred emotion" – fraught with sensual content – that fulfills the aim of the poet. The "kindred emotion" does not and cannot act in isolation to produce the desired effect, which is "good poetry." In other words, poetry cannot be reduced to a series of a well-constructed string of mental dispositions. It is bound to its own history of sensation. The emotion is not merely called upon to be true of reality, or to provide the poet with an attitude, an orientation towards reality or the part of it that is picked up by the eye and the ear. Its role is presencing and articulating in proportion to an authentic sensual content. To prevent sensation from being clouded by imagination or being in conflict with it, Wordsworth proposes that the poet should think "long and deeply," make a kind of selection between the sensory and the imaginative on rational grounds without turning the whole endeavor to bold and pure reasoning.

The “kindred emotion” belongs not to the category of volitions, but to the same mental category as memory, judgments, and other mental states. It is cognitive. Ben-Ze’ev defines it as “a general mental mode [which] includes various mental elements and expresses a dynamic functioning arrangement of the mental system” (147). For the poet the emotion entails evaluative thoughts held in memory of former experiences. “Tintern Abbey” illustrates this situation adequately. In his second visit to the Wye Wordsworth realizes that he does not experience vision as a distinct occurrence for his vision is associated with and even coveted in the act of the imagination. He is incapable of a second naïveté because of his cognitive affect. The alternative is to read his former pleasing and pleasure-laden vision in Dorothy’s “wild eyes.” Without totally stripping her of an emotional involvement with nature, Wordsworth anticipates what Dorothy is prone to feel under what he takes to be a standard condition of being exposed to nature’s beauty and sublimity.

As I have already intimated in the second division of this chapter (“the epistemological value”) Dorothy is capable of performing the simple “perceptual mode”, which Ben-Ze’ev defines as “the most basic mental mode. It involves being aware of our immediate environment without being engaged in a complex intellectual activity and without being in the midst of a stormy emotional experience” (148). Dorothy’s eyes obstinately resist the enchantment of nature, thought and imagination, and she is comfortable within the confines of simple perception. It shall be recalled that Wordsworth relied on her own minutely descriptive journal entries for his own purposes. Suzan Levin claims that “Dorothy’s writing is characterized by refusal, refusal to generalize, refusal to reproduce standard literary forms, refusal to undertake the act of writing ... She often

appears a mere cataloguer of irrelevant detail, a person strangely fixed on the minutiae around her” (4).³⁸ In “Tintern Abbey” she is valuable as an addressee for two reasons, the less important being that through her Wordsworth does not preclude the many graces to which simple perception – perception unmingled in imagination – provides. She is also valuable because she embodies Empiricism – the philosophy based on the principle that all knowledge is derived from experience – from which Wordsworth tries to distance himself. Anthony Easthope defines Empiricism as “the epistemological belief that the real can be experienced and understood more or less directly by an unprejudiced observer” (21). And such is Dorothy, “an unprejudiced observer.”

I wish to argue that the act of “read[ing]” Dorothy’s “wild eyes” is also an act of writing and that its value is the discursive reconstruction and perpetuation of Wordsworth’s visual experience. A preliminary albeit oblique remark is due before I proceed with the argument. It is that this act of writing, articulated as an act of reading, suggests that even the full-blown or fully-developed emotional feeling toward nature does not dispense with literal perception. Despite the emphasis I have put earlier on Wordsworth’s inclination for things as they seem, he still sustains interest in things as they are; that is, things as they are presented in the sensible manifold. Emotion in this view involves as much bodily as mentalistic content, or more accurately, its mentalistic evaluation demands that it be bodily for its bodily content is alone capable of warranting its own perpetuation and the perpetuation of its mentalistic aspect.

³⁸ In this sense Hartman declares that “When Wordsworth said of Dorothy, ‘She gave me eyes, she gave me ears’, it was no vain compliment. In her *Journals* we read, for example, of their meeting the poor old man who became the Leechgatherer of “Resolution and Independence” or that description of the daffodils which Wordsworth transformed into “I wandered lonely as a cloud” (*The Unremarkable Wordsworth* 56).

The value of perception as an epistemological act resides in its immediacy. Pfau asserts “however varied its inflection, ‘immediacy’ functions as *the* condition of the possibility for all knowledge” (223). Wordsworth’s wish to “read / My former pleasures in the shooting lights / Of thy wild eyes” (117-19) stems from his own proleptic fear of not being able to perform immediate vision. The expression “shooting lights” uncovers the motivational significance that Wordsworth finds in those eyes, which is that they protrude and reflect light in the same way that his eyes used to do in his youth. Dorothy’s eyes become a text through which the poet hopes to regain his lost language or the one he is about to lose, and at the same time an epitaphic text preserving the memory of that language when he “no more shall be.” It is epitaphic not in the sense of being invested with the tragic significance of mortality although the fear projected in this request is incontestably mortality and transience, but in the sense of attesting the triumph of language over death. Mark Hewson explains that for Wordsworth “the primary ‘meaning’ of epitaphs—the consciousness from which they arise and to which they bear witness – is not the consciousness of death, but the sense of immortality, since it is only the latter that could give the motivation for memorial practices” (20).

Now how is it possible to establish the relation between reading and writing? Reading Dorothy’s eyes involves the sublation of individual vision into the inclusive and the trans-individual authority of a shared vision for purposes of perpetuating shared knowledge, which Wordsworth presents in the Book 5 of *The Prelude* as a very delicate act. It is so delicate indeed that even books – which are assumed to be the best “shrines” – are shown to be “frail” (49). While discrediting the power of books to keep alive the knowledge inscribed in them and entrusted to them, Wordsworth suggests that writing is

the best means for enshrining knowledge. So when he says that he reads his pleasure in Dorothy's eyes in order to immortalize it, he is saying by the same token that he is writing that pleasure, inscribing it in a human shrine that will perpetuate it as long as it lives and as long as it can relate and communicate. Writing alone guarantees the perreniality of the sensually-fraught inscribed emotion, and allows for its recuperation in the form that is closest to its original because it observes the principle of representing the real. David Pirie notes that "instead of concocting imaginary worlds for our diversion," Wordsworth, "directs us back to the one world which is real" (1). Though the recuperation of the initial impression is technically strictly Empiricist in direction and attitude, it makes room for the interference of the imagination, understood in the sense of working out the ontic material to achieve the higher purpose of human knowledge. The language that recuperates and preserves the real is the dividing line between the retrospective and memorial discourse – which merely attests to the frailness of the real in the face of mortality – and the properly epitaphic text which upholds the real in the face of mortality.

Wordsworth has an Empiricist predisposition (conspicuous in the whole corpus of his poetry and most explicitly articulated in *The Prelude*), which enables him to depict the physicality of the environment. This predisposition does not involve privileging the visible over the imaginative in the discursive topos. Rather it preserves the visible in the imaginative. The recuperation of the past in a discursive form also makes possible the recuperation of the lost immediate self-relation. The role of language in this sense is not simply to provide a solution for human transience, but also to validate self-consciousness. As Hegel says "language [is] the existence of Spirit. Language is self-consciousness existing for others, self-consciousness which as such is immediately present, and as this

self-consciousness is universal” (395).

I showed in this chapter that even as he inveighs against the crippling energy of the eye, Wordsworth still puts premium on vision not as the genesis of the imagination, but as the source to which imagination returns for its regeneration. In the next chapter I demonstrate the contribution of the eye to self-consciousness through a close reading of the Alps episode in Book 6 of *The Prelude*.

Chapter Two

Vision in the Alps: Book 6 Revisited

Anyone who has common sense will remember that the bewilderments of the eyes are of two kinds, and arise from two causes, either from coming out of the light, or from going into the light, which is true of the mind's eye quite as much as of the bodily eye.
Plato (*The Republic*)

In this chapter I rethink the spontaneous emergence of the imagination in the often-quoted passage describing the crossing the Alps in Book 6 of the 1850 version of *The Prelude* until the apostrophe to the imagination.³⁹ I endorse the view that the episode stages the straight-out confrontation between the tyrannical eye and the imagination on a sublime scale. I dispute, however, the fact that it is a moment of unprecedented consciousness of imaginative power. I am not interested in the representation of the transformative dynamics whereby the tyrannical eye is thwarted by imaginative vision, but in its performance.

While I do not mean to challenge the well-established argument that imagination intervenes in the moment of writing in March-April 1804,⁴⁰ I wish to suggest that another avenue, perhaps equally worth pursuing, is obscured by the failure to see that imagination is unconsciously underway and, therefore, hermeneutically (not referentially) present since the beginning of the episode. In making this argument I do not mean to suggest that imagination is already constituted at the beginning of the episode for if it was, it would not be possible for it to “[rise] from the mind’s abyss / Like an unfathered vapour” (6. 594-95). I am rather claiming

³⁹The reason why I am devoting a whole chapter to Book 6 is that it is crucial to the understanding of the phenomenon of the imagination in *The Prelude* and in Wordsworth’s canon in general. David Ferris explains that “it would be difficult to understate the appropriateness of the Simplon Pass episode in Book 6 of *The Prelude* for any understanding of the imagination and its role as a mode of interrelation within romanticism as well as the critical discourse on romanticism ... The frequent recurrence of this passage may also indicate that it poses an unavoidable challenge to any serious attempt to read the discourse of *The Prelude*. As such the Simplon Pass episode would be a pass that must be passed through if any knowledge of the Wordsworthian imagination, not to mention romanticism itself, is to be arrived at” (“Where the Three Paths Meet” 418).

⁴⁰The ambiguous referent of the deictic “here” in line 592 has encouraged Harold Bloom to believe that the lines 592-597 may refer to 1790. Accordingly, what Wordsworth presents in 1850 as “the agent of transfiguration” is a “moment of baffled aspiration” and not the moment of insight during composition. (*Visionary Company* 148)

that because it is a “nothing,” or because it has negated its origin – that is, construed its nothingness in order to force itself to transcend it – that imagination is creative.

A few critics of a markedly phenomenologist bent have examined this issue. In his epochal *Wordsworth's Poetry*, Geoffrey Hartman focuses on the dialectic of nature and the imagination in Book 6 not only because of the salient position of this Book in Wordsworth's oeuvre, but also because it allows for a reading of the philosophic mind, which resists obedience to the sense while striving to remain earth-bound and in contact with the elemental life of nature.

Hartman formulates the polemical relation between nature and the imagination in terms of a tension between apocalypse and *akedah*. He divides the episode in three parts and submits that

as [Wordsworth] looks forward, in the moment of composition, from blankness towards revelation, a new insight cuts him off from the latter. The original disappointment is seen not as a test, or as a prelude to magnificence, but as a revelation in itself. It suddenly reveals a power-imagination – that could not be satisfied by anything in nature, however sublime. (*Wordsworth's Poetry* 46)

David S. Miall's argument moves in the path of Hartman's although it undergoes expansion along one dimension and contraction along another. Both deal with the dualism of perception and imagination, yet while Hartman deals with their dynamic bracing, Miall tries not to collapse their binarism. “Through the temporal disruption of his narrative in 1805,” Miall holds,

Wordsworth is able to rehistoricize his position as a consciousness that simultaneously inhabits and is inhabited by Nature, and transcends Nature. The paradox is apparent in the transit from the Imagination passage to the Gondo Ravine where, in Coleridge's term Wordsworth first eloins himself from Nature in order to return to her with fuller understanding. (88)

Basing his analysis on Mark Reed's Cornell edition of the *Thirteen Book Prelude* where the "discovery that 'we had crossed the Alps' is first elaborated in an earlier manuscript by the lengthy analogy of the cave" Miall brings our attention to at least two important elements. The first is that Wordsworth's unawareness that he had crossed the Alps is a betrayal of the eye.

Miall writes that

although it is not clear from the passage as we have it, either the 1805 or 1850, that the 'eye was master of the heart,' the earliest manuscript version containing the cave passage, later relocated to Book VIII (711-41) shows that Wordsworth's response to learning that he had already crossed the Alps was, among other things, another disappointment of the eye. (90)

His second important insight is that the "unfather'd vapour" of the imagination passage might have evolved from "a literal vapour or mountain mist" (91).⁴¹ In "Wordsworth and the Simplon Pass" and "Wordsworth and the Simplon Pass II" Max Wildi establishes very useful links between physical geography and mental geography in this episode, yet his insights about the phenomenology of the imagination do not diverge from the accepted doctrine that what happened in 1804 "had little direct connection with the crossing of the Alps" ("Simplon Pass II" 376).⁴²

Onorato claims that it is part of Wordsworth's "conscious artifice" (140) that imagination is readily put in gear with the process of remembering in Book 6. He implies that imagination is not the phenomenon by which Wordsworth's mind is actually smitten:

⁴¹ In Miall's words, "the cave passage holds three specific implications for understanding the experience that Wordsworth is trying to convey." The first is that "it shows the notorious 'unfathered vapour' of the Imagination passage (527)." The second is that "it is Wordsworth's disappointed expectations that lie behind the disrupted account of 1805." The third and, in my judgment, the most relevant implication of the cave passage is that "the series of claims made about the Imagination ... are in part a response to the prior disappointment" and 'the unexpected qualities of the Ravine ... lift it beyond the realm of the 'despotic eye'" (91).

⁴² Like Wildi, Ernest Bernhardt-Kabish discusses the geography of the episode in "Wordsworth and the Simplon Revisited." He does not spend much time on the literal reconstruction of the passage and proceeds to the analysis of Wordsworth's mental geography.

past dejection [associated with the memory of the experience] ... is being changed in the poetry to present joy. The immense feeling of aspiration is being given Imaginative expression and relieved of the encumbering recollected experience that has stimulated and frustrated it ... [In the 1850 version] ... Wordsworth further develops the similarity between the recollected journey through the mountains and the further experience of the imagination in his mind. (139)

The case is of a mixed mode of consciousness wherein remembering and imagination are combined to form a comprehensive act. The Alpine experience is remembered three times over; in *Descriptive Sketches*, in the 1805 and the 1850 versions of *The Prelude*. In the last two versions the episode is remembered and articulated with regard to its significance to “the growth of the poet’s mind.”

Commenting on the several revisions of *The Prelude*, Joel Faflak rightly claims that “the ongoing revisions are ... symptomatic of a subjectivity on trial/ in process” (99). This “trial,” I argue, cannot be carried out if the content of the act of remembering is not an act of imagining because a poet suffering from the “trauma of his inability to remember himself” (Faflak 99) cannot possibly dispense with imagining the irrecoverable. Memory has a committed character which allows it to posit the remembered event in the past. Imagination imputes to that posited event significance in the present. This is why the temporal order of remembering is strict while that of the imagination can be obfuscated and still provide a relieving “timely utterance”; an utterance which takes place on time, at the right time. The mutual incorporation of memory and imagination is conspicuous through an inbuilt cooperation of the correlative states of hoping and wishing.

In the first part of the chapter I will analyze the interplay of hoping and wishing in relation to memory and imagination. In the 1790 letter – which establishes the context and primary parameters of Book 6 – as well as in Book 6, the morphology of the text does not

accurately determine the liminal or terminal roles of wishing and hoping. There are intricate instances where they duplicate in such a way that they appear to evoke similar phenomena. On other occasions, the one expresses a claim perilously close to the one the other negates. They are in fact trammelled in the squeeze play of remembering and imagining. In the second part I argue that the failure of memory recorded in the letter to Dorothy leads to an imaginative filling out of memory traces in Book 6. Imagination – then readily employed to convert the missing traces of the experience of 1790 – is smitten by its own power to thwart the eye which has been hindering its activity. It is through this very act of authentication that imagination comes into the full ownership of itself.

1 The synergy of memory and imagination

Up until Book 5 of *The Prelude* the narrator reconstructs the whole network of his past by relaying thoughts and judgments, hopes and wishes in order to find/ found the truth about the self as a “natural [being] in the strength of Nature” (*Prelude* 3. 196). He makes the inventory of his resources as a poet aspiring to write a “philosophic song” (*Prelude* 1. 229). In Book 1 he establishes that he has “the vital soul”(150), that is, the ambition “needful to build up a Poet’s praise” (157), and to overcome the “hollow thought / [Hanging] like an interdict upon [the mind’s] hopes” (259-60).⁴³ In Book 4 he discovers his deep-seated poetic vocation: “bond unknown to me / Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly, / A dedicated Spirit” (335-37). The suggestion is that the path has been traced, that all Wordsworth has to do to be a poet is to dedicate himself to the office to

⁴³ Since the two part *Prelude* Wordsworth sought to affirm his creative genius. In the “Glad Preamble” to *The Prelude*, written in January 1800, he affirms that the “gentle breeze” is accompanied by a “correspondent mild creative breeze” that is, according to Jacob Risinger, “an affirmation of his imagination and an assertion that allows him to anticipate ‘the hope / Of active days, of dignity and thought, / [and] of powers in an honourable field’” (*Prelude* 1. 50-52). In “Ode to duty” which is contemporaneous with the two-part *Prelude* Wordsworth makes a similar claim about his predisposition for poetic genius: “I, loving freedom, and untired;/ No sport of every random gust” (25-26).

which nature has appointed him. The potential failure to become a poet is described as a sin rather than a mere dereliction of duty.

Sinning is conscious wrongdoing. It imputes to the possibility of violating nature's decree a volitional character and a motive, thus making its avoidance a matter of moral choice. This procedure does not break off in Book 6, which is marked "by [Wordsworth's] intoxication with the sense of "human nature seeming born again"(Day, 341).

Wordsworth deals with the same material extending over the five-book *Prelude* with the intention of establishing an ontological relation between nature and the imagination, yet the convoluted interplay of hoping and wishing at the beginning of this episode suggests that the poet doubts his poetic abilities despite the assertion "the Poet's soul was with me at that time" (6. 42).

It is of some interest to my purpose to refer to the 1805 version where this assertion comes after the accounts of being "detached / Internally from academic cares, / From every hope of prowess and reward," and of "wish[ing] to be a lodger in that house / Of letters, and no more—" (1805 6. 29-33). The "academic cares" consist in staying at Cambridge to prepare for the honours degree. Detachment from "every hope of prowess and reward" does not, however, collapse the "hopes for [Wordsworth's] future life" (1805 6. 60), which are, according to a footnote in the Norton edition, "the plan to write the main section of *The Recluse*." (Wordsworth, Abrams and Gill, 188). In forsaking "every hope of prowess and reward," Wordsworth does not capitulate to despair, but to the wish to be a "lodger in that house / Of letters, and no more." Up to this point, the hope to be a poet is well founded and Wordsworth seeks to fulfill it.

The wish, intervening between “every hope of prowess and reward” and the self-centered “hopes for my future life” induces, however, a feeling of disappointment and anxiety. It is what Milton calls a “[wish] / But not with hope” (*Paradise Lost* 9. 422); that is, a wish devoid of the possibility of fulfillment. The anxiety is very much reminiscent of the frustration recorded in Book 1, which results from the desire to meet Coleridge’s expectation to write about a “theme / Single and of determined bounds” (*Prelude* 1. 641-42), and simultaneously the wish to take up where Milton had left off in *Paradise Lost*.⁴⁴

In Book 6 the anxiety of the beginning stops Wordsworth from hoping, where hoping means “believing in possibility,” and forces him to idly wish. The focus on poetic character in a book which describes a mountain expedition raises, however, the suspicion that Wordsworth hopes to establish kinship with the poets who journeyed in the mountains – especially the Alps – to consecrate their office. Petrarch, one of the earliest Renaissance Humanists, climbed to the top of Mont Ventoux on April 26, 1336. John Dennis (1657–1734) crossed the Alps in 1688. In the eighteenth century Joseph Addison reports having felt “an agreeable kind of horror” (261) in the Alps, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau largely celebrated the Alpine landscape in *La Nouvelle Heloise* and *Confessions*. In *La Nouvelle Heloise*, an epistolary romance set in the villages of Vevey and Clarens, Rousseau

⁴⁴ In Book 1 Wordsworth’s desire to find a suitable theme for his epic causes him to dash trepidatiously from one endeavor to another. The potential literary subjects that Wordsworth catalogues until line 235 of Book 1 are strikingly similar to the tragic themes chosen by Milton in the *Trinity Manuscript* (Works 18. 228-44). The hesitation between several subjects is an appropriation of Milton’s conception of epic decorum, “long choosing and beginning late”, but is also in part generated by Wordsworth’s anxiety that “his eventual choice would actually be measured against Milton’s” (Halmi “The Very Model of an Epic Poem” 590). Wordsworth strives to settle on a subject that would conform to Milton’s revolutionary definition of the heroic, which privileges “what actually occurs in the poem” over the “formal treatment” prominent in Renaissance literary theory (Teskey 56). A strong sense of individuated consciousness urges him to write on a “theme / Single and of determined bounds” (*The Prelude* 1. 641-42) that centers on the self. Although this self-centered theme falls within the scope of Milton’s license to use any subject that is “sufficient of itself to raise / The name [heroic]” (*Paradise Lost* 9. 42-44), it engages abstruse and self-antithetical attitudes. While it promotes the sense of poetic self-sufficiency, its impropriety exposes Wordsworth to the risk of self-derision.

dramatizes the sublime majesty of the rugged Alps. The novel gained the author a large readership in Britain, and was, according to Andrew Beattie, “credited with creating a kind of secular mountain worship which went hand-in-hand with the religiously inspired doctrine of natural theology that had made its mark in the first part of the [eighteenth] century” (122). With Rousseau, the symbolism of journeying in the Alps became an ascent to the divine through the natural world where the divine manifests itself: “there is a kind of supernatural beauty in these mountainous prospects which charms both the senses and the mind into a forgetfulness of oneself and everything in the world” (60). Transcendentalism, a leitmotif in Rousseau, is sensed in the Crossing-of- the-Alps episode when the upward trail, Wordsworth feels “held forth / Conspicuous invitation to ascend” (6. 571-72), and inspires him and his companion with “hopes that pointed to the clouds” (6. 587). Yet transcendentalism in Wordsworth is devoid of the theological connotations prominent in Rousseau. It represents instead a striving beyond individual limitations in order to approach the “mighty names” (*Prelude* 6. 61). In this sense, hope challenges the interpretation of wish as a mitigation of “every hope of prowess and reward.”

To avoid breaks in coherence, we have to circumscribe the purpose of the wish “to be a lodger in that house of letters and no more.” The wish aims to privatize the ambition, to channel it into more intimate, subjective and solipsistic avenues in order to revive the real yet abated hopes. It is in line with the announcement “thenceforth I lived / More to myself” (21-22). Wish acts as a catalyst to hope, which itself functions as a power that binds the self to itself in order to fulfill the real and frustrating hope “of prowess and reward.” Hope as the foregrounding of possibility and the consolidation of subjectivity can be traced to Kierkegaard. Rebecca Kathleen Huskey notes that “for Kierkegaard, hope

seeks out possibility, and the person who hopes relates herself expectantly to the possibility of the good. A corollary to this is that hope is a proper relation of the self to itself” (27). The “good” in Wordsworth is intensely private, not communal. The most important element in the proclamation, “the dread awe / of might names was softened down and seemed / Approachable, admitting fellowship” (6.60-62) is the aspiration to establish affinities with “the mighty names.” The self becomes closer to itself by means of hope. However, it remains unable to face the “dread awe of mighty names” (60-61); the feeling that called for hope in the first place.

Undeniably, hoping is a first step toward the achievement of what is hoped for. Hobbes notes that “when in the mind of man, ... hopes ... arise ... [they continue] till the thing [which we hope to be able to do] be either done or thought impossible ...” (6. 27) and Paul W. Pruyser that “nothing is so inducive to hoping as one hope that was fulfilled” (91). Prominent among the fulfilled hopes of the past is “nature ... To me was all in all” (“Tintern Abbey” 75). Its counterpart in Book 6 is “...Nature then was sovereign in my mind,/ And mighty forms, seizing a youthful fancy,/ Had given a charter to irregular hopes” (333-35).

Wordsworth’s hopes are “irregular” because while “nature [is] sovereign” in his mind, he wants to win sovereignty for his mind over nature. Winning this sovereignty, is, I argue, the hope covertly contained in the first part of Book 6. The structure of limitation and the striving beyond limitation; the pain and relief punctuating the Alpine journey suggest the tenacity of that hope. Hobbes maintains that hope is an “appetite, with an opinion of attaining” (*Leviathan* chap. 6. 30). It is this “opinion of attaining,” the oscillation between possibility and actuality, that makes the pending “hopes for [his] future

life” (6.47) press upon Wordsworth as did the “dumb yearnings, hidden appetites ... ” (5. 506). This pressure is felt more acutely because Wordsworth decided that “Those were the days”

Which also first emboldened me to trust
With firmness, hitherto but lightly touched
By such a daring thought, that I might leave
Some monument behind me which pure hearts
Should reverence. (6. 52-57)

Soon, again, this firm trust is undermined in the declaration that “Such aspect now, / Though not familiarly, my mind put on” (6. 63-4). The declaration pinpoints the ostensible object of “trust” in the mental disposition and willingness to “leave / Some monument,” but interposes unfamiliarity as the unfavourable condition in which this project is to be fulfilled. The recast of the earlier wish “to be a lodger in the house of letters and no more” into a “daring thought” in turn unveils the precariousness of the thought. Placed between the two polemical ends of hope, where hope entails “belief in possibility,” and wish, where wish means “something not attainable by one’s own effort,” (*OED*) trust retains the unadulterated fact that is true of hope; being at enmity with itself. Perhaps it is because “trust” is placed in a context fraught with doubt that the thought is “daring” and is similar to a conceit; an unduly high opinion of poetic abilities and worth.

Now how does the preludial anxiety formed by the interplay of hoping and wishing relate to and serve the purpose of Book 6? I propose that this dialectic construes a particular relation to time and that time is placed as a witness to Wordsworth’s genial powers. Wishing and hoping bridge the past and the present, and remain open-ended. The incorporation of the three temporal dimensions in the acts of hoping and wishing is what gives time its testimonial role and what founds the priority of time over nature for the poet

committed to “be, else sinning greatly, / A dedicated spirit” (*Prelude* 4. 336-37). The pressure to prove his creative genius makes Wordsworth turn to time because time is constant even in its inconsistency. I shall show later that the meditation following the crossing of the Alps: “to my conscious soul I now can say- / ‘I recognize thy glory’” (6.598-99) can be interpreted as a tribute to the mind’s endurance, which, to the poet’s own puzzlement, has survived despite time and obliviousness.

By merging retrospective and prospective potentialities, wishing and hoping open up the narrative of remembrance to the yet untapped imaginative possibilities. The act of remembrance becomes an act of reconfiguration, thus offering a “site” for the collaboration of memory and imagination to validate the claim of imaginative power. I use the concept of “site” in the sense of

a place in which everything comes together, is concentrated. The site gathers unto itself, supremely and in the extreme. Its gathering power penetrates and pervades everything. The site, the gathering power, gathers in and preserves all it has gathered, not like an encapsulating shell, but rather by penetrating with its light all it has gathered and only thus releasing it into its own nature. (Heidegger “Language in the Poem” (159-60)

As he paves the way for the description of the Alpine expedition in Book 6 Wordsworth announces that the description will not be bogged in a morass of details:

’Tis not my present purpose to retrace
That variegated journey step by step.
A march it was of military speed,
And Earth did change her images and forms
Before us, fast as clouds are changed in Heaven. (489-93)

The form of economy “’Tis not my present purpose to retrace / That variegated journey step by step” suggests that Wordsworth is planning on a tale of reconfiguration rather than remembrance. His purpose is to discover the genuinely new in the experience that had

already been undergone. This is not a new purpose. Bridsall indicates that it is also present in *Descriptive Sketches*. He explains

The very fact that the poem does depart significantly from the facts of the journey – that it leaves out and reorders so much material – indicates that Wordsworth chose not to be confined to the natural landscape. He consciously selected and shaped his materials, and we see here no simple Wordsworth merely responding to mountains and lakes and waterfalls ... We thus see even in this early poem the familiar Wordsworthian interplay between subject and object, external and internal realities. These sketches, therefore, are descriptive rather than picturesque, and they aim to describe feelings and ideas, not places. (*Preface to Descriptive Sketches* x)

Initially in Book 6 Wordsworth does not know how to handle this project and the description of nature edges on the Picturesque if only to depart it from very quickly. Aware that the aesthetic effects they are eagerly seeking are lying ahead, the travellers intentionally pursue them as “keen hunters in a chase of fourteen weeks, / Eager as birds of prey, or as a ship / Upon the Stretch, when winds are blowing fair” (6. 497-99). Like most eighteenth-century picturesque theorists, reporters on local scenery, and especially Gilpin’s picturesque travelers, Wordsworth and his fellow traveller “search after” visual effects in a site they read or heard about. The site is the famous Convent of Chartreuse described in Thomas Gray’s letter to Mr. West in the following terms: “Not a precipice, not a torrent, not a cliff, but is pregnant with religion and poetry. There are certain scenes that would awe an atheist into belief, without the help of other argument” (14). The evidence that Wordsworth departs from the picturesque is that his feelings at the Chartreuse are different from what Gray and Gilpin respectively claimed might come out of the picturesque pause. Gilpin says that

we are most delighted when some grand scene, tho perhaps of incorrect composition, rising before the eye, strikes us beyond the power of thought ... In this pause of intellect; this deliquium of the soul, an enthusiastic sensation

of pleasure overspreads it, previous to any examination by the rules of art.”
(*Essays* II 50)

Gilpin’s “deliquium of the soul” is fraught with physicality and the “enthusiastic sensation of pleasure” it provides is different from the pleasure Wordsworth felt in his “awful *solitude*”(6.419) in the Chartreuse where what he seems to reverence is precisely the self feeling the pleasure rather than the pleasure of being in a particular station. The type of pleasure felt in the Chartreuse does not derive from the visible object *per se* or from the senses mediating that pleasure to the mind. It derives from thought. And thought not only enhances the pleasure, but also preserves it. There is a sense in which the thought of pleasure becomes the pleasure of thought.⁴⁵

Wordsworth’s awareness that he should not slip into the picturesque description derives from his fear that the despotic “bodily eye” – the mostly operative organ in the picturesque poetics – should impede the organic process of the imagination. This mishap was avoided as early as *Descriptive Sketches*. In the preface to The Cornell edition of *Descriptive Sketches*, Eric Birdsall notes that

[*Descriptive Sketches*] is *not* principally either biographical or descriptive ... the poem does not aim principally to record the trip or describe the places ... We see in episode after episode throughout the poem a cycle of rising hopes followed by disappointment. Even in the well-known apostrophe to France (II. 740-791), Wordsworth recognizes that the promise offered by the revolution is

⁴⁵ In arguing for the importance of thought in poetic composition Wordsworth declares that worthy poetry is produced by a man who “had also thought long and deeply.” Wordsworth’s attitude toward thought has an ambivalent relation to Kant’s because while it emphasises sense experience as the basis for thought and understanding, it departs from Kant in privileging feeling rather than understanding as an epistemological tool since thoughts are themselves “the representative of all our past feelings.” The gist of Kant’s epistemology as it is spelled out in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is that knowledge is premised on the human capacities of sense experience and understanding or concept formation. In a large section – the “Transcendental Dialectic” – Kant claims that reason cannot possibly lead to knowledge beyond the senses, *i.e.*, transcendental knowledge. Reason is therefore related to empirical truth, and has limits.

still in the future, and he concludes the poem with a supplication rather than a certainty (II.792-809). (x)

Likewise, in the 1790 letter there is a feeling that the picturesque is ill-suited to the spiritual and imaginative lift-off the traveller is seeking. The anticipatory pleasure that is part of the established picturesque codes is abated on two occasions. The first is when Wordsworth saw “the lower part of the lake (Lake Geneva)” which, he laments, “did not afford us a pleasure equal to what might have been expected from its celebrity.” The second is at the Rhine fall at Schaffhouse: “Magnificent as this fall certainly is I must confess I was disappointed in it. I had raised my ideas too high” (*Letters* 35). There is in both instances an element of the landscape which impairs vision and troubles the beholder’s pleasure. Lake Geneva, to mention but one example, is hidden from view by a “species of bright obscurity” (33).

Waning pleasure in the letter gradually makes room for disappointment, which is later made more conspicuous through its juxtaposition to “perfect enthusiasm”:

We are now . . . upon the point of quitting the most sublime and beautiful parts and you cannot imagine the melancholy regret which I feel at the Idea. I am a perfect Enthusiast in my admiration of Nature in all her various forms; and I have looked upon, and as it were conversed with the objects which this country has presented to my view so long, and with such encreasing pleasure, that the idea of parting from them oppresses me with a sadness similar to what I have always felt in quitting a beloved friend. (*Letters* 35)

Two elements stand out in the opening sentence; the first is that the sublime and the beautiful – two aesthetic categories with widely different determinations in Wordsworth’s time – are reduced to a mere description, and the second is the notion of conversation. The latter explains the former. Wordsworth’s sensibility of place in 1790 does not make room for pathetic fallacy and much less, of course, for a conversation with nature; a notion

which only entered his thought in 1798 when he wrote the two-book *Prelude*. He claims he “did converse ... With things that really are” (2. 393-94). The result is that “From Nature overflowing on my soul,/ I had received so much, that every thought / Was steeped in feeling” (2. 397-99). Before the successful handling of this “conversation,” which imbues thoughts with “feeling,” there is an “observation of the affinities / In objects where no brotherhood exits / To passive minds” (2. 384-86). Now because the mind – when engaged in a real conversation with nature is able to pinpoint the kind of influence nature exerts on it, we are right to question the notion of conversation and to posit that the sublime and the beautiful are used as mere epithets in the letter.

Although they are identified as two of the “various forms” in which nature strikes the mind, sensitive to them by virtue of being in “a healthy state,” the sublime and the beautiful are almost subsumed under the same aesthetic category.⁴⁶ Their effect is truncated and they seem to exert the same influence on the mind.⁴⁷ Kelly holds that Wordsworth “repeatedly describes sublimity and beauty as successive, then competing categories ... The sublime is “harnessed ... to a reiterated aesthetic contest with the

⁴⁶In the essay fragment “The Sublime and the Beautiful” started in 1811-1812 and revised in 1820-23, Wordsworth claims that “It is impossible that a mind can be in a healthy state that it is not frequently and strongly moved by both beauty and sublimity” (*PW*).

⁴⁷The distinction between the sublime and the beautiful begins with Longinus for whom the sublime and the beautiful are qualities in the object. Burke defines the beautiful and the sublime in totally different epistemological terms in *A Philosophical Enquiry into our Ideas of the Beautiful and the Sublime*. For him, the sublime and the beautiful are faculties of perception that can be categorized. The sublime is that which produces astonishment through power and infinity, and is masculine. The beautiful is that which inspires in us feelings of affection and tenderness, and is domestic and feminine. For Kant, both the beautiful and the sublime consist in “a free play of two different mental powers.” Beauty as a subjective experience is a feeling of harmony in the free play of imagination and understanding whereas sublimity manifests itself in terms of disharmony or struggle between imagination and reason. In this distinction Kant offers us a mental justification for Burke’s assertion that beauty causes us to relax whereas sublimity brings tension. See Emmanuel Kant *Critique of the Power of Judgment*; and Fiona Hughes, Dr. *Kant’s Critique of Aesthetic Judgement: a Reader’s Guide*. For Coleridge, the fundamental difference between the beautiful and the sublime is that the former is grasped by the eye because it is an immediate property of the object seen while the latter is mediated to the mind and is more of a value realizable within the relation of subject and object “the sense of sublimity arises, not from the sight of an outward object, but from the reflection upon it: not from the impression, but from the idea” (*Lectures* I. 544).

beautiful [and] this contest ... is the source of Wordsworth's aesthetic instruction" (3-7). Unlike its counterpart in Book 6, this passage from the letter does not present us with a scene of "aesthetic instruction" because the sublime and the beautiful are used as aesthetic aspects of nature rather than aesthetic judgments and, Fry explains, "the aesthetic aspects of nature scarcely matter to Wordsworth as a *poet*, that is, however much it may matter to him as a person, as an amateur landscape gardener, and an author of *Guide to the Lakes*" (45). Ostensibly observed by the eye, the sublime and the beautiful are presented in the letter as mere natural effects which provide an "encreasing pleasure"; pleasure in the making.

There is a sense in which "perfect enthusia[sm]"⁴⁸ is enthusiasm brought to perfection in order to fend off the compulsion of the eye and the failure of memory. "Perfect enthusia[sm]" pinpoints two objects of enthusiasm; "Nature in all her various forms" and enthusiasm itself. Whether we take the sentence to suggest that Wordsworth admires the "various forms" of nature with enthusiasm or is enthusiastic about his own admiration of nature, enthusiasm remains its own subject matter. Its relation to what Wordsworth sees in front of him is quite tenuous.

Although pleasure is structurally similar to "perfect enthusiasm" by virtue of being the ultimate end of its own pursuit, it merely "increases," and, as such, is not perfect. Wordsworth seems to anticipate the "pleasure pleased / Unworthily" (109-10) of Book 12 of *The Prelude* where he realizes that the picturesque practice – consisting in "giving way / To a comparison of scene with scene," and the application of "rules of mimic art" (111) to

⁴⁸Many critics have undermined the influence of the picturesque aesthetics on Wordsworth. W.J. B. Owen notes that "Wordsworth's debt to the Picturesque has probably been exaggerated ("Wordsworth's Aesthetics of Landscape" 70). Marin Price remarks that for Wordsworth "the picturesque moment has already passed" (34). Yet in 1790 Wordsworth's acute sensibility of place cannot be denied.

the landscape – are gratifying only to an “unripe state / Of intellect and heart” (6. 542-43). The picturesque pleasure is the “most dreadful enemy to our pleasures, our own pre-established codes of decision” (“Advertisement to *Lyrical Ballads*” 1798).⁴⁹ Miall is right to read the traveller’s sorrowful avowal: “when through the gorgeous Alps / Roaming, I carried with me the same heart” (1805 11 .240-41) as a belated condemnation of the tyranny of the eye.

Perfecting enthusiasm serves to mitigate the power of the tyrannical eye, which is “in every stage of life / The most despotic of our senses” (12. 128-29). The eye’s compulsiveness occasions a distressing feeling – “melancholy regret” – which needs immediate resolve as opposed to the “Poet’s tender melancholy / And fond conceit of sadness” (6. 366-67) which suggest intellectual acumen and the presence of creative genius. Book 6 presents melancholy not only as a “wise disease” elevating above the insensitive and uncreative, but, more importantly, as an ontogenic power: “melancholy, fits of spleen, that loved / A pensive sky, sad days, and piping winds,” (6. 173-74). Ranging from melancholy to “fits of spleen,” suffering is not a closeted and isolated incidence. It discloses a source of power that feels with nature. The pathetic fallacy in turn “sites” the sufferer in his own nature, gives him the possibility of being and of being-in-the-world. In his comments on the poet Trakl Heidegger draws attention to “the essential onefold simplicity of pain” (183). For purposes of concision we cannot establish a comparative study between the rhetoric of “spleen” in Wordsworth’s text and in Heidegger’s, but we

⁴⁹ Like the poor judgment of poetry Wordsworth calls “the prevalent fault of the day,” the picturesque is believed to be “a strong infection of the age” (*Prelude* 12. 113) and is rejected: “I shook off / Entirely and for ever” (*Prelude* 11. 254-55) the habit of “sitting thus in judgment” (*Prelude* 11. 165). For an elaborate discussion of Wordsworth’s use of verbal and visual perception and his interaction with the aesthetic tradition see Karl Kroeber *Romantic Landscape Vision: Constable and Wordsworth*, James A. W. Heffernan *The Recreation of Landscape: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Constable and Turner*.

might safely assume that outside melancholy, Wordsworth is *unheimlich*, a man who has not yet come into “the ownership of [his] own nature” (Heidegger “What are Poets For?” 96).

2 Imagination and the discursive labor of authentication

By the standards of 1790, the condition for the possibility of the mind’s conversation with nature is the capacity to remember what has already been seen. Therefore, something distinctive seems to obtain in interpreting the 1790 passage as Wordsworth’s dread of being “disowned by memory” (*Prelude* 1. 615). I have already suggested that the imbrication of a perilous lexis – “melancholy regret” – in a supposedly joyful context of “perfect enthusiasm” is a sort of forced joy, and that perfecting enthusiasm is no more than a prophylactic gesture. This is consistent with a later account in the same letter:

Ten thousand times in the course of this tour have I regretted the inability of my memory to retain a more strong impression of the beautiful forms before me, and again and again in quitting a fortunate station have I returned to it with the most eager avidity, with the hope of bearing away a more lively picture” (35)

The hyperbole “ten thousand times ... have I regretted” and the emphatic reiteration “again and again” suggest the degree of frustration caused by memory. To overcome this frustration, Wordsworth returns to the “station.” The word “station” belongs to the terminology of the picturesque. It allows for the interpretation of “return” in a literal rather than in a metaphorical sense. The physicality encapsulated in “before me” (in front of me) and the impossibility of an integral fusion between the object “before me” and memory in the punctual moment of perception suggest, however, that the hope to “bear away a more lively picture” actually depends on the eye.

This hope is problematic because the visual, as I argued above, becomes significant only when it meshes with its own history; when it emerges from memory. Hope for “a lively picture” is then abated by the necessary relaying of vision through the medium of memory, which fails to “retain” the image. Hope is vexed, and is more of a hope against hope, defined in the following terms: “to hope where there are no reasonable grounds for doing so: to hope very much” (*OED*). Quinney argues that

Wordsworth’s hopes are faint and delicate, arising out of anxiety and doubt, and so tinged by them. [Wordsworth’s] hopes seem so airy because they represent a merely intellectual or psychological shift. The material situation that necessitated them, the world they attempt to reengage, remains the same . . . Wordsworth fairly acknowledges that these hopes are compromised. He regards them as necessary, crucially necessary, but only for practical purposes. (47)

Interestingly, the definition of hope against hope is perilously close to one listed for wish: “most commonly denoting a desire for something not attainable by one’s own effort, felt in the mind but not impelling to action; a passive or inactive desire. The ordinary word for this affection of the mind; less emphatic than craving, longing, or yearning, but including these as particular cases” (*OED*). For our purpose, the item of interest is that hope in the context of the letter could be considered a camouflaged wish, although hope remains different from wish by virtue of having realization and satisfaction conditions where wish has only compliance conditions.

By camouflaging wish into hope – thus raising it to the level of fulfillment – Wordsworth foregrounds the possibility of seeing “a more lively picture.” However, the intensity of hope, its “eager avidity,” spoils the possibility of fulfilling it. The fervidness and urgency of hope is the major impediment toward its fulfillment. In *Heraclitus Seminar* Heidegger explains that “hope means ‘to concern oneself with something very intensely,’

while there is an adjoining with what is to come in awaiting. Hope at the same time includes an aggressive moment; awaiting, on the contrary, includes the moment of restraint” (152). This type of hope corresponds to the hope articulated in the letter. It is adjoined to “awaiting,” but not to the kind of “awaiting” Heidegger refers to. Rather it is the type of anxious awaiting which only adds up to the already “aggressive moment” of hope. Melancholy awaiting in the letter is a negative interdict imposed upon hope. It marks its conscription into wish where wish strictly means “something not attainable by one’s own effort.”

The point of the foregoing theoretical elaboration of the relation of hope and wish in the letter is to show that it bears on the problematic relation of the eye and memory, which weighs down on Wordsworth in 1790, but from which, I argue, he unburdens himself in the Crossing-of-the-Alps episode in *The Prelude*. To illustrate this proposal, I wish first to sketch the three important projects with which a failing memory interferes. If what initially sets up the function of memory is the inability of the mind to come by itself into immediate contact with nature, the failure of memory derails the epistemological project by removing the mind even further from the object. It will be recalled that though the natural object is an immediate object of vision, it is presented to the mind not as it is in itself but as an image. If the mind is forced into a kind of epistemic insularity by a disfunctional memory, it cannot develop a meaningful understanding of nature or of itself in relation to nature.

The failure of memory also derails the ethical project of preserving truth as “our visible friend and hourly companion” (*PLB* 1800 456). Truth is distilled from a situation of thought in which the mind is differently, not newly, punctilious about past images. Truth is

then determined by the presence and quality of past images, yet is not authenticated in the difference between these past images and the present ones – since the past images are not simply overlaid on present ones – but in the very annulment of their difference. Given the importance of past images in the architectonics of thought, the failure of memory to yield them up might result in the mind experiencing a blank. And by breaking the continuum, the blank harms the original and unsullied truth.

The third project a failing memory might jeopardize is ontological. Since the purpose of memory is to summon back the “days / Disowned by memory,” in view of reconstructing the history of the self, the failure of memory invalidates the project of “writing the self” (Andrew Bennett). In *Imagination and Time* Mary Warnock claims that “the individual’s persistence through time, the indisputable fact that he is the same as he was when he first received the impressions he recalls, is the essential element of truth he discovers, though that truth is not limited in its scope to him alone” (34-35). What is significant about Warnock’s claim is not the prosaic fact that memory is important to make sense of the continuity of the self, or the corollary that identity is based on temporal difference rather than on a sense of closure, but that truth is always captured in an act of reconfiguration which needs memory to come to completion.

The anxiety about the eye and memory recorded in the letter creates the burden of how to trust memory, which remains essential in the continuum of vision, and how to trust the eye which encroaches on the function of memory and holds on to nature. In Book 6, the experience of the past has to be brought back to the fore in order to be authenticated. Authentication is problematic because recovering the experience of the past can only

happen with the support of memory. And memory, as we have established from the exegesis of its role in the letter, is impaired.

The necessary employment of an impaired memory creates a situation of impasse. This impasse precipitates a moment Falfak calls “trial.” In his examination of the purpose of the three revisions of *The Prelude*, Faflak posits that “the prolonged encounter with memory only exacerbates a repetitiveness that returns [Wordsworth] to the unconscious of his imagination” (106). The argument has many degrees of determinacy with reference to Wordsworth’s own avowal in Book 2 that “Imagination slept / And yet not utterly” (260-61). Bennett’s view of revision as “as a palimpsest of writing and memory” (161) is similar to Faflak’s in the strict sense that it deeply implicates memory. The “repetitiveness” that the “prolonged encounter with memory exacerbates” recalls to the self the obligation to own up to what we might call the “word” or the “promise” that the self made to itself at the beginning of the epic to write after – in the style of – Milton. The promise leads to the unconscious renewal of a moment of origin when Wordsworth first discovered that he has “the vital soul” and the ambition “needful to build up a Poet’s praise” (1. 150,157). The “trial” will have to determine if the promise was kept.

As Wordsworth glides his readers through Book 6, he pushes the failing memory into the background and foregrounds interest in thought. Thought revels in geometric science: “an independent world, / Created out of pure intelligence” (6. 166-7). Yet the fascination with “geometric rules” and “formal arts” is short-lived because they represent “a false secondary power / By which we multiply distinctions” (2. 216-17). Geometry and all the natural sciences, as Nicholas Halmi says of Schelling’s interpretation of them “teach us how to *read* nature, [while] only philosophy teaches us how to *interpret* what we have

read” (22). Wordsworth does not pinpoint philosophy as a mode of interpretation. Instead he refers to “melancholy, fits of spleen” (173); a mood congenial to philosophic thought and meditation. Melancholy does not impede thought. And since it has no immediate cause and no immediate need to be resolved, it countenances the possibility of the increment of the thought with which it is associated. It is “something of a stern mood, an under-thirst / Of vigour seldom utterly allayed” (6. 558-59). Melancholy removes thought from any reality outside itself until it becomes self-contained and self-absorbed.

It is because of this self-containment that Mont Blanc was perceived as “a soulless image on the eye / That had usurped upon a living thought / That never more could be” (6. 526-27). The “soulless image” is the result of the collision of two polemical powers; the eye which still strives to remain committed to what it sees, and the underlying concomitant thought which reveals itself to consciousness by showing the dried-out hollowness – “soulless[ness]” – of the image provided by the sense. The image of Mont Blanc cannot integrate thought immediately because the image is too fugitive for thought to arrest and “rest” on. After this disappointment Chamouny” provided “rich amends, / And reconciled us to realities” (6. 532-33). Considering that the realities are those of the visible world, we might safely assume that a shift has occurred here from mind to nature. Wordsworth has been cut off from “living thought.” The “rich amends” are quickly dismissed as “fitted to our unripe state / Of intellect and heart” (6. 542-43). The later statement: “with such a book, / Before our eyes, we could not choose but read” (6. 543-44) suggests that the grip on reality is strong again and that we have circled back to a plane where the eye is “master of the heart.” Yet as in “Tintern Abbey” something seems to have “pass[ed] ... into [Wordsworth’s] purer mind”(29) and has now revealed itself to consciousness:

Imagination-here the Power so called
Through sad incompetence of human speech,
That awful Power rose from the mind's abyss
Like an unfathered vapour that enwraps,
At once, some lonely traveller. I was lost;
Halted without an effort to break through;
But to my conscious soul I now can say-
'I recognize thy glory' (6. 592-99)

Imagination is a phenomenon that neither manifests itself at the end point of the motor activity of vision nor could be said to be an act of reflection. "Reflection in the sense of a tuning back," Heidegger explains, "is only a mode of self-apprehension, but not the mode of primary self-disclosure" (Heidegger *Basic* 159). And self-disclosure is definitely what happens in these lines. What discloses itself is a power that used to dwell in and now "rose from the mind's abyss" (594). The 1805 apostrophe makes the emergence of the imagination even more significant through the gerund "lifting up itself / Before the eye and progress of my song" (1805 *Prelude* 525-26). Used in the sense of "ahead," the adverb "before" in the 1805 version suggests the self-sufficiency of the imagination and presents it a "power, / In all the might of its endowments" (1805 *Prelude* 6.527-28). However, the spatial connotation of before – "in front of" – complicates the former interpretation for it suggests that the vapour, meaning the "visible diffused substance floating in the atmosphere and impairing its transparency" (Webster dictionary), is a setback to vision. If the eye's activity is blocked off by the sudden apparition of the rising vapour how can it possibly identify what it sees? How can the vapour rising from the mind's abyss puncture and break upon sight if it is not seen?

Perhaps it is the inconsistency introduced by the spatial connotation of "before" that urged Wordsworth to delete it from the revised edition of 1850. To avoid the

inconsistency resulting from the identification of the Imagination – a phenomenon supposedly unseen before – Wordsworth uses preterition: “Imagination – here the Power so called / Through the sad incompetence of human speech” (592-93). The metaphor of “power” bestows on the imagination the qualities of indomitableness, self-sufficiency and newness and at the same time guarantees that the identity of the abyss remains undisclosed. Beyond identifying it as the “mind’s abyss,” Wordsworth never properly names it. Elsewhere he describes it as “depth,” “recess of thy nature,” or “caverns.”

I do not intend to reiterate a number of iconic critical tenets concerning why imagination comes from an abyss. This enquiry has been exhausted by the many critics I have mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, who are affiliated to phenomenological hermeneutics. My aim is to study such a phenomenon with respect to the thesis of this chapter, which is that imagination is a power that is hermeneutically present since the beginning of the episode, and that although now recognized in its full endowments, still sustains its relation to the outside world and to the eye, which mediates that world to the mind.

The breakthrough of the imagination has three effects. Firstly, it makes up for the deficiency of memory. “What Memory has held loosely and unrealized,” Onorato writes, “Imagination has touched on, and now forces as an experience upon the consciousness, one might say, in a new light” (143). Secondly, the breakthrough of the imagination confirms that the anxious “hope” to prove the sovereignty of the mind over nature has now been utterly fulfilled so much so that the mind itself is contained by the imagination. Wlecke notes that

not only does the imagination rise from the by now familiar subjective abyss; but the mind itself, confronted suddenly by its immanent power, is enclosed (imagination ‘enwraps’ the traveler) by the intensity of its reflexive awareness.

Consciousness is both the container that in its depths contains imagination and, now that imagination has leapt forth from these depths, the contained. (27-28)

Thirdly, and most importantly, the sudden manifestation of the imagination in the moment of writing suggests the triumph of the mind over the “bodily eye,” which is the scaffolding upon which picturesque vision is built. Miall claims that “with this one, striking adjective [“unfathered”] Wordsworth writing in 1804 distances himself from the picturesque inheritance that shaped his response to the Alps in 1790, and out of his “deep and genuine sadness” (VI.492) retrieves confirmation of the sovereignty of the mind”(90). The sublime emanation of the imagination, which neutralizes the tyrannical energy of the eye, is built on Kant’s assertion that in the state of the sublime, the individual grasps the power that is impossible to apprehend in the world of the senses.⁵⁰ In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* the senses are sealed off from the interest of judgment because “nothing that can be an object of the senses is, considered on this footing, to be called sublime” (25. 134).⁵¹ This sublime emanation is precisely linked to the dynamic version of the Kantian sublime, where the concern is not with infinity as in the mathematical sublime, but with power. The Wordsworthian sublime triumphs over the “bodily eye” which has been threatening to overshadow thought, wreck its associations, and cause its chaotic collision with the

⁵⁰ It is important to note that Wordsworth does not internalize Kant’s whole theory of the sublime. He departs from him in claiming the superiority of the imagination, not reason. For Kant the sublime in both its mathematical and dynamical versions attests to the superiority of the human power of reason over nature. In the mathematical sublime, reason’s superiority over nature takes the form, more specifically, of a feeling of reason’s superiority to imagination, conceived of as the natural capacity required for sensory apprehension, including the apprehension of the magnitudes of empirically given things. Mathematical “aesthetical comprehension” is not a consciousness of a mere greater unit, but the notion of absolute greatness not inhibited with ideas of limitations (*The Critique of the Power of Judgment* 261).

⁵¹ Halmi notes that “the Kantian sublime, shines inward, planting eyes within the human mind so that we may see and tell of things invisible to mortal sight” (*The Genealogy* 48).

imaginative impulse because, like the Kantian sublime, it “shines inward.” Wordsworth asserts the power of the imagination or the soul in claiming that it

Seeks for no trophies, struggles for no spoils
That may attest its prowess, blessed in thoughts
That are their own perfection and reward,
Strong in itself, and in beatitude (6. 610-13)

The self’s unconsciousness about “any worldly condition” suggests that in sustaining a strong relation to itself despite the “injurious sway” of time,” the soul has succeeded in thwarting the majestic, concrete, and overwhelming presence of nature.⁵² Hartman suggests that the soul’s realization of its own power (what he calls “self-consciousness”) involves an “objective attitude toward the self” (*Easy Pieces* 19). The “objective attitude” should not be interpreted as an equivalent of Kant’s turn to reason in his apprehension of the sublime because that would compromise the priority of imagination and feeling over reason in Wordsworth’s thinking. Kant ascribes to the imagination the very power to recombine sense data into new forms only to validate the supremacy of reason. Jarvis explains that the Kantian sublime is “associated with the attempt and failure of imagination to provide an intuition adequate to *reason*” (77). Like Kant, Wordsworth explains the sublime with reference to the human mind, yet remains outside the reductionist form of the

⁵² In this sublime moment Wordsworth reverses the self, not God or religion as Coleridge, for instance, does in a similar sublime imaginative experience in *Sca Fell* recorded in “Chamouny; the Hour before Sun-Rise. A Hymn.” Coleridge describes the experience of sublimity undergone in *Sca Fell* to Sara Hatchinson in the following words: “I lay in a state of almost prophetic Trance & Delight – & blessed God aloud, for the powers of Reason & Will, which remaining no Danger can overpower us! ... I know not how to proceed, how to return / but I am calm & fearless & confident” (*CL* 2. 842). His use of “Reason & Will” establishes clear affinities with the cognitive and moral significance of the Kantian sublime which “makes intuitively evident the superiority of the rational determination of our cognitive faculties to the greatest faculty of our sensibility” (*Critique of the Power of Judgment* 119) although it also establishes distance from the Kantian sublime when it gives a religious dimension to the sublime.

Enlightenment rationalist inquiry. He thinks pragmatically within a dynamic network of perception, emotion (the phenomenology of a mental state), and thoughts settled upon only after much thought and much weighing up of one thought against another, yet stops short of fully engaging the rationalist enquiry. He assigns to the sublime an importance in rational terms, but makes it resist full rational control.

The other interpretation that should be resisted in our reading of Hartman's "objective attitude toward the self" is the division of the self into an object and a subject because that would suggest the split of identity into a self that feels and a self that reasons. What Hartman means by "objective attitude" is that when the self is conscious of itself, it clears itself of any delusions about its being-in-the-world. What is reasserted in this "objective attitude" is the self's relation to the world not because any relation is in abstract terms "a coming down to earth, the recognition of an answering feeling" (Scofield, 353), but because outside this relation to the visible, the consciousness of self as being in the world is seriously undermined. Without this objectivity, which sustains the self's relation to the world, the relation of the self to the self ceases to obtain. Precisely because Wordsworth's moment of imaginative insight is a moment of "objective," lucid and perfectly poised self-consciousness, and not a moment of pathological solipsism, it could be argued that the imagination re-consolidates its relation to the world and to the eye, which mediates the world to the mind.

Scofield maintains that "the result [of "the light of sense goes out in flashes that have shown to us / The invisible world"] is the visionary insight into the actual scene of the Simplon Pass itself. The imagination comes down to earth, and the world is seen with visionary clarity" (355-56). Basing his argument on the idea that "relation" in Wordsworth

requires an answer and that “desire” needs to anchor itself in a thing, Scofield explains that “Desire, foiled of the infinite (as it must be) turns to the tangible and actual which it sees with new penetration. This turning to the tangible – or being surprised by it – one might express as the establishing of a relationship” (356). Scofield’s insight is interesting where it suggests that the imagination’s relationship to the world involves its “coming down to earth.” Yet where he claims that this “coming down to earth” is contingent on desire having an object, he seems to me to focus too much on the “thing” at the expense of the observing consciousness. This insistence on the thing as the object of desire fosters a unilateral attitude toward the self in ways that suggest that the self is impervious to the possibility of “something ever more about to be.” And since in Wordsworth’s text imagination is contingent on desire, the implication of Scofield’s claim could be the materialization of the imagination, which, in Wordsworth, suggests death.

I argue that in not severing its bond to the world and to the “bodily eye” (which in Scofield’s parlance is “coming down to earth”), the imagination becomes an endless present through “hope”:

Our destiny, our being’s heart and home,
Is with infinitude, and only there;
With hope it is, hope that can never die,
Effort, and expectation, and desire,
And something evermore about to be. (6.604-8)

Hope in this passage triumphs over time by presenting itself as “something ever more about to be.” It belongs to what Frank Kermode calls *Kairos*. As opposed to *Chrenos*, *Kairos* is a moment in history with timeless significance: “the notion of fulfilment is essential; the *Kairos* transforms the past, validates Old Testament types and prophecies, establishes concord with origins as well as ends” (48). As a mode of temporality that carries the self forward as

possibility, hope reassures the self that it has successfully construed its own time, and also consolidates the poet's ontological inquiry.⁵³ According to Schiller the poet "realizes form when he creates time, and opposes constancy with alteration, the eternal unity of his ego with diversity of the world; he gives form to matter when he proceeds to annul time, affirms persistence within change and subjects the diversity of the world to the unity of his ego" (63). In this context "I recognize thy glory" marks the moment of perfect self-consciousness when the self recognizes its triumphs over all the temporal impediments.

"I recognize thy glory" relieves the sense from of the sense of loss that has befallen it after it found itself "perforce engaged in naming" (Kroeber and Ruoff 55). Swingle claims that "the problem, if that dominion [of language] be inescapable, is to find means of breaking free from tyrannical despotism and of turning this potency of language into an advantage" (55). Wordsworth has succeeded in this task by accepting the non linguistic predicament as a force that adds value to the imagination. Luther claims that "characteristically Wordsworth insists on explaining the moral importance of vision in argumentative terms. At the same time, he recognizes "the sad incompetence of the human speech" (I 593) and wishes to convey the essential incommunicability of the experience" (253). Wordsworth answered the tyranny of language by simply accommodating it. The added value of this accommodation is that it appropriates expressive powers to the imagination. Outside the framework of language, imagination is a self-sufficient entity, a "power" that is too potent to hide beneath the latticework of words, a "power" that does not approach the mind as a proximate representation. Imagination benefits from "the sad incompetence of language" by making

⁵³ According to Schiller, the poet is a man who achieves the "highest expansion of 'being' where "all barriers disappear." Through this process, "we are no more in time, but time" (12th Letter 67).

itself its own justification irrespective of its relation to language or any outside relation. “I recognize thy glory” signals that something inside memory has indeed survived and now manifests itself. The exacerbated power, imagination “so called/ Through sad incompetence of human speech” opens up its prospects to the “hope that can never die” (6. 606) even if at times it shrinks and wanes.

Chapter Three

The Ear Between Harmony and Discord

“Romantic ideology was constructed not in opposition to the enlightenment
rationalism of the eighteenth century, but as a reaction to the visual culture of modernity
being born”
Gillen D’Arcy Wood *The Shock of the Real: Romanticism and Visual Culture*

In the first and second chapters, I focused on the dialectic of vision and imagination. In this chapter, I am interested in the ear and in sonic and acoustical events. Walter Pater suggests that in Wordsworth the phenomenology of hearing is more significant than the phenomenology of seeing “clear and delicate at once, as [Wordsworth] is in the outlining of visible imagery, he is more finely scrupulous still in the noting of sounds” (35). In examining the inherent characteristics of the ear, my aim is not to value it over the eye but to establish contexts for understanding its idiosyncrasies as well as its impairments.

Important thematic convergences between the literary and scientific studies on the ear in the Romantic era urge me to mention the eighteenth-century developments that influenced Wordsworth’s comprehensive poetics of hearing. In the first part of the chapter I will try to give a possible shape to the idea that the ear is a means of transcending the ontic and establishing the visionary. I will study the two poems in which Wordsworth engages the enticement of sound, voice and music – *On the Power of Sound* and *The Power of Music*. The argument in *On the Power of Sound* is that the ear is an “organ of vision” because it opens avenues of communication between idealism and realism, between the eternal and the temporal. In my analysis of this metaphor I will channel my argument in three directions. The first is that the ear substitutes for the eye, which remains largely tyrannical, and the second is that it is beholden to the divine for it is inhabited by a “spirit Aerial.” It is both a space for the thriving of self-consciousness and morality, and a receptacle for divine illumination. The third direction is that the human voice is itself

beholden to the divine logos by virtue of being harmonious and perfect. In the second part of the chapter I shall study the impairments of the ear, especially its capacity to induce hallucinations.

1 The ear as an “organ of vision”

It almost amounts to a truism today that Wordsworth’s later aesthetics is characterized by a notable privileging of the ear over the eye. Gillen D’Arcy Wood claims that Wordsworth’s priority of the ear over the eye is informed by the Romantic aesthetic aversion to the visual. In *The Shock of the Real: Romanticism and Visual Culture, 1760-1860* he claims that Coleridge, Wordsworth, Hazlitt, and Keats displayed some reserve toward the visual technologies of their era: “Romantic ideology was constructed not in opposition to the enlightenment rationalism of the eighteenth century, but as a reaction to the visual culture of modernity being born” (7). “Visual culture” represented an offence to Romantic idealism, which, if it existed at all in Wordsworth’s poetics, has been sustained by the ear.

Over and again in this thesis I have referred to the ear as redemptive without really drawing on the reasons that Wordsworth himself provides to support this claim. I will examine these reasons before showing how Wordsworth uses the ear to counteract the eye’s tyrannical potential. The first reason is that hearing provides more pleasure than vision. It establishes a relation to childhood, the segment in Wordsworth’s life where he experienced perfect pleasurable communion with nature and which he is always afraid to lose. As Wordsworth is approaching the shore of the river Leven in Book 10 of *The Prelude* he receives the news of Robespierre’s downfall. The news immediately triggers off childhood aural memories:

Thus interrupted by uneasy bursts
Of exultation, I pursued my way

Along that very shore which I had skimmed
In former days, when—spurring from the Vale
Of Nightshade, and St. Mary’s mouldering fane,
And the stone abbot, after circuit made
In wantonness of heart, a joyous band
Of schoolboys hastening to their distant home
Along the margin of the moonlight sea—
We beat with thundering hoofs the level sand. (594-603)

The last line of the passage is the exact same one exiting in Book 2 of *The Prelude* (line 137). The transposition of an aural childhood memory suggesting freedom and relief into the present time of despondency and existential crisis speaks to the power of hearing to bring about immediate consolation. Hearing is indeed mapped unto many episodes of childhood, suggesting that its reach in childhood affairs is more important than that of seeing. The experiences of transgressive sports in the first book of *The Prelude*, which are densely packed with manifestations of the aural sense, have strengthened Wordsworth’s hearing to such an extent that he became an expert in “ca[tching] ... the tone” of what unfolds in front of him:

That then and there my mind had exercised
Upon the vulgar forms of present things,
The actual world of our familiar days,
Yet higher power; had caught from them a tone,
An image, and a character, by books
Not hitherto reflected. (*Prelude* 13. 355-60)

The “higher power” of listening consists in capturing and detecting effortlessly a single tone in a scene. This sensitivity to particular sounds and tones is elaborated in the Preface (1800) where Wordsworth engages in a long and quite controversial discussion about his and his predecessors’ manipulation of meter, selection of diction and particularities of syntax. His sustained focus on poetic meter is the result of his refusal to be limited by the eighteenth-century laws of writing, especially the artificiality of patterned rhythm and the dependence of

meter on syntax. Bennan O' Donnell captures this issue adequately "the problem ... is that meter can, and frequently does, draw the poet's and reader's attention away from the chief focus of the poem – the modifying effects of passion on perception – and toward the poet in his capacity as merely a manufacturer of verse" (40). To the question "Why, ... have I written in verse?" Wordsworth answers that although "a very small part of the pleasure given by Poetry depends upon the meter", "words metrically arranged will long continue to impart such a pleasure to mankind as he who proves the extent of that pleasure will be desirous to impart" (458-59). The aural pleasure provided by a well-arranged meter; that is, the painstaking arrangement of sound effects, rhythm and cadence, redeems the sense of poetic gravity and moral integrity largely compromised by vision. Wordsworth notes that the motive of aural engagement is to temper the excessive excitement induced by visual stimulation and to promote moral reformation:

Now the co-presence of something regular, something to which the mind has been accustomed in various moods and in a less excited state, cannot but have great efficacy in tempering and restraining the passion by an intertexture of ordinary feeling, and of feeling not strictly and necessarily connected with the passion. (Preface 1800, 459)

The redemptive effect of hearing – reducing the excitement to a reasonable standard – is what makes hearing at once moral and ethical. Discussing the ethical import of sound and the experience of hearing as a whole, David Haney rightly declares that

Sound is hermeneutically very "mediate" for Wordsworth, lacking the representational tools of sight with which we make the world accessible, and thus expressible only through labyrinthine circumlocutions ... However, ethical experience involves entering that hermeneutically mediate labyrinth, taking the risk of immediate exposure, through "rents and openings in the ideal world"... (193)

Haney sketches a familiar topic in Wordsworth's poetics. By virtue of being mediate, sound compels the poet to undergo an experience through which he can assess his level of moral integrity. Entering the "hermeneutically mediate labyrinthine" is reminiscent of the image of sound entering the labyrinthine cave of the ear; an image that Wordsworth borrows from the anatomical studies of the ear in the late eighteenth century. The anatomy of the ear and the phenomenology of auditory perception have been scrupulously investigated by Enlightenment scientists. They were mainly concerned, as Gouk and Sykes declare, with such issues as "the bizarre nature of acoustical echo in an open environment, the strangeness of perceiving the harmonic series, and the shocking effect of music on the nerves" (514). The trope of the ear as a long labyrinthine cave, Gouk and Sykes explain, has been adapted from the scientific discourses of Benjamin Martin, a British natural philosopher and Claude Nicholas le Cat, a French surgeon, who presented the inner ear with its labyrinth and cochlea – the mechanical part in the form of an ocean shell – as a cave reached through a physical passage and opening up into a Newtonian absolute and limitless space.

The trope of the ear as a cave, John Hollander reminds us is "a Romantic fulfillment of Neoclassical traditions in which sound, music herself, or echo inhabits a cave or a so-called 'shell' (by tradition the 'corded shell,' testudo, a synecdoche for 'lyre' or even 'lute')" (*Vision* 23). Although Wordsworth was not the only poet to use this trope, he provides a novel insight into experiencing the inner ear as a pathway or a channel reaching into a deep and especially gothic cavernous space in which the divine Word is ultimately poured. In his encomium to the ear in *On The Power of Sound* – a keystone in his later poetry composed between 1828 and late 1829 and published in 1835 – he writes:

Thy functions are ethereal,
As if within thee dwelt a glancing Mind,
Organ of vision! And a Spirit aerial
Informs the cell of hearing, dark and blind;
Intricate labyrinth, more dread for thought
To enter than oracular cave;
Strict passage, through which sighs are brought,
And whispers for the heart, their slave;
And shrieks, that revel in abuse
Of shivering flesh; and warbled air,
Whose piercing sweetness can unloose
The chains of frenzy, or entice a smile
Into the ambush of despair;
Hosannas pealing down the long-drawn aisle,
And requiems answered by the pulse that beats
Devoutly in life's last retreats! (1-16)

By placing a Spirit that is nothing less than “aerial” rather than an animal spirit inside the ear, Wordsworth departs from the scholarship on the ear in the eighteenth century. French scientists such as Montpellier surgeon Raymond Vieussens connected the sensation of hearing with *l'esprit animal*. In 1715, Vieussens published his significant work *Traite nouveaux de la structure de la Coeur* in which he argued that the ear resembles the heart insofar as it is a solid mechanism actuated by the “esprit animal” and whose mechanical parts are “shocked” into action. Wordsworth’s standpoint on this issue is neither materialist nor vitalist. Hearing is for him pivotal to the understanding on account of being inhabited by a “Spirit aerial.” The question of whether the “indwelling power was itself material (perhaps a superfine ‘fluid’ related to electricity and magnetism) or altogether unworldly” that Richardson thought “could be left open” (*British Romanticism* 69) was definitely answered.⁵⁴ The “Spirit aerial” causes

⁵⁴ Richardson thinks that “the materialist and vitalist tendency in Romantic-era Britain were reflected in Wordsworth’s work through the latter’s belief in a “‘motion and a spirit’ coursing through the body (and its mind) and, it might be, through every other particle of the universe as well. Whether that indwelling power was itself material (perhaps a superfine ‘fluid’ related to electricity and magnetism) or altogether unworldly was a question that could be left open” (*British Romanticism* 69).

the ear to be active in the internal sphere; to be at once a thoroughfare to the “inner world” and a receptacle of divine illumination. Because the “Spirit aerial” actuates the ear, hearing becomes a delegated secondary cause by means of which God operates in the world.

The idea of aural illumination is itself a reformulation of a classical theory in circulation since the medieval times. Christian medieval philosopher Augustine gave it a very prominent role in his theory of knowledge especially where he speaks of the internalization of God’s word. In his later writings, according to Blumenberg, “‘hearing’ the word about Divine predestination displaces vision’s aspiration to seek insight into the reasons of the divine will” (47).⁵⁵ Wordsworth’s adherence to Augustine’s idea is conspicuous in his description of the ear instead of the eye as an “Organ of Vision”, an organ endowed with a capacity for perception, intuition and intellectual cognition. The metaphor does not suggest that the ear and eye are very close in purpose or are identical, but that the ear is an organ that is contingent on illumination to channel its own activity. It is in this very particular sense of a receptacle that can be illuminated that the ear is understood as an intuitive and intellectual organ as well as a means of visionariness.

Two major claims lie unambiguously exposed in *On the Power of Sound*. The first is that the ear is beholden to the divine. The second is that sound, rather than light, is crucial to natural harmony and stands in a privileged relation to the divine logos. Dale contends that for Wordsworth “sound has stepped in to assume the place to which the eye, utterly circumscribed by the limitations of scope, light and perspective, cannot extend itself” (3). Dale is right to

⁵⁵ The privileging of the ear over the eye is also a very explicit Hebraic idea to which even Heidegger participated. “In one sense Heidegger’s thought” Jay notes “... can be construed as receiving the Hebraic emphasis on hearing God’s word rather than seeing His manifestations” (269). Hans Jonas explains that “at last [with Heidegger] the suppressed of “hearing” gets a hearing after the long ascendancy of “seeing” and the spell of objectification which it casts upon thought” ().

quote John Hollander in this context. The latter explains: “sound pierces darkness, whereas light seems to have no effect upon silence. It is sounds, rather than illuminations, which seem to awaken us from sleep, and which can invade our dreams” (78). The second claim is an elaboration of former ones made in *The Prelude*, the first occurring in Book1:

Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows
Like harmony in music; there is a dark
Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles
Discordant elements, and 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! (340-50)

In mentioning the antithesis of “harmony” and discord Wordsworth unearths the nature of “the dark ... workmanship” that reconciles them. This workmanship helps the mind to overcome discord and mutability.

In *On the Power of Sound* the ear is explicitly visionary and beholden to the divine. The “roar,” the “bleat,” the “toll,” the “shout”, the sound of the wind, as well as the “tower bells”, the “ditty” of the “milk-Maids” etc ... form a harmonious whole. In his study of Wordsworth’s prosody in *On the Power of Sound* Chandler suggests that

all the diverse sounds semantically indicated are articulated in words that can themselves be sounded. These sounds, the sounds of the words themselves, are patently organized to constitute the poem’s formal auditory system ... The “scheme or system of sound” is in turn both expressive of and governed by a larger, indeed a cosmic regime of sound. (1)

What is important about Chandler’s comment is not that the association and resonances of sounds cause a particular sound effect, but that the poem’s own “formal auditory system”

is harnessed to a larger category; the “cosmic regime of sounds.” By virtue of being natural this “cosmic regime” is harmonious rather than orderly. Harmony, as opposed to order, carries the right note of inherent natural orderliness, and depends on the nature of things rather than on man-making artifice. Underlying this idea of harmony there is a theory, which, if considered, uncovers many underwritten yet important claims in the poem. In assuming that natural and human sounds are harmoniously clustered Wordsworth takes his cue from Pythagoras who suggests that all motion is a kind of music and all audible sound is latent music. Most notably Wordsworth is influenced by Pythagoras’s famous theory of the “harmony of the spheres” according to which the heavenly bodies make harmonious music as they move, each contributing its share to the hymn of the heavenly music.

This theory undergoes, however, a notable change at Wordsworth’s hands. He converts it without excessive strain into terms more familiar with his own purpose in the ode, which focuses on the human need for divine illumination through the recognition of the divine will in the physical world. The music which was formerly the work of the sirens is now the work of nature.

Break forth into thanksgiving,
Ye banded instruments of wind and chords
Unite, to magnify the Ever-living,
Your inarticulate notes with the voice of words!
Nor hushed be service from the lowing mead,
Nor mute the forest hum of noon;
Thou too be heard, lone eagle! freed
From snowy peak and cloud, attune
Thy hungry barkings to the hymn
Of joy, that from her utmost walls
The six-days' Work, by flaming Seraphim
Transmits to Heaven! As Deep to Deep
Shouting through one valley calls,
All worlds, all natures, mood and measure keep
For praise and ceaseless gratulation, poured
Into the ear of God, their Lord! (193-208)

More exceptionally sensitive to the music of natural origin, Wordsworth replaces the Pythagorean angelic music by the harmonious sounds of the natural world. He bereaves it of much of its metaphysical interest only to value it as a mediator between the heavenly and the human through the natural. Neither the natural nor the human sounds are perfect in themselves, yet their harmony makes up for their imperfection and places for them above Art:

“Happy Milk-maids, one by one
Scattering a ditty each to her desire,
A liquid concert matchless by nice Art,
A stream as if from one full heart (46-9)

By placing the auditory harmony formed by the Milk-maids’ ditty above refined and cultivated art, Wordsworth ascribes to it the quality of perfection. Leibniz draws on the idea of perfection that derives from harmony. In a letter in which he replies to an inquiry by Christian Wolff (1679–1754) about the concept of perfection, Leibniz gives the following analysis: “*Perfection* is the harmony of things, or the state where everything is worthy of being observed, that is, the state of agreement [*consensus*] or identity in variety; you can even say that it is the degree of contemplability [*considerabilitas*]” (18 May 1715, 233–4). By ascribing perfection to the Milk-maids’ ditty, Wordsworth subtly suggests that it has its counterpart laid up in divine nature, manifesting the perfection of the divine will. He does not, of course, suggest that divine perfection and human perfection reached through natural harmony are equal. They remain incommensurable in value in his understanding. If God has ultimate and infinite perfection, human beings can only aspire to reach perfection. The point pressed here is that natural and human sounds approximate divine perfection insofar as they are harmonious.

The philosophical pronouncements about the divine character of harmonious natural and human sounds in *On the Power of Sound* recall to mind some eighteenth-century theological treatises. William Derham's enormously popular *Physico-Theology: Or, A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God from His Works of Creation* (1713) – which was inspired by Thomas Willis's *Cerebri Anatome* (1664) – suggests that the power of music allays the spirits and calms perturbations of the mind as an ultimate evidence of the Creator's "admirable work." In his chapter "Of the Powers of Music in Soothing the Passions," Nicholas Robinson explained that there was a direct correlation between alterations in the mind and changes in the fibers of the brain. Music's influence on the mood – specifically its ability to alleviate turbulent emotions – is caused by the variation in the force with which it hits the tympanum, which in turn affects the auditory nerve and brain fibers through the elastic ether. This idea is echoed in the fourth stanza of *On the Power of Sound* where the song "brightens / The blind Man's gloom" (49-50), the "Peasant's whistling breath, that lightens / His duteous toil of furrowing the green earth" (51-52) and the "Song lifts the languid oar, / And bids it aptly fall, with chime / That beautifies the fairest shore" (53-55). Music enlightens as it soothes, and soothes as it enlightens. This reciprocal double effect is conspicuous in the verbs "beautifies" and "mitigates." To the "Prisoner of the Mine" who "sing[s] his griefs to rest" (62-64) singing is similar to praying insofar as it provides a pleasure-laden relaxation and calls on a source greater than the singer's limited power. The song is as venerable as a prayer for it springs from the singer's "own clear breast" a place from which devotional entreaty and pleas spring.

Now the problem is how does the ear establish its relation to the divine? Does it simply react to a flood of specific ideas unleashed in it by divine intuition? Does it develop beliefs on its own that are later illuminated by God? In *To Joanna* Wordsworth claims that the ear is “touched / With dreams and visionary impulses / To me alone imparted” (70-72), implying that it is merely gifted and that it does not actively seek this illumination. As a passive recipient of the Divine call, the ear remains passively waiting for glimpses and tokens of immortality. The fact that it is merely “touched” (as opposed to being fully imbued with) “dreams and visionary impulses” suggests that its solemnly prophetic character is undermined because of its simultaneous function as a sensory organ. The ear is overwhelmingly and primordially real even if by virtue of being responsive to the Divine call, it is numinous and holy.

In his “major theoretical fragment” of the Alfoxden period published for the first time in the fifth volume of the new Oxford edition of the *Poetical Works* Wordsworth describes the ear as part of the “godlike faculties” that “At one and the same moment are the mind / And the mind's minister” (Vol.5.343). The ear is not singled out as an organ with special endowments. It is only in collaboration with the other organs that it forms the structure Wordsworth calls “the mind.” In this example, as opposed to “To Joanna,” the sensuousness of the ear is undermined because it is presented as acting purely in the realm of the intellectual. Yet although the intellectual here betokens a severance from the world of the senses, it does not fathom the idea of spiritual ascent or visionariness. As opposed to the ear which is “touched / With dreams and visionary impulses” in “To Joanna” and to the ear which is a “Godlike” faculty in “There is creation in the eye” the ear in *On The Power of Sound* – a poem written in a period when Wordsworth was more versed in conservatism

and religious orthodoxy – is a “glancing mind” that is, a self-sufficient organ that has a capacity for visionariness. As such it is a joint ground for seeing and thinking, and creates a space for man’s sensuous and cognitive performance. It is quite interesting that despite the intrinsic superiority of the ear above the eye, it is still vision that demarcates the only and unique category of perceiving, feeling and thinking for Wordsworth. The eye does not figure revelation on its own even though it is the one that taps on key moral ideas on the basis of being a means of inner vision. Its frailness and tyranny make Wordsworth resort to the ear as a redemptive organ. Yet again the ear is approached as an “organ of vision” or a “glancing mind” with quite some caution probably because Wordsworth settles in *On the Power of Sound* with a peculiar mindset inherited from the earlier poetry, which conceives of the ear more as a fleshy organ than a “Godlike facult[y].” Note that as opposed to its description as part of the “Godlike faculties” in the “major theoretical fragment” of the Alfoxden, the ear in *On the Power of Sound* is only the seat of the “glancing mind” (“as if within thee dwelt a glancing mind”). It is from the paradox of the ear as a fleshy organ and a “Godlike faculty” that the argument of *On the Power of Sound* is strung. The gerund “glancing” emphasizes the agency of the ear, its deliberate undertaking in order to arrive at visionary insights. Because it enjoys this autonomy, the ear is an active and unstinted participant in the consciousness-building project.

The “Spirit aerial,” which is said to be served “with untired powers” (18), is given pre-eminence over the human mind because it is by means of this Spirit that the mind, lodging in the ear, is “inform[ed]”; that is, enlightened. The enlightenment is warranted by the fact that the “Spirit aerial” is benevolent and magnanimous. Although Wordsworth does not explicitly state that the “Spirit aerial” informs the ear through the voice, the

argument of *On the Power of Sound* is set up in such a way as to unquestionably attribute the Voice to the Spirit. The particularity of this voice is summed up at the end of the poem:

A Voice to Light gave Being;
To Time, and Man, his earth-born Chronicler;
A Voice shall finish doubt and dim foreseeing,
And sweep away life's visionary stir;
The trumpet (we, intoxicate with pride,
Arm at its blast for deadly wars)
To archangelic lips applied,
The grave shall open, quench the stars. (209-16)

In this very particular passage Wordsworth brings a unique blend of philosophical and theological sensibilities to bear on questions related to the epistemology of hearing. Its most important theological hallmarks are the notion of divine speaking and of human reception as hearing, and the perception of hearing as light or illumination. Before it is enlightened by the Divine Voice the “cell of hearing” is “dark and blind ... more dread for thought / To enter than oracular cave.” The coming into existence of Light, Time and Man as a chronicler of Time is owed to the Voice. The conditions and circumstances related to the emergence of the Divine Voice are couched in an oblique and enigmatic form. Its functions, however, are specific; it “shall finish doubt and dim foreseeing, / And sweep away life’s visionary stir” (211-12). The Voice does not put an end to the human aspirations to be in contact with the divine. Its action is rather redemptory in that it relieves man of the “stir” for which he had to pay a hefty price, and brings about silence and ultimate peace.

This type of silence is different from the mood of composure that Wordsworth calls the “blessed mood,” a state that is not subject to emotional agitation. Later when he mentions the divine Word Wordsworth is not explicit about its content, but is assertive of its everlastingness. The last stanza illustrates, as Wordsworth declares at the end of the

“Argument” prefacing *On the Power of Sound*, “the survival of audible harmony, and its support in the Divine Nature, as revealed in Holy Writ.” The assumption that harmony’s “stay / Is in the Word that shall not pass away” (223-24) is a reiteration of the first verse in the Gospel of John “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John1:1). The end and the beginning are conjoined through the Word. Here Wordsworth appropriates a theological foundation of morality in which morality is derived from a divine, all-perfect Word, which underlies a faint suggestion that because God has chosen to speak to man, it becomes morally binding to man to hear the Word and abide by it. Wordsworth underlines the probity of the action of hearing by identifying the Word as a command, a moral injunction. What is expected of man upon hearing the divine Word is a rational interpretation and reconstruction of that Word for the purpose of bettering his life. Morality finds its way into this last section of the poem through the claim that the Word is the only surviving monument of Earth and Heavens and, therefore, is to be accepted as morally enjoining. The last observation ties in with the first line “Thy Functions are ethereal.” The assigned duty of the ear is to bridge the gap between the ontic and heavenly, to help man transcend his mortal state through the intuition of the perfection of the Divine Word through the Voice.

The ode seems to invite an answer to the following question: “What importance does sound have as an element in the universe?” At the beginning of the ode, sound is said not to have a sobering effect on the ear. Because it only appeals to the passions and to the senses, it is not bound to grand moral and intellectual schemes. An almost similar claim is made in Henry Home’s (Lord Kames) *Elements of Criticism* (1807) “Music having at command a great variety of emotions, may like many objects of sight, be made to promote luxury and

effeminacy, of which we have instances without number, especially in vocal music” (53).

Likewise, Wordsworth’s remark “How oft along thy mazes ... have dangerous Passions trod!” (81-82) draws attention to the ear’s compromising potential and its capacity for raising dangerous impulses. The solution for this predicament is that the “regent of Sound” “Betray not by the cozenage of sense / Thy Votaries, wooginly resigned / To a voluptuous influence / That taints the purer, better mind” (85-88). Aware that sound lacks moral and intellectual layout Wordsworth gives it divine license: “In the faintest dream of memory,” we retain “wandering utterances” which have divine power.

In claiming that sound gives shape to man’s religious piety and that the ear is an “Organ of Vision” Wordsworth outflanks a former claim put forward in *The Power of Music*, which is that music is man-made and is sufficient into itself as to dispense with divine intervention. *The Power of Music* (1807) examines the aesthetic as well as the emotional effects of music. The descriptors of emotional states lie along one single dimension of excitement and exhilaration and include a mixture of emotional language and imagery; “sways” (6), “fills with his power their hearts to the brim” (7), “power”, “bliss,” etc ... This description suggests the high arousal level of the crowd, which is also called “eager assembly” and “empire” (9). In the language of Kim-Cohen, they go through an “acousmatic” experience. “Acousmatic listening,” she explains, “involves a naïve, blank reception of the auditory” (13). The musician is not presented as an ordinary craftsman. He is assimilated to Orpheus; a legendary musician in ancient Greece who was able to charm all the living things even stones with his music. The purpose of this assimilation is to emphasize the fact that human talent and ingenuity, more than the sound of the instrument itself, stupefy the audience although sound remains an important ingredient of the music. According to the musicologist Jean-Jacques

Nattiez “Sound is an irreducible given of music even in the marginal cases in which it is absent it is nonetheless present by allusion” (67). The idea is consolidated in the first line of the second stanza. The fiddler “works on the crowd, / He sways them with harmony merry and loud” (5-6). He is a master of the musical manipulation of emotion and “As the Moon brightens round her the clouds of the night, / So He, where he stands, is a centre of light” (13-14). As opposed to *On the Power of Sound*, which treats divine Voice as the center and cause of light, it is the fiddler who is the ultimate provider of illumination.

The case is not of an ingenious man who lays claim to the glory of God through his talent, but rather of a man who is sufficient unto himself and pervasively preoccupied with the effect of his music on his fellow men. It is through intellect alone – not divine influence – that the fiddler reaches down to his fellow men who, in turn, answer his call by sharing in the musical passion and transport. The religious motifs at work in *On The Power of Sound* are here replaced by the idea that man can feel a sort of veneration for the music produced by his fellow men which, it is important to signal, acts on him persuasively not coercively: “O blest are the hearers and proud be the hand / Of the pleasure it spreads through so thankful a band” (29-30). The fiddler’s music creates a feeling of co-pathy; motivating individuals to engage in a common emotion of musical pleasure. While the many different cognitive and psychological elements that music entails for each individual are not totally abolished, music is experienced individually as a communal feeling. There seems to be an actual binding of nervous systems, the unification of an audience by a phenomenon that Mesmerists called “neurogamy.”

Music is more humanly-oriented than sound. While sound is capable of uncontrollable and sometimes destructive force and exacts the hearers’ enslavement and capitulation, music is delectable and beneficent for the most part: “The weary have life,

and the hungry have bliss; / The mourner is cheered, and the anxious have rest; / And the guilt-burthened soul is no longer opprest” (10-13). Even though the overflow of music into the motor system can go far, becoming in a sense irresistible, it never quite becomes coercive. The example of the woman who while listening to the fiddler “sees the Musician, ‘tis all that she sees!” (24) suggests that a particularly acute aural sensitivity does not block other sensuous activities. The woman’s visual concentration on the fiddler is mediated by hearing his music. Music also “stirs in [a man] like wind through a tree” (36). “Stir” is not used in the sense of disturbance and commotion, but excitement and ferment. How much of it is due to the intrinsic characteristics of music itself – its complex sonic patterns, logic, momentum and rhythm – and how much to the man voluntarily yielding to the influence of music, is difficult to establish. It remains, however, that music pierces through the body as naturally as wind through a tree. The suggestion is that music’s stimulation of sensory receptors is natural; it is not subject to doubt, revision, or confirmation. Another notable individual case is that of “That Mother, whose spirit in fetters is bound, / While she dandles the Babe in her arms to the sound” (39-40). Here music promotes relationship-building and interpersonal communication. These individual reactions to music suggest that although the ear is always in a ready and ardent pursuit of music, it reflects it, reconfigures it, and re-appropriates it for the self. A further suggestion is that the power of music is not as manipulative or overbearing as the power of sound.

The first part of the poem captures the collective excitement created by music, yet does not suggest that music induces a hypnotic, cataleptic, or ecstatic state. When the sound of the fiddle hits the ear and makes its way through the nervous system, it simply

enchants. The degree of the listeners' engagement in music becomes hypnotic in the last stanza:

Now, coaches and chariots! roar on like a stream;
Here are twenty souls happy as souls in a dream:
They are deaf to your murmurs — they care not for you,
Nor what ye are flying, nor what ye pursue! (41-4)

This stanza focuses on the ecstatic effect of music. The crowd here listens “acousmatically” that is “without regard to the source of the sound ... paying attention only to the characteristics of sound, ignoring who might have made it, ... for what purpose” (Kim-Cohen 9). The more they focus on the sound, the more their semiotic activity wanes. They are taken over, engulfed or entrained by music. The fact that the trance is achieved by a communal group rather than a single individual has led Adam Potkay to suggest that music is “the opiate of the masses” (25). The psychic and autonomic effects of the fiddle on the listeners culminate in a state of unconsciousness to the external world. They become “deaf to your murmurs — ... care not for you” (43). As the hysterical ferment simmers down the audience, they reach a state of exaltation and become “happy souls as souls in a dream” (42).

The hypnotic trance alleviates the consciousness of the body as a physico-material limitation and allows the mind to transcend it. It is similar to mystical and even religious ecstasy. The mystical overtones of the lines “They are deaf to your murmurs — they care not for you, / Nor what ye are flying, nor what ye pursue” (43-44) suggest that the hearers (who actually no longer hear) experience a psychological state which reduces external awareness at the same time that it expands mental awareness. The distinctive tonal quality of the fiddle works its way through the auditory pathways into their nervous system and leads the group to experience hypnotic trance, which, in terms of intensity, is much more important than a casual absorptive experience. The experience has the same characteristics as ceremonial trance

behaviour; an individual response involving subtle forms of social interaction where members feel moved from within by purposes that are not exclusively their own. It is similar to a spiritual encounter, which does not occur spontaneously, but with the aid of the ritual practices of gathering, listening, and being transported. As I have noted above all react to music idiosyncratically, yet they have a similar relation to music as an encountered superordinate entity.

Although the lines “twenty souls happy as souls in a dream: / They are deaf to your murmurs” seemingly rules out the possibility that body is a space of freedom and that hearing is a means for achieving that freedom, they do not indicate that the incommensurable value of freedom is achieved on the condition that the ears are shut. Deafness is mentioned in the context of a passage from sensual to emotional arousal; a purportedly super sense-perceptual experience which allows for the attainment of realities that are not accessible by way of ordinary sense perception. Rather than a mere negation of hearing, deafness is, I submit, a sublime response to the sound. It is a capability and an emotional skill. As such, it does not hamper man’s freedom. It fosters it by giving the hearer a more acute and profound sense of his body that he has not yet experienced. There is a sense in which sublime hearing provides an intense experience of the body rather than a withdrawal from it. It provides a complete subjective embodied experience. Alan Richardson claims that “Wordsworth’s psychological poetry frequently does root mental growth in embodied experience ...” (*British Romanticism* 33), and Mark Johnson that “meaning is not just what is consciously entertained in acts of feeling and thought; instead meaning reaches deep down into our corporeal encounter with our environment” (25). Hearing, I suggest, is a phenomenological experience which provides a more immediate

sense of subjective embodiment than seeing. It enables Wordsworth to understand himself as being a body as opposed to the phenomenology of seeing, which enables him primarily to understand that he owns a body. The difference between being a body and owning a body is that in the latter case, sensations are localizable in the body while in the former sensations are inherently part of and define the body. I shall explore this difference in the Boy of Winander episode where, until the supervening of silence, the ear is deployed as an intense organ and a means of a more significant and meaningful embodied engagement in the world.

Merleau Ponty's ontology of the body is helpful in this regard because in emphasizing bodily intentionality as well as the coordinated actions of the senses, it endorses two of the major premises of the Boy of Winander episode. In his monumental work *The Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty claims that because of the intermingling of the senses the body is a living center of intentionality upon which rational reflection depends. "The senses" he writes "translate each other without any need of an interpreter, and are mutually comprehensible without the intervention of any idea" (235). The heterogeneity of the senses is resolved by the presence of the object which makes them "intercommunicate by opening onto the structure of the thing" (229). Jay comments on these statements in the following words: "Merleau-Ponty claimed that the unification [of the senses] was like the merging of binocular into monocular vision, produced by a kind of bodily intentionality before mind distinguished itself from matter" (310). In the Boy of Winander episode Wordsworth endorses Merleau-Ponty's arguments about the amalgamation of consciousness and the body and the coordinated actions of the senses – that I will later elaborate in the form of synaesthesia – which provide a sense of the body as

a living center, yet he demonstrates that hearing, as a distinct bodily process, is an operational activity which provides an immediate orientation toward the world. The episode outlines the wholeness of the sensible body, its function as a heterogeneous but coordinated entity which acts as an orchestrating agent for the senses. Yet it isolates each sense with a particular independent function and achievement of its own performed prior to their collapse and absorption into each other.

According to Merleau-Ponty bodily actions are determined by what they target: “to move one’s body is to aim at things through it” (139). It is in this sense that actions can be said to be intentional. The targeted objects “present themselves to the subject as poles of actions ... call[ing] for a certain mode of resolution, a certain kind of work” (106). This “intentional arc” organizes and “endows experience with its degree of vitality and fruitfulness” (157). When we first encounter the Boy, his body seems to depend for its life and liveliness on the coordinated actions in which it is engaged; hearing and reciprocating sounds. Vision is at first absent not simply because it is less operational in the evening (the temporal setting of the episode), but because the visible spectrum is always narrower than the range of hearing. With its robustly spatial perceptual modality, seeing would have furnished awareness of space and spatial features, yet would have fallen short of being, like hearing, an important signaling function. Giving himself to the sound, the boy is rapt and carried away. He performs for the pleasure of the owls as well as for his own edification. The qualities of sound that the Boy hears, particularly the pitch and the loudness of tone, are related to two properties of sound waves; the frequency and the amplitude. Both foster the relation between sound stimulus and perceptual experience. This is why in lieu of visual cues, the boy relies on the extension of echoes and on sound to locate and

communicate with the owls. The acuteness of his ear transpires through its capacity to distinguish between different sounds accurately; to discriminate between “quivering peals, / And long halloos and screams, and echoes loud” (376). These different sounds are imminent, given to the Boy’s consciousness all at once, and are immediately reciprocated. At the same time that the ear orients the Boy to individuate himself as a subject distinct from phenomena in the external world, it challenges him to understand and interact with these external phenomena as sensations in his body to which he has to furnish an adequate response.

Because the ear is the point in the body in the world which connects to boy to the owls, it could be said to be, initially at least, the kernel of the experience of embodied being-in-the-world and the means by which the boy understands himself as being a body as opposed to having a body. This is not to say, of course, that the Boy has no sense of self before this experience of hearing and response. His abiding sense of self that is prior to and independent of self-consciousness, is a mere awareness of the body as a site of localizable sensations. Yet since he engages hearing the boy no longer makes the difference between sense and reference. The Boy blows “mimic hootings”, *i.e.*, sounds that already imitate those of the owls registered in his memory. The “mimic hootings” are not mere physics as they are not shorn of their relation to the sound of the owls. They are internalized as a resonance of these sounds. The ear is then a system of response which reacts to the movement of the external sound until that movement becomes silence. As it “baffl[es] [the Boy’s] best skill” (380) silence is first perceived as a limitation. The body stops communicating with the outside world and becomes alienated. Merleau-Ponty suggests that because the body maintains our entire life-world, an ailment in the body easily

becomes a crisis in the world: “our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism: it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive, it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system” (203). When the Boy “hung / Listening” (381-82) he engages silence as a variation of sound. Though conveying a sense of suspense and indetermination “hung” prevents us from interpreting this moment as one of distance and remoteness. We are not dealing with a pure ego standing in a merely external relation to the sound. As he is hanging, *i.e.*, as he is striving to listen, the voice of “mountain torrents” is “carried far into his heart” by a “gentle shock of mild surprise” (383). Silence is neither perceived as an external object of awareness nor yet fully as an internal phenomenon because the inner sphere of consciousness and the outer domain of experience are not categorical distinctions. Yet even without these dichotomies in place, the body is not perceived as a phenomenological anomaly posing awkward questions for the role of the ear as a mediator between the internal and the external. The ear does not reconfigure the sound as much as it represents a system of response which vibrates in sympathy with the movement of the external sound. The experience of hearing involves, on the objective side, sense impressions which act upon the boy’s body through his sense organ, and on the subjective side, the activity of the organism manifested in apprehending the sensation with a certain form or configuration.

The system of response to the sounds of nature elucidated in this episode is symptomatic of “the cultivation of [the] ‘inward ear’” which, John Hollander maintains, “is ... an important element in preparing for the representation of consciousness” (“Wordsworth and the Music of Sound” 59). This is not to say, of course, that consciousness is a mere causal byproduct or spinoff of the aural experience. Rather it

drives and organizes this aural experience. Merleau-Ponty considers consciousness to be an important dimension of perceptual acts as opposed to a mere appendage or epiphenomenon. In contrast to traditional accounts of human nature, which separate the mind from the body, and usually give dominion to the mind over the body, the guiding assumption for Merleau-Ponty as well as for Wordsworth is that consciousness is incarnated.⁵⁶

2 The ear's impairments: Illusive aural perception and hallucination

I have signaled at the beginning of this chapter that no matter how paradigmatic the definition of the ear in Wordsworth's poetry has become, it should be challenged in order to command a clear view of the ear's long-overlooked impairments. The idea that the ear is a privileged organ and a gateway to consciousness is, as I have argued above, grounded in a battery of arguments with a considerable lineage. I do not claim that the critics who produced this scholarship, especially Hartman, labored under a common misconception. They simply bracketed or set aside as inconsequential what I take to be the ear's important impairments. In the remainder of the chapter I will attempt to remedy this neglect by demonstrating that when the ear is left to its own device, it sometimes fatally misrepresents reality, thus inducing hallucinations, which German E. Berrios and Ivana S. Markova define as a phenomenon that "occurs either because a) a representation presents itself to awareness without being vouchsafed by reality or b) there is a failure in the subject's cognitive and emotional management of the representation" (61). It is my sense that the ear

⁵⁶ David M. Levin claims that Merleau-Ponty departs from Heidegger who thinks that the problem with framing the question of "essence" in thinking about the body is that in order to arrive at an answer we must "stand opposite the body, secretly detaching ourselves from 'the body' in a move that only perpetuates the conflict already inherent in dualism" (60). "Consciousness," D. Ellis paraphrasing Merleau-Ponty maintains, "is not just an extra layer superimposed over physiological information processing, enabling us to be aware of what is going on in a computer-like subconscious mechanism" (34).

has to be governed by the mind in order to function adequately. I approach this argument by way of two interrelated claims; the first is neurotic hallucination fostered by the ever-openness of the ear, and the second is psychotic hallucination.⁵⁷

There is no need to use the neuroscientific competence to make the point that before the informational processing is carried out in the brain it must of necessity transit through the ear as a reception system. Many neuroscientific accounts of the causal transactions that mediate between the ear and the world to establish that like the rest of the sensory organs, the ear receives stimuli that are transformed into impulses that move along the sensory nerves to the cerebral cortex. At the cerebral cortex, these impulses are processed and then sent along the motor nerves to the motor organs in order to initiate action.⁵⁸ The particularity of the ear is not that it transfigures and reinstates the sounds' concreteness into signs for the interpretive mind in a different manner than the eye, but that it performs this action in a much more intense manner. This intensity, caused by the ever-openness of the ear, can cause the overwhelmed mind to interpret the acoustical events in a flawed or excessive manner. Bloom declares that "crucial to the economy of the sense is the fact that we cannot close our ears as we do our eyes, and that vision is far more directional than hearing, which is not "To such a tender ball as th'eye confin'd" but, more like feeling, through all parts at least of the head, "diffus'd" (*William Wordsworth* 48). Bloom's insight served as a touchstone for many later critics such as Seth Kim-Cohen who asserts that unlike the eye, the ear is oblivious to the notion of a blink. She explains that "there is no such thing as an earlid. The ear is always open, always

⁵⁷ The illusion caused by the eye has not always been perceived in such a negative light. Iwan Rhys Morus explains that in the early half of the nineteenth century "it was often just this combination of optics and mental misdirection demonstrated by the Brocken specter, for example, that fascinated contemporary observers. Brewster's letters were full of examples of those kinds of illusions, both natural and of human origin" (395).

⁵⁸ For more on the way the aural and visual impulses travel to the brain, see Byrnie Faith Hickman *Brain Sense: The Source of the Senses and how we process the World Around Us*, especially parts four and five.

supplementing its primary materiality, always multiplying the singularity of perception into the plurality of experience” (XX). Bloom and Cohen interpret the over-openness of the ear in a positive light. Likewise Bromwich asserts that acute listening fosters Wordsworth’s moral identity:

In portraying his childhood and young manhood, Wordsworth frequently lets us see him as a listener. The Boy of Winander pausing as “mimic hootings” pass between himself and the owls, and the republican radical stopping on the road in France to notice the hunger-bitten girl his friend pointed out with the same words “’Tis against *that* / That we are fighting” are recognizably the same person caught in the same gesture. He hears a call to which others are oblivious. (2)

The ear’s intensity is not, however, without drawbacks. Not all the hosted sounds can be interpreted adequately. In the *Prospectus*, after proclaiming that his “spousal verse” will “speak of nothing more than what we are,” Wordsworth vows among other things:

To travel near the tribes
And fellowship of men, and see all sights
Of madding passions mutually inflamed;
Must hear Humanity in fields and groves
Pipe solitary anguish; or must hang
Brooding above the fierce confederate storm
Of sorrow, barricaded evermore
Within the walls of cities—may these sounds
Have their authentic comment; that even these
Hearing, I be not downcast or forlorn! (*The Recluse*” 826-35)

Authenticity has two of the meanings listed for it in the *OED*: “belonging to himself, own, proper,” and “real.” The first suggest that it authenticity is inherent in the sounds. In the sense of “real,” however, the authentic is recovered hermeneutically. Derrida writes that “one cannot refer to the real except as an interpretive experience” (148). Only a hermeneutic action can establish whether the sounds themselves are authentic or made to seem so by the ear. In this context “I must hear” as opposed to “see ill sights” functions as a self-caveat. Hearing needs to be performed more cautiously than seeing because of the ear’s openness and autonomy which

threaten to seduce or preoccupy with the present to the point of wrecking the imaginative moment.

Another example illustrating the dangers related to the openness of the ear is the false perception of the grating sounds in the “Vale of Esthwaite” including screaming owls, “clanking chains,” and a minstrel’s harp that “Shrieks at his shoulder sharp and shrill.” Wordsworth confesses “Now hollow surrounding all around I hear / Deep murmurings creep upon my ear; / No more the wild shrieks of the storm / Drive to its cell the startling worm” (232-35). Many successive episodes at the beginning of *The Prelude* present the ever-openness of the ear in a negative light. In the woodcock-snaring episode, the boy Wordsworth goes out to catch woodcocks at night. Upon stealing the prey, he hears strange sounds in the open heights:

and when the deed was done
I heard among the solitary hills
Low breathings coming after me, and sounds
Of undistinguishable motion, steps
Almost as silent as the turf they trod. (*Prelude* 1. 321-25)

This experience differs from a normal sensory experience insofar as it is not constrained by sensory information from the external physical world. The ear’s wakefulness and watchfulness – its own self-consolidated attentional mechanism – makes it vulnerable to “low breathings” and “sounds of indistinguishable motion” which obviously do not exist in the external world, but which the mind interprets as a form of chastisement for having committed the “deed.” Fry interprets these hallucinatory sounds and others such as “giant forms” as “nature’s obscure admonitions to the erring child” (Fry 80). Fry’s argument is based on the interface between nature and the self because for nature’s influence to be interpreted as “admonitions,” the self needs to apprehend them as such. In the succeeding episode of the birds’ nesting the boy hears

intermingled voices. When he is plundering the raven's nest—

oh, at that time
While on the perilous ridge I hung alone,
With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind
Blow through my ear! the sky seemed not a sky
Of earth—and with what motion moved the clouds! (*Prelude* 1. 335-39)

Here again the sensory input does not emerge from the physical reality, but is the result of the internal process of experience. The phenomenal world seems to be embedded rather than lying beyond the subjective experience. In “strange utterance” utterances, as opposed to sounds or even voices, is a specific linguistic event involving the intentions of the speaker. It does not inscribe itself in semantics; what is literally said when an expression is uttered, but in pragmatics; meanings conveyed and the linguistic actions performed when something is said. The speech act is not simply a locutionary act and much less a phonic one. Nature encodes thoughts into utterances and the child Wordsworth decodes the utterances into thoughts. Again the ability to decipher the particular meanings of the sounds, their interpretation as “strange utterance” arguably depends on the existence of a highly receptive and attentive mechanism. In the boat-stealing episode, the boy rows the stolen boat away from the shore because of the voices that he thinks are chasing him: “It was an act of stealth / And troubled pleasure, nor without the voice / Of mountain-echoes did my boat move on” (361-63). Like the former examples of chastisement, a sense of guilt is the scaffolding of the experience and the voices heard are mythologized as the voice of nature rebuking the child for having transgressed its calm and sanctity. In the skating episode there is no sense of guilt, yet listening is just as acute. When the village clock tolls six “clear and loud” (*Prelude* 1. 430) Wordsworth and his playmates go skating with “resounding horn” and the “pack loud chiming,” and “not a voice was idle” (436-39). The cacophony of sounds around him does not prevent him from

perceiving other concomitant sounds that inspire fear and awe:

with the din
Smitten, the precipices rang aloud;
The leafless trees and every icy crag
Tinkled like iron; while far distant hills
Into the tumult sent an alien sound
Of melancholy not unnoticed, while the stars
Eastward were sparkling clear, and in the west
The orange sky of evening died away. (439-46)

These iron sounds do not belong to the same repertoire of chastising sounds that characterize the other sporting episodes, yet they alienate the boy from his immediate environment and preoccupy him with melancholy thoughts. A little further in Book 1 of *The Prelude*, when Wordsworth remembers his “home-amusements,” the sounds go back again to their violent notes. While busy playing cards the boy hears grating sounds outside the home.

Meanwhile abroad
Incessant rain was falling, or the frost
Raged bitterly, with keen and silent tooth;
And, interrupting oft that eager game,
From under Esthwaite’s splitting fields of ice
The pent-up air, struggling to free itself,
Gave out to meadow grounds and hills a loud
Protracted yelling, like the noise of wolves
Howling in troops along the Bothnic Main. (*Prelude* 1. 535-44)

The “protracted yelling” seems to be felt with such full impact that it recalls the “noise of wolves.” It is hallucinatory insofar as it is little amenable to voluntary control. It comes upon Wordsworth and protracts itself until it induces a withdrawal from the immediate environment and an exclusive preoccupation with itself. “Hallucinations” Behrendt claims “are similar to dreaming in that a lack of sensory constraints on the physiological mechanism of conscious experience makes these forms of conscious experience maladaptive for interaction with the physical world” (19). More than nature’s “obscure admonitions to the erring child” (Fry 80) –

manifested in the form of “breathings” and “giant forms” which make “deep murmurings creep upon my ear” (*Prelude* 1, 233) – the “protracted yelling” haunt the child and cannot be easily offset.

If the ever-openness of the ear only just undermines Wordsworth’s almost “Roman confidence” in the capacity of the ear, the case of psychotic aural hallucination puts the ear under serious strain. “In hallucination,” Fish argues, “we are in a state that seems to us just like a veridical perception of a worldly fact or facts, yet in which there are no suitable facts for the hallucinatory state to acquaint us with” (80). Auditory hallucination or paracusia is recorded in Book 10 of *The Prelude*, which is about Wordsworth’s experience of watchfulness and vigilance in the wake of the September massacres. The passage reads:

And in this way I wrought upon myself,
Until I seemed to hear a voice that cried,
To the whole city, “Sleep no more.” The trance
Fled with the voice to which it had given birth;
But vainly comments of a calmer mind
Promised soft peace and sweet forgetfulness.
The place, all hushed and silent as it was,
Appeared unfit for the repose of night,
Defenceless as a wood where tigers roam. (85-93)

The voice crying “sleep no more” takes the mind by surprise. “I wrought upon myself” Wordsworth says “Until I seemed to hear a voice.” Seeming to hear signals that this is not a veridical experience, that it is the result of excessive anxious brooding and is thus remote from the domain of sensation *per se*. Because it is internal, the voice is impossible to explore or examine by sense-organ adjustment. Among the many cases of hallucinations, Wordsworth’s could be defined as “the case of pure hallucinations that take[s] the place in the absence of any background experience of the world. [It has no] acquaintance-based phenomenal character” (Fish 93). Physiologically, as a brain state, hallucination results

from overwrought nerves. The “mind on the watch,” which Richardson conceives of positively as an extreme form of the mind’s power to “build up greatest things/ From least suggestions” is the cause of the hallucinated voice. I wish to elaborate on this idea of vigilance and its relation to aural hallucination.

My starting point is the pervading rumination preceding this episode, which, I submit, largely contributed to it. Wordsworth indulges in imaginative hypothesis until it materializes into hallucinations. Here’s how he describes his feelings on that night:

But that night
I felt most deeply in what world I was,
What ground I trod on, and what air I breathed.
High was my room and lonely, near the roof
Of a large mansion or hotel, a lodge
That would have pleased me in more quiet times;
Nor was it wholly without pleasure then.
With unextinguished taper I kept watch,
Reading at intervals; the fear gone by
Pressed on me almost like a fear to come. (*Prelude* 10. 63-72)

“The fear gone by” steals upon thought and fosters rumination; a stable, inflexible and pervasive pattern of thinking which prolongs depressive moods. Wordsworth’s general mood in this episode is difficult to determine in isolation from his general mood throughout the years of the French revolution, which oscillates between hope to utter rejection, between exultation and indifference. He was “depressed” and “bewildered” (11. 321) for his “true self” (11. 342), misled by the times, was almost destroyed. He laments that the “blasts / From hell” (10. 337-38) of the revolution could have ruined his poetic voice. The France books in *The Prelude* show that he engaged in depressive rumination about the revolution probably because ruminating unconsciously helps the individual to come to terms with the painful event. Yet rather than leading to self-understanding,

depressive rumination increased his anxiety. Allen, Coyne, and Console argue that stressful or traumatic events may cause individuals to be “vulnerable to ... [their] inner world” (332) mostly because they encourage the reconstruction of past visual images and auditory experiences. This is probably what happened to Wordsworth when he was in Paris – on the scene of the September massacres. The sensorimotor engagement with the environment has increased his vulnerability to hallucination. There are, Mark Johnson claims, “processes of organism-environment interaction that operate beneath our felt awareness and that make that felt awareness possible” (25). If we compare Wordsworth’s reaction to depressive thoughts in Book 9 – when he was physically remote from the events to his thoughts in this episode – we realize that it is the geographical proximity to the place that has encouraged depressive thoughts and made them more accessible. In Book 9 Wordsworth demonstrates that he shields from the passion of the times “I stood ‘mid those concussions, unconcerned, / Tranquil almost, and careless as a flower / Glassed in a green-house” (86-88). The “strange” indifference steadies the self “while every bush and tree, the country through / Is shaking to the roots” (90-91). Being on the spot, however, makes it very difficult for Wordsworth to distance himself from the painful events and opens up the way for negative thoughts to intrude and constitute materials for hallucinations. It is the sensorimotor engagement in the environment that induces hallucination. It emerges quite plainly from the Shakespearean reference that the voice is no genuine aural percept, that it is not the result of the acuity of Wordsworth’s perceptual skill, but the fabrication of the “wrought upon” mind. Although it induces a feeling of reality, the voice cannot be interpreted as perceived. It is imagined and invented. If we take this to be the case, then the problem at hand is extreme delusive sensing. As opposed to veridical sensing, which is an original

source of knowledge of external particulars, delusive sensing is derivative, in a quite precise sense that it does not rely on external particulars but on the organs of perception to make sense of these. The hallucination in this case indicates a breakdown in the ear and outlines it as an unreliable organ that cannot be trusted. Because trusting it is a risky yet necessary endeavor – Wordsworth seeks to capture the ear under judgment, investing it with poetic and religious aura even as he hollows it from the inside and subjects it to discrediting judgments – the question of when this trust should be warranted and when it should be withheld becomes problematic. The breakdown of the ear's capacity to reliably translate reality is also indicative of a breakdown in mind's capacity to regulate itself and make up for the deficiency of the ear. This is why I spoke of this particular episode in Wordsworth as the closest to psychotic hallucination as opposed to the other instances of neurotic hallucination.

Chapter Four

Synaesthesia or the End of the Sensuous Dialectic

“The dialectic of the senses in Wordsworth is psychagogic and can be analyzed even if we are not
sure where it leads”
(Hartman *The Unremarkable* 24)

David P. Haney's suggestion that in Wordsworth "hearing has always remained in the picture ... both as sight's partner and as its potential adversary" (182) attests to the inextricable relation of the senses, yet determines this relation in terms of an unresolved dialectic. In this chapter I propose that synaesthesia, a phenomenon which refers to the activity in the human brain when a neural pathway stimulated by one sense produces sensation in one or more others, could resolve this dialectic. I will examine the synaesthetic aspects of Wordsworth's writing and explore the nodes of intersection between the eye and the ear both when they function as "inducers" (the stimuli producing synaesthesia) and "concurrents" (the accompanying sensation of the trigger). Crucial to the interest of this chapter are two particular synaesthetic inflections; light and sound and image and voice⁵⁹.

I offer to elucidate the way the highly controversial and inherently self-antithetical principle of synaesthesia is spelled out. I argue that Wordsworth engages both vision and hearing simultaneously rather than the one faculty among them which provides the most vivid emotional engagement. In dealing with Wordsworth's adaptation of synaesthesia, I shall concentrate on two important facts. The first is that Wordsworth validates synaesthesia as a bodily praxis by making the opposite aesthetic move, *i.e.*, by proffering a poetics resisting the legacy of sensibility and crediting the transcendental through typical metaphors of light, "illumination," the "inner eye" and the "voice of God." The second is that synaesthesia establishes the truth about the self and the world. If by themselves neither

⁵⁹ My study of the eye and the ear will not be absorbed in the difference between speech and writing as is customary in Wordsworth criticism. Mary Jacobus is one among many critics who studies voice as speech in conjunction with writing. According to her, voice as speech is "always a doubling of self, and more often a multiplication of alienation." The voice speaking through the poet, she writes, "comes to imply all the destabilizing multiplicity of plural (or ancestral) voices" (170).

the fallible eye nor the frail ear can be trusted as arbiters of truth, by their commingling they can be reintegrated into the discourse of truth.

The concept of synaesthesia that I am proposing to study is by no means original. It dates back to Aristotle who posits that all perception is fundamentally synaesthetic. In *Inner Touch: Archaeology of a Sensation*, Daniel Heller-Roazen explains that Aristotle's discussion of the "common-sense" or the "inner-touch" addresses the problem of awareness and concludes that no perception "can occur through direct perception of the object, but through 'a common faculty that accompanies all the senses, by which one senses that one is sensing and that one is hearing'" (36). Much more recently, Louise Vinge argues in her study of the senses in literary history that "mixed sensations, associations, synaesthesias" appealed more to the "Romantic imagination" than did the "rational five-sense pattern, which had now been almost totally eclipsed" (166). Analyzing many instances of synaesthesia in Wordsworth David P. Haney concludes that "the disturbing of the realm of sight" aims at "providing an ethical ground for a subjectivity that can participate in an internalized Platonic illumination, function in a community that depends on representational visuality, and still hear at least the echo of the 'astounding course of infinity'" (199). Noel Jackson maintains that "[T]he poet himself furnishes an image of [the] mutually reciprocating, simultaneously active and passive, model of perceptual activity in his famous praise – adapted as he tells us in a note to the poem, from Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* – for "the mighty world / Of eye and ear, both what they half-create, / And what perceive" (*Science* 33). Likewise Alan Richardson notes that "[L]iterary artists may also choose to explore [gaps in the cognitive system], even exacerbate them, using one sensory modality to revise or correct a different one" (*The*

Neural 52). This is the case in Wordsworth for the tyranny of the eye is thwarted when “Nature”:

... summons all the senses each
To counteract the other, and themselves,
And makes them all, and the objects with which all
Are conversant, subservient in their turn
To the great ends of Liberty and Power (*The Prelude* 12. 135-39)

1 Principles of Wordsworthian synaesthesia: Equivalence and compensation

Before I examine instances of synaesthesia, I wish to point out that the intermingling of the eye and the ear is a sign of their dynamic bracing, not their loss of autonomy. Two examples might illustrate this claim. The first is the “visible quiet of this holy ground” (*The Excursion* 7. 482). The second is the description of the “eye” as “deaf and silent” (“Intimation Ode” 112). In both cases, one sense strengthens another. In the first example, the forcefulness and semantic power of the “quiet” are paradoxically bequeathed through visibility. Wordsworth accurately and resourcefully bestows on “quiet” the properties of dynamism and interaction characteristic of the visible. The “visible quiet” is of course a metaphor for the place’s dignity and religious solemnity. Visually apprehending and representing the undisturbed quiet is at one and the same time an act of secularization and sanctification. On the one hand, as visible and representable, the “visible quiet” is moored in the human experience of the physical world. On the other hand, its visibility; that is, its conspicuousness, suggests that it is potent, magnificent and awe-striking.

As to the second example having to do with the eye in “Intimations Ode” deafness and silence are markers of the eye’s ability to discern what it sees. The “eye among the blind / That deaf and silent, read’st the eternal deep, / Haunted forever by the eternal mind”

(111-13) is a metaphor for the child, immediately after described as “[M]ighty prophet, Seer blest! / On whom those truths do rest, / Which we are toiling all our lives to find” (114-16). Precisely because he is “an eye among the blind” the child is an eye that sees as opposed to the blind others, and most importantly, is an eye that sees because it is silent and deaf. The corollary is that the eye which discerns what it sees is a deaf and a silent eye. This example is reminiscent of *The Old Cumberland Beggar* where the central character represents, according to McConnell, “a considerable advance in Wordsworth’s ethics of vision” (104). McConnell picks on a very important characteristic of sight in *The Old Cumberland Beggar*, which, I think, is absolutely true of “the philosophical eye” in “Intimations Ode.” McConnell writes:

What is important about *The Old Cumberland Beggar* ... what does continue into the later poetry and especially *The Prelude*, is the peculiar articulation of the act of sight which Wordsworth gives us. Seeing is a block to vision in the poem in a much more radical way than in *The Borderers*. For here the life of sight, of everyday trust in the visual, is not simply deceptive but what a psychologist would call overdetermined. (104)

It is not difficult to get the sense that in *Intimations Ode* too “seeing is a block to vision” for the poem illustrates that upon regaining its own identity the eye relapses into blindness. When its function is to see, the eye loses its privilege of “read[ing] the eternal deep.” The example is slightly perplexing because a sense is empowered by the negative properties of another. The eye discerns more not less because it is deaf and silent. We would have expected the translation of one sense in the negative terms of another to yield loss rather than power, to lead to the blocking of the mind instead of its magnanimity and capacity not only to relate to “the eternal mind” but to be haunted by it. The two instances from *The Excursion* and from “Intimations Ode” suggest that the eye and ear are mostly efficient

when their peculiar qualities are anchored in each other's larger territories. Their amalgamation strengthens them to such a degree that they become impervious to external challenges.

Now this mutual adequacy of the senses takes on a more robust form in synaesthesia where the already overlapping senses also overlap with the mind. In his reading of the following passage:

There is creation in the eye
Now less in all other senses; powers
They are that color, model and combine
The things perceived with such an absolute
Essential energy that we may say
That these most godlike faculties are the mind
And the mind's minister (*Lyrical Ballads* 323-40)

Jarvis explains that “[the senses] *are* the mind, not merely an accompaniment of, addition to, or instrument of, the mind. First of all comes this ‘absolute / Essential energy,’ the affective, the bodily, nature of thinking” (174). The overlapping of the senses and the mind and the resultant “bodily nature of thinking” confirm that the senses do not merely rely on the mind as a *sensorium commune*; that is, as an organ that synchronizes their actions and assists them to complete their ordinary actions. The mind and the senses are one and the same entity by means of which higher cognitive activities are performed.

Synaesthesia is predicated on equivalence and compensation. The first problem that the claim of synaesthetic equivalence encounters is the critical assumption – encouraged by Wordsworth himself – that the eye is tyrannical and usurpatory while the ear is redemptive. In presenting vision and hearing as warring faculties in many synaesthetic incidences Wordsworth draws a consistent pattern in which the tyranny of the eye is counteracted by the ear. Studies by Hartman and Wagner, for instance, make their case for this particular

critical trajectory. Wagner speaks of Wordsworth's "ability to celebrate a moment of lightened perception and consciousness" (40) when the tyrannical eye is held at bay. Hartman claims that Wordsworth maintains a connection to nature through hearing. There is a "constant concern with denudation, stemming from both a fear of visual reality and a desire for physical indestructibility." In his reading of the lines: "I have felt what'er there is of power in sound / To breathe an elevated mood, by form / Or image unprofaned" (1805, 2 11. 321-326). Hartman contends that there is a "vast identity established throughout the poems of Wordsworth, an identity against sight, its fever and triviality, and making all things tend to the sound of universal waters; subduing the eyes by a power of harmony" ("The Romance of Nature" 289). Hartman's metaphor for the "sound of universal waters" comprises Derwent's music in Book 1 of *The Prelude*, which prompted and promoted the boy's consciousness. Derwent "sent a voice / that flowed along my dreams" and was assimilated in the mind with "mingled pleasure" (1. 273-74). It also "[made] ceaseless music that composed my thoughts / To more than infant softness" (1. 277-78), recalling the effect of music on the soul.

Hartman's privileging of the ear over the eye owes to the fact that the ear is "a sense both intensely pure yet deeply in touch with earthliness" (*Unremarkable* 23). His comment on a significant passage from Book 2 of *The Prelude* consolidates his claim:

I would walk alone
 Under the quiet stars, and at that time
 Have felt whate'er there is of power in sound
 To breathe an elevated mood, by form
 Or image unprofaned; and I would stand,
 If the night blackened with a coming storm,
 Beneath some rock, listening to sounds that are
 The ghostly language of the ancient earth,
 Or make their dim abode in distant winds.
 Thence did I drink the visionary power. (2. 302-11)

Hartman remarks that “where other poets might have invoked a heavenly music, [Wordsworth] evokes a music of the earthly sphere” (*Unremarkable* 24). The substitution of the earthly music for the “heavenly music” serves to preserve the link between the human voice and nature, hence to justify the naturalness of the human voice and the subsequent song as well as the “purity” of the ear. Hartman’s privileging of the ear over the eye on the basis that it traffics between purity and earthliness could, however, be undermined by the fact that eye, too, has the same privilege for it is both inward and bodily. And its inwardness could be assumed to be the strict parallel of the ear’s purity. Hartman’s advocated priority of the ear over the eye makes him reject Wordsworth’s synaesthesia. He submits that “[Wordsworth] rarely uses synaesthesia: his typical intensities are those in which he is ‘now all eye now / All ear’ ... Such natural transcendence ... generally perplexes rather than purifies eye and ear. We get more a feeling of impasse than facilitation” (*Unremarkable* 24). Hartman is right to insist on the independence of the senses and on Wordsworth’s reliance on one sense at a time. A short remark in *Guide to the Lakes* supports his claim: “in this season of stillness, the ear being unoccupied, or only gently excited, the sense of vision becomes more susceptible of its appropriate enjoyments” (126). Hartman’s argument might be criticized where, in purporting to prove the independence of the senses, it explicitly denies the use of synaesthesia and focuses on the “‘counteraction’ of the senses”, which, in Haney’s paraphrase of his argument, leads to “a relationship of contraries without progression that potentially leads to the turning of positives into negatives, such as spirit into counter-spirit and to a general crisis in perception (178). An example illustrating Hartman’s rejection of synaesthesia in Wordsworth is “[nature] doth open up the clouds, / As at the touch of lightning” (363). Hartman asks: “Is there an equivalent in sound to this ‘touch of

lightning”? A flash of sound, or thunder touch?” (*Unremarkable* 101). I think the answer is contained in the assumption itself. The lightning stimulates both eye and ear. Either inside clouds, cloud to cloud or cloud to ground, lightning is always accompanied by the loud sound of thunder so that what is seen is simultaneously heard. Similarly, Hartman argues that the dialectic of the senses atop Mont Snowdon is never resolved and that it does not contain any synaesthetic element.

Thus Snowdon is a vision of mastery, though a peculiar one. The power in sound and the power in light, or eye and ear, or nature and mind, are asymmetrical elements that struggle toward what Wordsworth calls “interchangeable supremacy,” “natural domination.” There is no single locus of majesty or mastery. It is doubled and troubled by shifts in the poet’s interpretation of what he experienced. Though light begins by usurping the landscape (both internal and external), sound sours up in reclamation, and no cosmological or ontological position is reached that would resolve the conflict. Wordsworth’s manuscript revisions also suggest radical metaphoricity rather than mastery; power is not unified or localized as the property of one place, organ, or element, it is as homeless as the “voice of waters” itself. (*Unremarkable* 103)

The unresolved dialectic speaks to the majesty of the intellect and not to the supremacy of the senses. Yet in suggesting that the immersion into the sensuous experience results in the valorization of the intellect Hartman emphasizes the effect of synaesthesia that he is at the same time curtailing. *Contra* Hartman, I argue that there is a way in which synaesthesia in Wordsworth could be understood as the end of the sensuous dialectic. Synaesthetic equivalence works in both ways, which means that the senses can be synaesthetically animate regardless of whether they are active or abeyant. In its active version, synaesthetic equivalence involves a symmetrical functioning of the eye and ear. In the language of Hollander, it occurs when “eye gives way to ear” (*Images* 26), and when the aural yields to the visual. Its passive

version could be gleaned through “On the Village silence Steals her Way”, which integrated the group of Miscellaneous sonnets under the name “Calm is all Nature as a Resting wheel”:

A timely slumber seems to steal
O'er vale and mountain; now while ear and eye
Alike are vacant what stranger harmony,
Homefelt and home created seems to heal
That grief for which my senses still supply
Fresh food ... (5-10)

Where it involves inactive eye and ear, synaesthetic equivalence is so important that once Wordsworth had tapped on its epistemological and aesthetic potential, he worked on integrating it into his finest poetic moments such as, to limit myself to one instance, the imaginative insight in the crossing of the Alps episode. Wordsworth's own prose formulation is quite explicit on the import of inactivity in this particular epiphanic moment.

He reports to De Quincey:

At the very instant when the organs of attention were all at once relaxing from their tension, the bright star hanging in the air above those outlines of massy blackness, fell suddenly upon my eye, and penetrated my capacity of apprehension with a pathos and a sense of the Infinite that would not have arrested me under other circumstances. (qtd. in Jordan 442)

“Relax[ation] from tension” seems to be the *sine qua non* condition for achieving insight.

Frank McConnell argues that

the fixation of the eye, obsession with the visual scene, is in fact a form of blindness, both because overreliance upon the sense transforms that sense into a limitation of the spirit, and because such overreliance blocks the apparition of the inner vision, the ‘auxiliar light’ so central to the poetry of the great decade. (100)

Not being absorbed in material sense gratification triggers off the epiphanic moment and leads on to a spiritual platform where the self becomes conscious of itself without

mediation.⁶⁰ The synaesthetic act here consists in both senses being synchronized not in the way they take action (react to each other and to the environment), but in the way they reciprocate each other's inactivity. That perception with the dormant "organs of attention" is forceful enough to arrest the mind suggests that the synchronized inactivity of the organs is even more important than their activity. It is true that one could curtail this argument by claiming that what arrests Wordsworth is not the passive organs but the mind itself, which is an active receiver of the energy flux of the senses even if the latter is subdued. Yet this counterargument could be undermined by the fact that even as a dynamic explorer, the mind is itself contingent on the senses. "The brain isn't always in charge of the senses" Faith Hickman explains, "in fact, there's reason to argue the opposite: the senses run the brain" (113).

Synaesthesia is also predicated on the principle of compensation. Book 7 of *The Excursion* presents an interesting case of synaesthesia as compensation:

One, blind and alone, advancing
 Straight towards some precipice's airy brink
 But, timely warned, 'He' would have stayed his steps,
 Protected, say enlightened, by his ear;
 And on the very edge of vacancy
 No more endangered than a man whose eye
 Beholds the gulf beneath. (492-97)

The "enlightened" ear offsets the deficiency of the eye and saves the blind man from "the precipice's airy brink." In disclosing the danger lying ahead, the ear pits itself against the inoperative "bodily eye" and acts as an enlightened or "inner eye." It receives its

⁶⁰ The idea of the senses' lack of attention is perceived as an obstacle by Frank McConnell. In *The Confessional Imagination* he devotes a whole chapter to the "tyrant eye" and claims that "If sight for Wordsworth is the daemonic sense par excellence, it is so because of the power that beautiful and gigantic or terrifying sights have to rivet our attention, taking us out of ourselves in that transport which fascinated the eighteenth-century theorists of the sublime. For Wordsworth, however, such experience comes to represent a paralysis of the imagination, a freezing of natural mental growth which ... is intimately connected with the idea of 'fixing' the sight on a particular object" (100).

assignment of significance not from itself as a physical organ, but from both its quality and function as an “inner eye,” *i.e.*, as a provider of light. Despite its assimilation to the eye, the ear remains individualized down to itself in its awareness of itself as an organ which compensates for the inadequacy of the eye. It performs this action in two cases; when the eye closes itself off to the world and when the eye fixates things in the outside world in a way that blocks the imagination. When Wordsworth sees the blind beggar with a label on his chest in Book 7 of *The Prelude* he confesses “Caught by the spectacle my mind turned round / As with the might of waters, ...” (643-44). He was particularly smitten because the blind beggar was wearing a label which “seemed of the utmost we can know, / Both of ourselves and of the universe”(645-46). The shift from the visual to the aural is a symptom of the suffocation with sight. The aural comes to the rescue of the poet whose giddy visual fixation led to near collapse. The sound of waters is symbolic of life and joy – the sound of Derwent has enchanted the boy Wordsworth and has “blended with [his] nurse’s song” (*Prelude* 1. 271). McConnell notes that the man with label takes on the reductive, minimal identity of man as label” because of the eye’s “fixation” on the “written paper.” Thanks to the relieving power of the aural memory the “beggar himself begins to be transformed, through the narrator’s consciousness, into a force beyond the phenomenal, an energy which is not daemonic because it manifests itself as the obliteration of daemonic imagery” (107). Although I do not argue for the daemonism of the bodily eye I think that McConnell is right to maintain that as soon as the aural comes to the rescue of the visual, a positive “transformation” occurs.

“Ode to duty” contains a similar argument. Although omitting to speak of impeded vision, the poet celebrates duty (in its quality as “inner voice”) as light. The ode opens on

the following synaesthesia “Stern Daughter of the Voice of God! / O Duty! If that name thou love / Who art a light to guide” (1-3). Duty is affiliated to the “Voice of God” by virtue of being morally enlightening, or simply, light. Like the voice of God – which comprises both his breath and his speech – “inner voice” substitutes for the light of the “bodily eye.” The explicitly religious tone of “Ode to Duty” recalls to mind the Book of Ezekiel where the prophet declares “Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year ... the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God.” The lengthy description of the vision is suddenly interrupted by “the word of the Lord” when Ezekiel “hears[s] the voice of one who spoke.” The usurpation of vision by voice is emphasized by the prophet hiding his face in prostration and awe. Bettina Rotenberg explains “[Ezekiel’s] visions which are composed of a battery of signifiers that elude any unifiable visual sense defy perception. It is even this sudden ‘aversion’ from vision that opens him to the reception of divine speech” (84).

I wish to point out that the “enlightened” ear is slightly yet significantly different in function from the “inward ear,” which, as demonstrated in “Yes! Full Surely ‘T Was the Echo”, has a bearing on the transcendental but does not necessarily act as light for the soul:

Such rebounds our inward ear
 Catches sometimes from afar—
 Listen, ponder, hold them dear;
 For of God, -- of God they are. (17-20)

The beginning of the poem tells us that apart from the “rebounds” (meaning re-echoes) caught “from afar” the echoes that the ear captures are those of the mountain, which are themselves echoes of the sound of “the shouting Cuckoo” (2). The cuckoo is described as “a babbling wanderer” and the sounds it utters do not solicit an answer. Because the ear is

able to capture the unsolicited, hence unobtrusive, mountain echoes, it is extraordinarily powerful, yet nothing in the passage suggests that it enlightens the soul. So unless we consider that the “rebounds” are enlightening because they have a divine provenance – as is the case in “Ode to Duty” – it is difficult to establish that the “inward ear” provides light.

2 Light and sound

Merging light and sound marks a particular constellation of philosophy and science. The notion might have found its way in Wordsworth’s poetry through Coleridge, who bridged the German philosophy of mind to the British ideas of sensibility. Coleridge’s idiosyncratic theorization about the alliance between light and sound, articulated in “A light in sound, a sound-like power in light” (*The Eolian Harp* 28) might itself have derived from seventeenth-century natural philosophers such as Athanasius Kircher, the inventor of the harp – the metaphor of the Romantic imagination.⁶¹ The latter has influenced Newton’s theory about the assimilation of colors and tones (Erhardt-Sietbold 347-348) when he proposed that “different rays excite vibrations of different bignesses, as different vibrations of the air excite different sounds.” Kircher is thought to have founded our modern understanding of synaesthesia when he proposed that sound, in Castel’s own translation of his terms, is “le signe de la lumiere” (*simiam lucis*) and that whatever is “felt” by the eyes is also “felt” by the ears.⁶² These scientific developments bring a fuller understanding of the multisensory and synaesthetic triggers which Wordsworth thinks accompany the experience of perception.

⁶¹ Coleridge largely undermines his synaesthetic claim in one of the letters where he claims that “[T]here are Sounds more sublime than any sight can be, more absolutely ...” (*Friend II*, 275).

⁶² Castel declared “J’y trouvais quelque part que si dans le temps d’un beau concert nous pouvions voir l’air agité de tous les frémissements divers que les voix et les instruments y excitent nous serions tous étonnés de le voir semé des couleurs les plus vives et les mieux assorties; voilà une de ces idées que j’appelle des semences de découvertes” (248).

Wordsworth uses at least three devices to merge light and sound; anaphoric ellipsis, zeugma and paranomasia. These are efficient in conveying synaesthesia, yet their efficiency depends on Wordsworth's power to manipulate them and not in the genuine synaesthetic experience. I am not proposing that there are poems where synaesthesia is genuine and others where it is not. My contention is that because synaesthesia is fated to be manipulated by language, it loses some of its original intensity. The other predicament befalling synaesthesia as a physiological phenomenon is that it loses momentum in adulthood. The poems of the early years and those that are mainly written from the vantage point of the past – which marks the naturalness of the child's senses – record the failure to recuperate the synaesthetic potential in adulthood. I take this failure to suggest that synaesthetic behavior does not develop over time and that it does not grow into quirks of intersensory connectivity in adulthood. While natural and spontaneous in childhood, it is bound to be contrived in adulthood. Since the recuperation of childhood sensorium is an impossible dream, Wordsworth edges closer to it by discursively engaging and honing the senses of seeing and hearing for which he created an idiosyncratic symbolic language.

In "An Evening Walk" Wordsworth wilds metaphorical, transcendental and scientific versions of light and sound in order to reproduce and sustain the synaesthetic experience of the past. I will use the poem as a gateway to the study of Wordsworth's early experimentation with synaesthesia. I shall demonstrate how Wordsworth mangles his phrases synaesthetically by crossing hearing and vision, and how through the creative possibilities of synaesthesia he enhances and consolidates metaphors.⁶³

⁶³ The overlap between synaesthesia and metaphor is a theme developed by Richard Cytowich's *Synaesthesia: A Union of the Senses*, John Harrison and Simon Baron Cohen's *Synaesthesia: Classic and Contemporary Readings*.

Now o'er the sooth'd accordant heart we feel
A sympathetic twilight slowly steal,
And ever, as we fondly muse, we find
The soft gloom deepening on the tranquil mind.
Stay! pensive, sadly-pleasing visions, stay! (315-19)

The “accordant heart” has deliberately and extensively reflected on the sensed realities of light and shade and has endorsed them as part of the natural scene and its own response to that scene. Likewise the “sympathetic twilight,” now in tune with the heart, “slowly steal[s]” and is not coercive. It is on such experiences of metaphorical conversions that the foundations of Wordsworth’s synaesthetic breakthrough are laid. Like “Descriptive Sketches” the poem was dismissed as an aesthetic failure owing to its allegiance to the eighteenth-century picturesque tradition.⁶⁴ Yet it moves us steadily toward the more sophisticated and informed use of synaesthesia in the poetry of the Great decade. As a prelude to the phenomenon of synaesthesia treated intermittently in the poem, Wordsworth exaggerates attention to the contrast of light and shade or what is known in the art of painting as chiaroscuro. The concept is immediately introduced through the twilight, which continues to be the dominant tableau until it is overruled by darkness. It is granted a power of enchantment as it stitches the segments within shade and light, and sound and light together: “And shades of deep-embattled clouds were seen, / Spotting the northern cliffs with lights between” (39-40). The chiaroscuro is succinctly expressed in the lines “With restless interchange at once the bright / Wins on the shade, the shade upon the light” (297-98). By winning on each other, Wordsworth means that light and shade both intercept each other efficiently and lose themselves in one another in such a way that it becomes difficult

⁶⁴ For criticism of Wordsworth’s own rejection of the picturesque tradition see James Heffernan’s *Wordsworth’s Theory of Poetry: The Transforming Imagination*.

to draw a line of demarcation between them. Despite their tonal contrasts, they overlap and develop as a unity. This overlapping is carefully developed over a dozen lines:

Now, with religious awe, the farewell light
Blends with the solemn colouring of night;
'Mid groves of clouds that crest the mountain's brow,
And round the west's proud lodge their shadows throw,
Like Una shining on her gloomy way,
The half-seen form of Twilight roams astray;
Shedding, through paly loop-holes mild and small,
Gleams that upon the lake's still bosom fall;
Soft o'er the surface creep those lustres pale
Tracking the motions of the fitful gale.
With restless interchange at once the bright
Wins on the shade, the shade upon the light. (287-98)

The passage draws attention to the mixture of light and shade in twilight not only as a natural appearance but, more importantly, as an object of intrigue to the senses and to the mind. Miller observes that in the evening, as opposed to daytime, “a new kind of work takes place, that of listening and thinking” (81). The intrigue starts in the meditative prelude and simmers through the middle of the poem until the perceiver comes to terms with it near the end. Light and shade are unified and their union results in a sense of timelessness of deep imaginative significance for the perceiver. The striking qualities of contrasted light and shade are that they have uniform motion and uniform rest despite their distinguished dynamical properties. It could even be argued that their intimate reciprocity is made more significant, paradoxically, because the force of the one is met with an equivalent and opposite reaction from the other. Then comes the passage from the binary of light and shade to the binary of light and sound:

No favoured eye was e'er allowed to gaze
On lovelier spectacle in faery days;
When gentle Spirits urged a sportive chase,
Brushing with lucid wands the water's face:
While music, stealing round the glimmering deeps,

Charmed the tall circle of the enchanted steeps. (299-304)

The landscape is both visually and auditorily determined. As the music moves on the water stealthily and unobtrusively, the relationship of the perceiver to the landscape stops being defined in overwhelmingly visual terms. The ear becomes a significant part of it for it is not merely called forth to make sense of nature's mutually responsive sounds as when the bittern "fills" the valleys with its cries (19), the brooks pour forth a "wildwood strain," (87) but as an aid to the eye that is starting to be weary. The strong visual impulse at work since the beginning of the poem already starts drooping and waning in line 68 when "the eye reposes on a secret bridge," if only temporarily. It soon sets itself back to work. Even as it is enwrapped by the twilight, which, it should be recalled, is a period of the day characterized by dim and diffused light, the eye still craves the enchanting and animated landscape until eventually "on the dark earth the wearied vision fails" (308). Failing vision is immediately compensated by acute hearing. Faced with a preponderate darkness, the traveller endeavors to make at least his "pensive sadly-pleasing visions" (319) abide when he is suddenly surprised by his ear taking over and preparing to commune with the sound of the bird:

....., who ceased, with fading light, to thread
Silent the hedge or steamy rivulet's bed,
From his grey re-appearing tower shall soon
Salute with gladsome note the rising moon,
While with a hoary light she frosts the ground,
And pours a deeper blue to Aether's bound;
Pleased, as she moves, her pomp of clouds to fold
In robes of azure, fleecy-white, and gold. (323-30)

In this passage, synaesthesia consists in having a distant yet audible sound compensate for the deficiency of light. As in many other poems notably "To the Cuckoo" the locatedness of the bird does not seem to matter as its "gladsome note" is expected to enter the content

of auditory perception as an event rather than a property of the sounding object. Like the cuckoo, described as “an invisible thing / A voice, a mystery” (15-16), the bird derives its significance from the fact that it feeds the insight, inspiration and creativity of the eye, as the pinnacle of sublimity.

Despite the farness of sound, the traveller anticipates to engage quite easily in an active listening experience. Instead of weakening and undermining sound, distance deepens it and creates affinity with the imagination. Odgen notes that “distance serves Wordsworth as a principle means through which imagination exercises its power ... the intervening distance helps bring about an imaginative transformation in that object, elevating the commonplace to poetic significance” (246). The emphasis on distance does not integrate the poem for the first time in this passage. Earlier instances “Yon isle, which feels not even the milk-maid’s feet, / Yet hears her song, ‘by distance made more sweet’” (236-37), “Sweet are the sounds that mingle from afar, / Heard by calm lakes, as peeps the folding star” (279-80) prepare for the transformation of hearing from a mechanical act at the ear to an inner sensation. The effect of distance is consolidated by darkness, which itself accentuates the sublimity of sound.

Wordsworth focuses on darkness to achieve some kind of sublime communion with the sound and to set the synthetic imagination to work. Yet if bodily vision is not the capacity operative in darkness, it is still enchanted by the moonlight, which changes from “hoary” to “deeper blue” to “azure, fleecy-white and gold.” Moonlight wins again for the eye the capacity for color discrimination. With a sleight of hand, Wordsworth changes the synaesthetic terms from sound and light to sound and color. The myriad colors of the moonlight are comparable to the bird’s “gladsome notes” in terms of dynamism and

development from a basic form. They are a developed form of mere light in the same exact way that the bird's "gladsome notes" are a developed form of sound. It could be argued that in outstripping mere light, the colors of moonlight become analogous and even identical in function and effect to music, which, as we have said, outstrips mere sound. The moonlight colors are music for the eye. This notion is a crucial argument in *Airey-Force Valley*:

How sensitive
Is the light ash! That pendant from the brow
Of yon dim cave, in seeming silence makes
A soft eye-music of slow waving boughs,
Powerful almost as vocal harmony. (11-15)

The force underpinning this vision is that it has two operative capacities; light and sound. Light enchants the eye by filling silence. The resultant audible silence is perceived as "vocal harmony," which roughly refers to a style of vocal music where assonance is created from dissonance. It is not the "slow waving boughs" that offer a visual spectacle but the "light ash" transpiring from the "brow of yon dim cave." Making its way out of a "dim cave," light transpires through the boughs offering itself as harmonious music to the eye. Beyond the mere fact that light and sound are not contrastive the passage suggests that their amalgamation is "powerful almost as vocal harmony" probably because it alleviates chaos and contingency. "Eye music" is the most harmonious representation of the visual spectacle not only because the eye captures all the motions of light – even those which would otherwise be occluded – but also because it coherently transforms the unitary persistent visible object (light) to a whole array. The perceptual awareness of the environment is not segmented into light and sound separately. It is as homogenous as "vocal harmony," which in place of the incoherent union that might be caused by the

random acting of different notes or their intentional isolation, creates close correspondence and unity.⁶⁵

The attention that this passage from *Airey-Force Valley* draws to the value of light as music for the eye recalls a few lines written in the *Alfoxden Notebook* and taken off from Book 14 of *The Prelude*: “There would he stand ... / Would gaze upon the moon until its light / Fell like a strain of music on his soul.” Moonlight is felt as music, and this music binds the perceiver to the actuality of what he is perceiving while also mediating the very perception to the soul. The perceiver experiences both music and moonlight as coextensive phenomena. Moonlight is identified as music and music is encoded as light. The former is present to the perceiving consciousness inasmuch it is constituted as a musical assimilation and vice versa. As the speaker “gazes” or contemplates the scene and writes it, the perception cannot itself be disengaged from its effect on the soul; what is perceived as the poet writes, the experience of the scene in the very punctual moment of perception is indeed constituted by its assimilation as music for the soul. Visual perception *per se* is not absent as much as it is unobtrusive, inapparent and rendered through the medium of feeling – “a strain of music” – for the purpose of implementing it successfully in the soul. The *Airey-Force Valley* passage could be used to demonstrate that because of its substantiality, light is engaged more significantly than sound. Other liquid metaphors such as “But He beholds the light, and whence it flows” (“Intimations Ode” 69), “a fountain light of all our day” (“Intimations Ode” 151) as well as “Thou Eglantine, so bright with sunny

⁶⁵ The use of “music for the eye” attests to Wordsworth’s influence by a long line of thinkers beginning with Newton who claimed in *Opticks* (1704) that the spaces between the seven primary colours were similar to the spaces between the notes of the octave (134) to French Jesuit Father Louis Bertrand Castel who invented the “color organ”; a device built to represent sound or accompany music in a visual medium. Darwin too has dwelt on the same analogy and famously added the *Melody of Colours* as a note to his *Temple of Nature*.

showers” (“‘Tis said that some have died for love” 37) suggest that light is always better perceived as water sound or water music.

In the following part, I shall analyze two instances of synaesthesia where sound is projected as light. I shall start by “Three years she grew in sun and shower” then move on to the Boy of Winander episode. These texts have a similar pattern, which begins with the symbolic, continues with the sensible and the intelligible, and concludes with representations. In the first lyric, the child is an acutely sensitive natural being:

Nor shall she fail to see
Even in the motions of the Storm
Grace that shall mould the Maiden's form
By silent sympathy.
“The stars of midnight shall be dear
To her; and she shall lean her ear
In many a secret place
Where rivulets dance their wayward round,
And beauty born of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face. (21-30)

There are two interrelated moments of human and natural mutual surrender. In “lean[ing] her ear / In many a secret place / Where rivulets dance their wayward round” (26-28), the maiden discloses broad and various sluices of human thoughts to the rivulets. The rivulets respond by uttering a beautiful “murmuring sound.” The ear is beguiled and enchanted by the natural sound, and the sound, equally beguiled by the human ear, is led down to dwell on it until its effect transpires as beauty on the human face. The ear and the rivulets, the human and the natural, function in each other’s terms. Synaesthesia consists in having the “murmuring sound” project itself as beauty on the girl’s face. Two main reasons invite an understanding of beauty as light; the first is that beauty is a form of rejuvenation and re-birth from sound (both archetypal symbolic attributes of light), the second is the chain of

symbolism in the rest of the poem which rests mainly on the bi-polarity of beauty and darkness.

Beautification by light is also a form of beatification, the exaltation of this one natural maiden above all others and her singling out for eternal blessed happiness. The light on the girl's face becomes even more prominent owing to the dimness of environmental light. Note that the temporal setting marking the scene of this interchange is lit only by "the stars of midnight" (25). The character of the maiden does not gather up around light. She is herself light. In one of the other so called "Lucy Poems" the maiden is said to be "Fair as a star, when only one / Is shining in the sky" ("She dwelt among the untrodden ways" 7-8). The reference here is to planet Venus, the morning star, or the star of light. What is significant about this star is that it symbolizes death and rebirth by virtue of being alternatively a morning and an evening star.

As far as the girl is concerned, this reciprocal interchange marks a passage from a natural predisposition to an affective, hence human experience. For the sound there is no such passage from one realm into another. In trafficking between the natural and the human, the sound proves to be beyond the lifeless and the living although its influence on the living remains more conspicuous by virtue of brightening the human face. The derivation of light from sound and the subsequent stilling of sound as light on the girl's face is a premonition of her death; her repossession by nature as if sound has been called on to bring her back to nature. Nature coerces the sound into compliance by fixing it as light on the girl's face, and the sound wins the girl back to nature by dying on her face, thus bestowing on her "the silence and the calm / Of mute insensate things" (17-18). The truth that undergirds or forms the origin of the chain of coercive influence is that nature intends to make the girl an inmate

of her universe after allowing her to undergo the human experience: “The Child I to myself will take; / She shall be mine, and I will make / A Lady of my own” (4-6). The girl is an epitome of the natural being, who, in undergoing a tripartite process of abiding, procession, and return or conversion to nature, confirms nature as super-eminently identical to itself, pre-containing everything in itself and claiming it back in its original form after it has undergone a different experience. This is encapsulated in the lines: “Myself will to my darling be / Both law and impulse” (7-8).

Since the knowledge that nature imparts is never pervasive, its mysteries lie wrapped in the darkness that immediately follows the advent of light on the girl’s face – in hidden silence. In this configuration, the stilling of sound or its reversion to its original form of silence is understood as a step toward a higher light or enlightenment; that is, the knowledge that nature intimates to her inmate girl. The deprivation of light changes the course of action; from the sensible and intelligible contemplation of nature that would have been possible if the chain of interaction with nature ushered in by visual contemplation (“see[ing] / ... the motions of the storm”) had not been interrupted to an arcane and esoteric knowledge of nature. Enlightenment by sound, responsible for the illumination of the girl’s face, is a prelude to the enlightenment of spirit, which culminates in the ultimate reunion of the girl and nature through her death. This thought of repossession by nature as a step subsequent to synaesthesia is couched in terms very reminiscent of the Boy of Winander episode.

The Boy of Winander’s synaesthetic experience is patently strong. Wordsworth subverts or at least contorts the traditional taxonomy of light as essence and sound as substance by making the light of the Boy’s heart the space which preserves the sound’s inherent and unchanging nature, thus transforming sound into essence and light into

substance. Sound is the potentiality from which the manifestations of light are actualized. What makes the Boy's synaesthetic experience similar to the maiden's in "Three years she grew in sun and shower" is that the auditory stimulus starts off a visual sensory effect then makes room for silence – its counterpart in terms of function and effect – to carry out the task. John Blades affirms that "[h]ootings speedily become the 'riotous sounds', and the riot speedily, mysteriously becomes an awesome silence, a void" (27). The owls' manifold response to the Boy's calls; "quivering peals, / And long halloos and screams, and echoes loud, / Redoubled and redoubled, concourse wild / Of jocund din" (376-79) as well as the usurping "voice / Of mountain torrents" (383-84) constitute a veritable cacophony of voices that rightly merit the Bakhtinian critical description of "polyphonic." They are all assimilated by the Boy as "a visible scene /... / With all its solemn imagery" (384-86).

The visible scene contains immediate visual output as well as sounds. It is the images of these sounds that are actually mapped onto the Boy's heart. The translation of sounds in light ensures that they never be cut off from the human heart as if by themselves sounds are unable to access the heart, are not capable of inwardness. The synaesthetic experience reaches a climax when the Boy's voice is hushed, when "his best skill" is "baffled", *i.e.*, in the death of sound. While the Boy means the suspension of sound to refine the quality of his hearing, he is surprised by the emergence of echoes in his heart. From that point on, the ear's role is undermined. Instead, silence heightens vision and is most readily associated with the boy's consciousness of nature. In other words, silence is seen rather than heard. The auditory pitch of the owls' sounds is mapped onto some sort of visual elevation. This type of silence, it should be recalled, is different from the silence experienced when both senses are

subdued; the moment Duncan Wu describes as a “mystical suspension” (“Navigated by Magic” 362).

Sound and light abide in silence as the creative principles of a bi-unity that reaches the heart in the form of an echo. Hollander argues that “Echoing, for Wordsworth, is so central a figure of representation and plays such an important part in the dialogue of nature and consciousness” (*Figure of Echo* 18). The echo is the resultant unity from the combination of light and sound. Wordsworth’s metamorphosed version of echo is that it is at once infinite and definite. Because of its incessant replication of sounds, the echo is infinite, yet because the replicated sounds sternly abide by the law of the expansion of light within and upon them, the echo is definite. The echo has two major characteristics. It changes the nature of the interaction of sound and light from differential to interferential, thereby giving them equal or nearly equal intensity. This interferentiality in turns allows sound and light to integrate the vicinity of the imagination and to exert an intensifying effect on its flow pattern. In Wordsworth’s later comment on the Boy of Winander episode he says: “Guided by one of my own primary consciousnesses, I have represented a commutation and transfer of internal feelings, co-operating with the external accidents, to plant, for immortality, images of sound and sight, in the celestial soil of the imagination” (*PW* II. 440). Just what exactly does Wordsworth mean when he claims that light and sound are “plant[ed] for immortality” as images in the imagination? One way to answer this question is to recall that as Jarvis said, “imagination is the capacity for experience” (217). Experience is understood as incommensurable, comprising the lived experience and the poetic experience. The latter is more challenging because it has to smooth over the possible latent discrepancies of sound and light. Even more than the ostensible report of

the immediate experience, the synaesthetic experience runs the risk of being flattened out, of losing momentum when it is conveyed as an image. In implementing synaesthesia in the text; that is, in passing from bi-sensory perception to mental percepts related to metaphor, and thence to creative synaesthetic writing, the content itself of synaesthesia is jeopardized and might not be captured in full. As a form of representation, the image can weaken the force of synaesthesia. Wordsworth's wish to "plant for immortality, images of sound and light in the celestial soil of the imagination" suggests the intention to consolidate the tenuous bond of light and sound with the imagination while preserving the latter's integral form. "Plant" is an apt metaphor because in both scientific and literary senses it means to fix and to set in the ground to grow. Its use in the sentence suggests that synaesthesia is a living organism that is likely to sprout in the rich soil of the imagination. A great deal here lies on the thesis that imagination itself evolves organically and that it is an amalgam of the components that have been embedded and instilled in it. The argument I am making is that Wordsworth uses the botanic metaphor of planting to suggest that what is planted – images of sound and light – is embedded in the imagination, and not simply correlated with it. What is at stake is identity, and not merely constitution. It is within this framework of expansion and overall increase of its basis that imagination is thought to inform and promote the principle of self-consciousness which enters the passage with the sinuous transformation from the third person's vantage point into the first-person interiorized monologue, focusing on the speaker's philosophical insights.

3 Image and voice

The correlation between image and voice and its association with certain linguistic behaviors constitute one of the most robust forms of synaesthesia in Wordsworth's poetry.

Two preliminary remarks are due before analyzing this type of cross-model correspondence. The first concerns the voice intrinsically and the second applies to both the voice and the image. Natural voice, like human vision, is foundational and originary. In Book 1 of *The Prelude*, where are exposed a number of false starts and discarded themes which had to be endured before a firm central theme could be established, Wordsworth wonders “Was it for this” that Derwent “sent a voice / that flowed along my dreams?” (273-74) and “[made] ceaseless music that composed my thoughts / To more than infant softness” (277-78)? He expected the blending of the voice of the river and his “nurse’s song” to expand consciousness and to provide a source of inspiration in adulthood. The natural voice is also soothing and comforting. In the *River Duddon* Wordsworth says that the purpose of the voice of the river is “to heal and to restore, / To soothe and cleanse, not madden and pollute!” (VIII.13-14). The river sings in its own voice: “Sole listener, Duddon! to the breeze that play’d / With thy clear voice, I caught the fitful sound / Wafted o’er sullen moss and craggy mound” (V. 1–3). In “An Evening Walk” he confesses to have “taught, a happy child / The echoes of your rocks my carols wild” (13-14).

The second remark is that the image and the voice are mediated, the former because it is a form of representation, therefore twice removed from the visual experience generating it, and the latter because it is its nature as an acoustical event to be mediated. The eye perceives what is available in the sensible manifold. In the language of Cavarero “[s]ight ... perceives every object that is in front of the onlooker – objects that are characterized by permanence in time and space. They are stable, lasting, present” (37). The image, on the opposite, invokes thought – itself a long gestation of apperception or mental assimilation –

and not the immediate object of perception.⁶⁶ The standard uses of imagery, symbol and figuration in general is an attempt to go beyond the categories of immediate visual experiences, to stretch and to transform them. The image, on this account, may stand for the distortion of reality, which, in the Aristotelian terminology, is referred to as the original. In *Intersections* Rajan and Clark note that “If one takes the standpoint of the original, then the image will represent a falling away, a derivativeness, a certain decline, in short, remoteness from the truth,” but one could also say that within the discourse of mimesis, the image could also have “the positive value of being disclosive of the original” (67). In the case of Wordsworth the image – which is the most invaluable correlate of the mental processes which govern thought and a fundamental tool of poetic creation – is faced with the demand to own up to its original that is, the sensation or feeling from which it springs.

The image cannot be said to leave behind the sensuous element and to operate purely in the realm of the figurative. It is, as I have noted elsewhere in this thesis, an amalgamation of sensuousness and figuration. The questions that come to mind are how to account for Wordsworth’s imagistic engagement with and representation of an auditory subject matter? What are the conditions for the possibility of aurally representing a visual act? The answer to the first question is offered in *The River Duddon*; synaesthesia widens perception and perspective although not all the sonnets in the collection can claim to produce that effect. *The River Duddon* is generally thought to be prototypical of Wordsworth’s pictorialist poetics that is antithetical to the poetics of the imagination. Peter Simonsen claims that when

⁶⁶ Karl Lange made very explicit the fundamental difference between perception and apperception. “In order that a sensation may arise, there is, as a rule, a fusion or union of its content with similar ideas and feelings. With the assistance of the latter, the sensation is held in consciousness, elevated into greater clearness properly related to the remaining fields of thought, and so truly assimilated. We call this second act, in distinction from that of simple perception or the reception of a sensation, APPERCEPTION or mental assimilation” (5).

Wordsworth “turned to the sonnet” in the later years, he “turned to a form ... that would result in the creation of a palpable, concrete and above all visual poetry. Visual is meant both in the sense of being more about the visible, external world of matter ... and in the sense of calling attention to itself as a visual form on the page” (“Italic Typography” 864). The voice of the cataract flowing from the Seathwaite tarn into the Duddon is orchestrated as an image.

My frame hath often trembled with delight
When hope presented some far-distant good,
That seemed from heaven descending, like the flood
Of yon pure waters, from their aery height,
Hurrying, with lordly Duddon to unite;
Who, mid a world of images imprest
On the calm depth of his transparent breast,
Appears to cherish most that Torrent white,
The fairest, softest, liveliest of them all!
And seldom hath ear listen'd to a tune
More lulling than the busy hum of Noon,
Swoln by that voice – whose murmur musical
Announces to the thirsty fields a boon
Dewy and fresh, till showers again shall fall. (XIX 1-14)

The music of the river is simultaneously heard and perceived. It is heard as soothing harmonious music and perceived as a mixture of colored shapes and scintillations. The trigger of the synaesthetic response is the voice of the Seathwaite tarn rushing into the river Duddon, which is immediately perceived as an image impressing on the surface of the river's “transparent breast.” In being ready to reflect the image of the torrent's voice as it mingles with its own, the river is itself an accomplice. The reflected voice is refined into “a tune / More lulling than the busy hum of Noon.” Lulling suggests the easeful pleasure felt by the perceiver/listener and at once the harmonious cohabitation of image and voice. The compound mixture of image and voice leads to the inexhaustible play of manifestations, deployments, combinations and reverberations that are distilled by the ear as “murmur

musical.” Where “murmur” suggests the intimacy between the perceiver and perceived, it could be considered the moment at which perception and perspective are widened. At the beginning of the passage Wordsworth is content with describing the direct experience that synesthesia typifies. Then he moves closer to the emotional account of that experience.

“The Solitary Reaper” is another example of synaesthesia where the image is translated into a voice.

BEHOLD her single in the field,
Yon solitary Highland Lass!
Reaping and singing by herself;
Stop here, or gently pass!
Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
And sings a melancholy strain;
O Listen! For the Vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound. (1-8)

The voice is so prominent that the image of the girl singing is by comparison a mere alterable adjunct. The sonorous revelation is what makes up the girl’s embodied uniqueness. It is important to note that while at the beginning of the poem the environmental visual flow does not overpower the voice, at the end the voice overpowers the visual flow. The continuous outpouring of the voice/song is no longer synchronized with vision. The voice itself now stills the image, gradually becoming an image of stillness. Convinced that the song will fade away, the listener bears it in his heart as he leaves the spot:

Whate’er the theme, the Maiden sang
As if her song could have no ending;
I saw her singing at her work,
And o’er the sickle bending;-
I listened, motionless and still;
And, as I mounted up the hill,
The music in my heart I bore,
Long after it was heard no more. (25-32)

We get both a sense of temporal momentum through sight – “I saw her singing” – and of fused visual and aural impressions after the speaker leaves the spot. “The music in my heart I bore” suggests that the speaker does not fixate on the echoes of the sound ringing in his ears as the last dying impressions of an acoustic event. Rather the song endures in his heart. It does not flatten away even if it is not initially given priority. The priority is rather oddly given to sight. The speaker sees the “Highland Lass” rather than hears her singing. Maybe the initial emphasis on sight suggests that the song itself was not attractive, or that it is not of much interest to the perceiver because it is sung unmindfully while the singer was “at her work.” In the preceding strophe he conjectures that her song may be about “old, unhappy, far-of things / And battles long ago / Or is it some more humble lay” (19-21). The emphasis on vision has two purposes. The first is to put off the speaker’s involvement with the Maiden’s voice until the voice itself becomes so compelling that the speaker is unable to resist it. The second is that it avoids the suggestion that the voice could be emptied of its semantic significance and yet endure, or that the vocal can have a value that is independent of its semantics. The formulation “I saw her singing” signals that the visual is inscribed within the auditory and synaesthetic sensibility. “BEHOLD her, single in the field, / Yon solitary Highland Lass / Reaping and singing by herself” (1-3) gets us far away from the range of the ordinary meanings of song to get us closer to the theme of voice. In the middle of his praise for the song, the speaker’s attention suddenly shifts to the voice as though the voice has suddenly impinged on the vision that is underway:

A voice so thrilling ne’er was heard
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides. (13-16)

The Maiden's voice is superior to the cuckoo's by virtue of signifying. Aristotle declares in the *Politics* that man's voice is an acoustic phenomenon that despite being distinguished from logos can have both sematic valence and emotional value. Cavarero explains that for Aristotle "only in man is the voice signifying, *semantike*. With the other animals the voice is instead a 'sign' [*semeion*] of pain or pleasure, a cry or a yelp"(34). Despite the absence of interlocution, the perceiver communicates with the Maiden through her voice by which he is enchanted and mesmerized. The "vale profound" is also overflowed with the song so much so that it becomes its second natural "habitat." Intrinsically untied to the body that produces it and easily emancipating itself from its physical source, the voice reverberates in the vale, joining the natural surroundings and the sensitive listener in a sematic space: "O listen! For the vale profound / Is overflowing with the sound" (7-8). There is joining together through the voice as *logos*.

When vision saturates, the perceiver "listen'd, motionless and still" (29). His ear takes over not only because it does not have a similar saturation threshold as vision and is capable of sustaining acoustical sounds without distorting them, but because it cannot help communing with the Maiden's voice. The intensity of this communion is translated in the image of the ascent ("As I mounted up the hill"), which invites an understanding of the experience in transcendental terms. The singularity of the experience of hearing and vision is realized in the image of the ascent in which Wordsworth gains an insight into the individual essence of the song as voice, a voice that enchants through the emotion it imparts even if its theme remains unknown. This insight prompts the use of "music" at the close of the poem: "[t]he music in my heart I bore / After it was heard no more" (32). The song has imparted some of its expressiveness in the form of music as melody not as lyrics.

The melody is steeped with meaning although its words remain unknown. It is devoid of words, yet still has a semantic content. At the beginning of the poem, the speaker's consciousness of the song is concurrent with his perception of the singer. Hearing and perceiving constitute one single physical phenomenon. By means of this unified mental state, the speaker has a consciousness of the melody and of himself listening and perceiving. At the end of the poem hearing the music alone reflects the image of the Maiden at her work, and of himself as listener and perceiver. He no longer experiences the song as objective but precisely as a subjective experience. The music, borne in the heart not in the ear, is now lived through and no longer apprehended in an objectified manner. The image substantiates the voice. It makes the voice perceptually appear, and thereby more easily apprehended.

Epilogue

This thesis focuses on the prominent roles of the eye and the ear in Wordsworth who wrote in a period where, Jackson explains, “as the principle inroad to knowledge, sensation was understood to be the first and most important building-block in the history of human understanding” (*Science* 70). Although the subject I deal with is quite familiar in Wordsworth criticism, its different ramifications have not been fully explored. There is a continuing project of negotiation of these ramifications. My thesis, I hope, contributes to the boom in interdisciplinary scholarship in Romantic studies and stakes out for itself a place in the ongoing debate about the possibility of establishing the truth about the relation of the senses to the imagination that would absorb all or most of the different nuances of the imagination; a power which Wordsworth himself leaves open to critical interpretation. Simon Jarvis explains that “wherever [he] tries in verse to say what imagination is, Wordsworth becomes more than usually cataloguing or paratactic. Even when the sentence starts as though about to offer us the definition, it ends otherwise” (222). Wordsworth interweaves the various and variegated strands of the subject of the senses’ relation to the imagination throughout his writing in a way that shows sometimes explicitly and sometimes quite implicitly the layered interconnections between the eye and ear and almost every other subject on which he wrote. Because of the bearing of this subject on many other adjacent subjects, it has been difficult to establish once and for all Wordsworth’s final stand on it. Another impediment is Wordsworth’s own pervasive claims of sweeping apart the Empirical tradition. This claim has been so convincing that it has become entrenched. It has acquired the status of truism and seriously undercut many potential critical possibilities. Despite his own emphasis on the crucial role of the senses in the working of the mind, criticism of his work has had understandably enough a degree of ambiguity in its assertions.

I submit that although Wordsworth is not forthcoming in acknowledging his debt to Empiricism, he creates a literary acceptance of Empiricism and seeks to steer a middle course between Empiricism and the imagination. His aim in propounding the theory that imagination is inextricably related to the senses is to liberate the imagination from its ancient metaphysical associations, and, especially to bring peace to Empiricism and imagination, which have long been considered antithetical.

In reassessing the visual and aural phenomenology in Wordsworth's poetry, this thesis might seem in some places to sit astride the line dividing Wordsworth the poet and Wordsworth the philosopher. I am aware that Wordsworth's discourse sometimes comes closer to the type of writing that would be both literary and philosophical. It has not been my purpose, however, to treat Wordsworth as a philosopher. I follow the lead of Scofield who believes that "the answer to [philosophical questions] was not a matter of philosophy or theology for Wordsworth, but of poetry. Poetry can establish, can present the nature of man and his place in the world in a moment of feeling, which has an unanswerable authenticity" (353).⁶⁷ Where the elucidation of Wordsworth's complex ideas necessitates the use of philosophy, I use some philosophical notions from Heidegger and Kant. Yet I only apply them in terms of general tendencies. My outlook remains that of a literary critic outside philosophy and circumscribed to minor but relevant details as they coincide specifically with their correlates and antinomies in Wordsworth's complex thought.

My subject opened up such an immense scope of poetic corpus that I had of necessity been selective in the choice of materials for analysis. And since my thesis only attempts to

⁶⁷ For a critique of the confluence of poetry and philosophy see Matthew Arnold Preface to his selection of Wordsworth in 1879, T.S. Elliot *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism: Studies in the Relation of Criticism to Poetry in England*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986; F.R. Leavis *Revaluation: Tradition & Development in English Poetry*. Chatto & Windus, 1936; Simon Jarvis *Wordsworth's Philosophical Song*.

isolate a tendency, rather than to make a claim about the essential character of Wordsworth's work, I only singled out the examples that in my judgment best interpret the roles of the eye and ear in their own right. I hope that my review of the most important overlapping waves of scholarship accurately pinpoints Wordsworth's several philosophical allegiances for which different parts of his poetry make a case. In addition to philosophy and neurophysiology, critics of Wordsworth used other sciences such as psychology and psychoanalysis to fruitfully explore and enrich the debate about Wordsworth's imagination and its relation to the senses. I have only used the sciences of physiology and philosophy to extend the basis upon which Wordsworth's imagination could be understood as inextricably linked to the senses.

In terms of thematic interest, I took my cue from Hartman who, according to David P. Haney, "has refused to reduce the relation between the eye and ear in Wordsworth either to a politically motivated sign or to particular representational model" (177). Any political and social stakes that the phenomenology of seeing and hearing might have were held in abeyance because they are beyond the thematic scope of the thesis.

The gist of my argument in the first two chapters is that Wordsworth's source of imaginative power is eclectic and that imagination, though the ultimate supply, is not a point of origin for it has itself a "Fair seed-time" (*Prelude* 1. 301). Embracing Jarvis's illuminating idea that thinking in Wordsworth is "affective" and "bodily," I demonstrate that the vision performed by the "inner eye" is a moment wrought with physicality, and that imagination is empowered by its bond to the "bodily eye." By "return to the visible" I did not mean to suggest that Wordsworth steps back into the ground of the visible after encountering and discovering the imagination. On the opposite he confirms through this

return the coterminous necessity while being on the grounds of the imagination of taking a step into the realm of the visible in order to warrant the regeneration and sustenance of the imagination.

The prismatic character of the imagination has inspired antithetical critical attitudes. What I call the “visionary trend” argues that the imagination comes into the full recognition and ownership of itself in transcending nature, and in this transcendence it relinquishes and even disparages the “bodily eye.” The “materialist trend,” on the opposite, argues that because it has long been repressed, the visible comes back to haunt. Sweeping aside the overbearing influence of these accepted doctrines, I lodge my argument in a middle ground and argue for the necessity of “the return to the visible,” which is different from Galperin’s “the return of the visible” in that it capitalizes on the spontaneity rather than on the compulsiveness of this return.

The culminating idea in the first chapter is that imagination is a form of self-relation which remains connected to the “bodily eye.” Although the latter is different from the imagination, and, in many ways, inferior to it, it remains the condition for the possibility of its being. I attempted to elucidate the way the eye traffics between the ontic and the phenomenological. I showed that the return to the visible (the material or the ontic) is a circling back into a sense of origin from within the imagination, which tires to secure its own sustenance. Yet this return never slips into the ontic proper since it is induced by the imagination. The salient problem I dealt with in my analysis of *The Prelude* and “Tintern Abbey” is where to draw the line between the ontic and the imaginative. The chapter has three divisions. The first – the ontological value – argues that the return to the visible advances the poet’s ontological inquiry. In the second part I dealt with the epistemological value and submit

that it also bears on the ontological question. I discussed Wordsworth's and Coleridge's positions concerning the antithesis of realism and idealism. While Coleridge's thought starts with realism and ends in idealism, in Wordsworth there is no increasing importance of idealism to the detriment of realism. Both must necessarily be joined in the production of knowledge. In the third part of this chapter – the discursive value – I focused on the role of figuration and the rhetorical reconstruction of the visual experience. I argued that Wordsworth shares and rejects Locke's mistrust of language. On the one hand, he urges a heightened vigilance to the myriad ways in which language misleads, the reason being that the text cannot ascertain unerringly what is visual from what is imaginative and visionary. On the other hand, he argues that it is only the revisionary poetics that causes the mind to step back in order to think through its own acts and revise its own topography, and only the discursive that purveys knowledge about the proper limits of the visual and the imaginative.

In the second chapter, I offered a close reading of the episode of the crossing of the Alps in Book 6 of *The Prelude*. I argued that the imagination –which finally triumphs over the failing memory of 1790 and the massive concrete presence of nature – is hermeneutically present since the beginning of the episode. Most of all, it triumphs over the “bodily eye” – which holds on to nature – by, paradoxically, yielding to its overwhelming exhilaration. Since the ambition to overcome the tyranny of the eye starts in the two former pieces narrating Wordsworth's Alpine expedition; the 1790 letter to Dorothy and *Descriptive Sketches*, and that both inform an integrative reading of Book 6, I referred to them with the purpose of trying to establish the new strategies that Wordsworth uses in Book 6 in order to triumph over the eye and the failing memory. Although *Descriptive Sketches* paves the way to the full blossom of the imagination in Book 6, I do

not really focus on it because as Ramsey says “[t]he poems of 1793 take us repeatedly to the brink of insight that Wordsworth articulated successfully just a few years later”(37). First I studied the interplay of the ontic states of hoping and wishing, how it constitutes a particular relation to time, which is used as a witness to Wordsworth’s imaginative power. By intermingling retrospective and prospective potentialities, hoping and wishing open up the narrative of remembrance to the yet unrealized imaginative possibilities. In the second part of the chapter I examined the imagination and the discursive labor of authentication. In Book 6 the memory of the Alpine experience has to be brought back to the fore in order to be authenticated. This authentication is problematic because of the failing memory of 1790. This failure creates a situation of impasse and the impasse leads to the “trial” which always brings Wordsworth back to his imagination. The synergy of memory and imagination is thus embedded in the episode whose motive is from the onset the transfiguration rather than the remembrance of the experience.

Wordsworth realizes, in the moment of writing, that a certain form of power has passed into his mind and is now blind to the outside world, but that it is overwhelmingly present to consciousness. That moment marks imagination’s triumph over the “bodily eye.” I read the apostrophe in relation to three elements: the success of the imagination to make up for the deficiency of memory, its sovereignty over nature, and finally Wordsworth’s successful attempt to distance himself from the picturesque tradition which relies on the bodily eye. I link the sublime manifestation of the imagination to the dynamic version of the Kantian sublime. I then argue that the imagination re-establishes its relation to nature at the very moment it becomes conscious of itself. I base my argument on Wordsworth’s claim that the moment of self-consciousness involves an “objective attitude

toward the self.” This objectivity, I argue, is not and cannot be explained in terms of Kantian reason because that would undermine the priority of the imagination over reason for Wordsworth. This objectivity also suggests that the self becomes conscious of its being in the world. Outside this relation to the visible the consciousness can only experience a sense of alienating solipsism.

My contention in the third chapter was that despite its redemptive potential – as opposed to the tyrannical potential of the eye – the ear is impaired. In examining the inherent characteristics of the ear, my aim was not to value it over the eye but to establish contexts for understanding its idiosyncrasies as well as its impairments. I made a number of observations about the ear; the first is that it is an “organ of vision”; that is, an organ endowed with the capacity for visionariness as well as intellectual cognition. I exposed the ear’s relation to the divine through the principles of harmony and perfection. By ascribing perfection to the human voice, Wordsworth brings it closer to the divine logos. Of course, Wordsworth does not mean that the human voice and the “voice of God” are equal in value and worth. His argument is that the human voice is beholden to the divine voice insofar as it is harmonious. The second part of the chapter focused on the impairment of the ear, mainly its capacity for generating hallucinations and inducing different kinds of mental illusions. I focused on a few examples of transgressive sports at the beginning of *The Prelude* to argue for Wordsworth’s proneness to hear sounds that do not actually exist. In my analysis of the example of hallucination in Book 10 of *The Prelude*, I focused on the psychological state of rumination, which fosters Wordsworth’s anxiety and leads to the perception of voices in the mind.

The fourth chapter presented accounts of synesthetic experiences in Wordsworth's poetry and speculated on their underlying causes. I referred to the early poetry as the testing ground for the principles of synesthesia that are later put forward in Wordsworth's finest and most philosophical poetry. Basing my argument on the idea that the mind is a *sensorium commune*, engaged in giving and receiving for the purpose of not finding itself in isolation from nature (because that is the sign of poetic dearth and even death) nor in complete fusion with (that would suggest that it has no intrinsic value), I made the case that synesthesia is the culminating experience in Wordsworth's poetics. Far-flung and varied as the sensual experience in Wordsworth might be, synesthesia remains its most complex and most significant expression.

Whereas the three preceding chapters are concerned with the distinction of the intrinsic properties and function of eye and ear, the closing chapter absorbs this distinction into the distinction of light and sound on the one hand, and image and voice on the other. I argued that Wordsworth resorts to creative synesthesia because it enhances the alliance between the mind and the senses. My aim in studying synesthesia in the closing chapter was to validate the claim I put forth very early in the introduction, which is that despite their respective impairments, the eye and the ear interact and contribute evenly to the imagination and to the making of poetry.

I have realized during the composition of my thesis that the subject of eye and ear in Wordsworth's poetry embraces an unexpected constellation of features and relates to a host of important themes such as authenticity and confession. I hope to investigate these issues in a postdoctoral project and to address them not only in Wordsworth's thought and British Romanticism in general, but also in the Romanticism of Continental Europe. Although I

treated Wordsworth as the product of British Romantic ideology, the thesis has familiarized me with the intellectual and philosophical environments of the late eighteenth and early-nineteenth century Europe. I also had a fair exposure to Heidegger's and Kant's theories to a degree that enables me to embark on the new project with a background in the philosophy and the main developments that inflected the rhetoric of authenticity in the early nineteenth century.

Europe witnessed a surge in the production of literary confessions after the publication of Rousseau's *Confessions*. Rousseau secularized the genre and gave it its first shape as an autobiography. Yet although the market was brimming with written confessions (Lamb's "Confessions of a Drunkard," *The Confessions of William-Henry Ireland*, Hazlitt's *Liber Amoris: Or the New Pygmalion ...*), those produced by Coleridge, Wordsworth, de Quincey and Goethe were at the forefront of attempts to satisfy the demands of an ever expanding readership eager for first-hand accounts of shameful acts, as well as self-revelations. In will study the communalities and mutual influences between them to highlight the easy trafficking of the knowledge between the disciplines of literature and philosophy and the British, German and French traditions.

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