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The Edge of Perception

The Psychology of the Seen and the Unseen in the Works of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge

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The Edge of Perception: The Psychology of the Seen and the Unseen in the Works of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge

The Edge of Perception

The Psychology of the Seen and the Unseen in the Works of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge

John Öwre

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Abstract:

This thesis investigates the psychological dimensions of sense perception in the works of two key poets in the British Romantic tradition - William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge - using a combination of traditional close reading and a newer psychobiographical approach. The thesis proposes that Wordsworth's and Coleridge's works can be seen as staging a dialogue between two mutually incompatible habits of sense perception, with Coleridge experiencing perception as metaphysically divisive, and Wordsworth experiencing it as metaphysically unifying (once the mind learns to correctly process sensory gaps). In this dialogue, Wordsworth eventually takes center stage as the dominant 'seer' of the two, while Coleridge takes on the role of auditor, alternating between vicariously adopting, interrogating, doubting and philosophically augmenting Wordsworthian perception. Furthermore, I argue that this dialogue represents a philosophically significant attempt to combine transcendent values with a tangible and intuitive connection to real objects, with Wordsworth and Coleridge attempting to forge a middle road between idealism and empiricism - a pursuit of transcendent objectivity that, I argue, problematizes the conventional reading of Romanticism as an inward turn.

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The Edge of Perception

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John Öwre

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A Note on Terminology

In keeping with standard philosophical terminology during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, this thesis will use the term ‘sensation’ for a sensory experience taken on its own (e.g. seeing red), and the term ‘perception’ for a sensory experience which includes an accompanying notion of the object causing the experience (e.g. seeing a red table).

While Romantic authors sometimes distinguish between upper-case “Nature” and lower-case “nature”, typically in order to differentiate between a divine or ensouled nature and the mere totality of natural phenomena, there are enough deviations from this practice, not to mention grey areas between the two terms, that I have decided to avoid this practice so as to avoid potential misunderstandings and accidental distortions of meaning. Hence, in all cases except for in quotations, the lower-case “nature” will be used to express both meanings.

Finally, my usage of the term ‘Romantic’ should not be construed as an attempt to encompass the entirety of writers and thinkers who have historically been labeled Romantic, nor to encompass all writers who were active during what has been called the Romantic period (for the latter, the adjective ‘Romantic-period’ will be used). Instead, the term will be used roughly as it was used in most early-to-mid twentieth century criticism, i.e. as loosely designating a worldview characterized by certain traits and beliefs. Those traits and belief include, but are not limited to, 1) an interest in powerful, often quasi-mystical, feelings that emerge from personal experience with no overt religious trappings, 2) a reverence for art that approaches the sacred, 3) a conviction that the principles that govern both mind and world are organic and holistic rather than static and particularistic, and 4) a belief that intuition trumps discursive reasoning. My primary reason for using the term this way is that it offers an useful way to group together certain aesthetic practices and ideas which very often occur together, and which have a shared history in how they have been discussed by scholars over time.

Abbreviations

AR	*Aids to Reflection*
BL1-2	*Biographia Literaria*, vols 1-2
CL1-2	*Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vols 1-2
CM1-6	Coleridge's *Marginalia*, vols 1-6
CN1-5	*The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vols 1-5
CPL1-2	*The Philosophical Lectures of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vols 1-2
"D:O"	"Dejection: An Ode" (1802)
DWJ	*Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*
DWL1-4	*The Letters of Dorothy and William Wordsworth*, vols 1-4
Fr1-2	*The Friend*, vols 1-2
OM	*Opus Maximum*
P1799	*The Prelude* (1799)
P	*The Prelude* (1805)
P1850	*The Prelude* (1850)
"Pf1802"	"Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, 1802"
"Pf1815"	"Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, 1815"
"TA"	"Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" (1798)

General Introduction

In 1798, in “Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey,” William Wordsworth’s speaker makes a bold claim about the farthest limits of sense perception. Reflecting on a power gradually built up and nurtured by childhood memories, he describes it as the faculty whereby “with an eye made quiet by the power / Of harmony, and the deep power of joy, / We see into the life of things” (“TA,” lines 47-49). The wording is simple, but the sentiment is not: what is a quiet eye, and what are the powers of harmony and joy that make the eye quiet? What is the life of things? Is it inherent in the physical forms of things or does it transcend them? Does it animate all things or only some? Finally, how literally are we to take the notion of seeing *into* the life of things? Is this a real, albeit extraordinarily powerful, act of sense perception, or a metaphor for a meditative state that performs feats that ordinary seeing cannot? Any straightforward interpretation of these lines dissipates like a mist if one looks at them too closely, yet the overall sentiment seems to be one of warm assurance that something difficult and impossible has been successfully overcome. Seeing, the poem suggests, is an act imbued with great metaphysical power, capable of connecting with something either divine or semi-divine at the other end: a “life of things” as wondrous as it is elusive.

In contrast, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Wordsworth’s poetic collaborator-turned-rival, often struggled to conceive of sense perception as anything other than a perpetually unfulfilled longing. In a letter to his friend Thomas Poole, Coleridge complains that he longs in vain to “behold and know something *great*, something *one* and *indivisible*,” and that “it is only in the faith of that that rocks or waterfalls, mountains or caverns, give me the sense of sublimity or majesty” (*CL1* 228). Coleridge, at that point in time, was not persuaded that one could “see into the life of things,” and instead tended to place his trust in the more permanent “mind’s eye” of Reason. At the same time, however, Coleridge’s private notebooks register a secret desire to perceive the world the way that Wordsworth appears to perceive it, a desire that is always thwarted: “sometimes when I earnestly look at a beautiful object or landscape, it seems as if I were on the *brink* of a fruition still denied – as if Vision were an *appetite*; even as a man would feel who having put forth all his muscular strength in an act of prosilience, is at the very moment *held back* – he leaps and yet moves not from his place” (*CN3* 3767). Perception, for Coleridge, has the character of internal conflict: a hunger to perceive something transcendent blended with a stronger wish for the same hunger to remain unsated, since the highest meaning must be assigned to something unseen, something inviolably one and undivided.

In the meeting of these two minds, posterity has traditionally, although increasingly controversially, located the birth of British Romanticism. While the main critical interest in Wordsworth's and Coleridge's relationship has tended to be their disagreements over poetry, the question of sense perception and the mysterious intersection of the personal, philosophical and religious which they took to be incarnated in particular sights and sounds was long deemed essential for understanding their thought. Over time, however, and particularly since the historical and material turn in the 1980s, that question has lost much of its importance. As familiarity with, and sympathy for, signature Romantic modes of feeling have declined, the vision question has increasingly been reframed as an unhelpful enigma in need of demystification, or as an ideological defense-posture in need of deconstruction. Furthermore, the often hazy ways that Romantic thinkers root their convictions in intuitions, essences or hypothesized organic laws have proven largely indigestible to the language-focused approaches favored under the postmodern critical paradigm. Thus, while the last half-century has yielded many insights into the sociopolitical origins of Romantic thought, a kind of pall has fallen over the revolution in feeling ushered in by poets like Wordsworth and Coleridge. This pall can be described as a widespread embarrassment at the blatantly mystical logic of their emotional responses to things, combined with an anxious wish to see these responses redeemed through new forms of contextualization and reinterpretation. In the following pages, I argue that what is needed is a closer and more intimate engagement with this emotional-mystical type of thinking, albeit one that neither returns to a literal reenactment of Romantic practices, nor one that reduces them to dead data-clusters in an epistemically closed Romantic-period 'discourse'.

At the same time, one must not lose sight of the fact that Wordsworth's and Coleridge's ideas, despite the temptation to reduce them to any particular philosophical idiom, are often predicated on direct, and potentially eccentric, personal experience. John Beer has described the situation of the Romantic poet as that of someone who, unable to find metaphysical solace in a strong religious tradition, comes to "set up himself as the stable point in a universe that seems otherwise devoid of stability" (Beer, *Visionary* 17). If this sounds like a shift away from metaphysics toward finding one's bearings in the here and now, however, that is incorrect; instead, more characteristic of Romanticism has been a kind of braiding of metaphysical concepts and everyday experience, or what the nineteenth-century critic T. E. Hulme disdainfully referred to as "spilt religion." In Hulme's colorfully pejorative analogy, the Romantic attitude is akin to "pouring a pot of treacle over the dinner table," so that "[metaphysical] concepts that are right and proper in their own sphere are spread over, and so mess up, falsify and blur the clear outlines of human experience" (Hulme 118). However, if personal experience constitutes at least half of the bedrock for Romantic ideas, it would appear that differentiating between the poet ‘Wordsworth’ and the poet ‘Coleridge’ either on the level of either their ideas or their style is not sufficient. Instead, the deepest fault lines ought to run between *selves*, that is, along lines deeply buried in the shadowy territory which, viewed in high resolution, would be understood as neurological structure. To capture this dimension, I argue that a more sensitive approach is needed, one that borrows a few cues from the more psychologically- and biographically-oriented genres of criticism.

In short, this thesis proposes that the ‘vision question’ can be reinvigorated through a combination of, on the one hand, the close and sympathetic attentiveness to the processes of Romantic feeling evinced by older schools of criticism, and, on the other, a ‘psycho-biographical’ methodology inspired by newer schools of new historicist and biographical criticism. Its overarching argument is that the evolution of Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s treatment of perception, in poetry as well as in prose, involves a complex ‘conversation’ between their respective personal psychological habits of perception, in which the poets alternately respond to, adapt to and reject each other’s problem formulations. This conversation can be summarized as a meeting between, on the one hand, Coleridge’s sense of an unsolvable paradox at the heart of sense perception, and, on the other, Wordsworth’s sense that most intellectual problems can be overcome through the correct emotional processing of sensory ‘gaps.’ The conversation begins with the start of the Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s collaboration in 1797, follows the respective upward and downward trajectories of their relationship, and receives a kind of conclusion with Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria* in 1817.

In line with what has been asserted by Seamus Perry and others, this thesis will take the position that Coleridge’s influence was predominant in the first two years of the two poets’ collaboration, but that the center of gravity shifted in the period 1798-1802 once Wordsworth began to demonstrate mastery of the literary-philosophical genre of the so-called ‘conversation poem.’[1] In effect, this means that most of the problem formulations driving their conversation about sense perception sprang out of Coleridge’s apprehension of the world, while Wordsworth gradually found his niche in refining them into poetic expression. Individual elements of the analysis of each poet’s intellectual trajectory will occasionally align with conclusions of earlier scholars, such as M. H. Abrams, Thomas McFarland, Geoffrey Hartman and Stephen Prickett. However, while these scholars tended to study representations of perception within the context of changing or conflicting philosophical and religious beliefs, this study proposes to read them as emerging out of deeply-rooted psychological differences between Wordsworth and Coleridge. As the following chapters will show, doing so not only points to new patterns of influence, but also adds a strong psychological dimension to Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s various philosophical disputes.

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[1] See, for example, Perry, “Wordsworth and Coleridge” 161-179.

The first generation of British Romantics, of which Wordsworth and Coleridge were the most prominent members, deviated sharply from both the intellectual traditions of rationalism and empiricism. Instead, many of them inherited an assumption from the mystical tradition that there was a faculty of direct unmediated contact with the truth, ‘intuition,’ which was distinct from the lower faculties of understanding, which governed abstract and linguistic reasoning.[2] This notion drew inspiration from the distinction between “intellection” and “discursive reasoning” as taught by the Neoplatonic tradition, still a vibrant presence in the late eighteenth century, which in turn shared some features with the distinction between intuitive *Vernunft* and discursive *Verstand*, which became well established among the Jena Romantics in Germany.[3] While intuition and understanding were often placed in opposition to each other, the relationship between intuition and sense perception, on the other hand, tended in the Romantic era to be more undefined, and in some cases even complementary. Nicholas Halmi has argued that Romanticism entailed a rediscovery of the authority of the senses, and that sense-input became aligned with Romantic interests because its ‘objectivity’ had been successively eroded by the progress of rationalism. For example, Halmi sees the Romantic symbol, in which intuitive meaning and perception were thought to overlap, as an attempt to reintroduce a form of inexhaustible and non-discursive meaning in opposition to the fully discursive meaning of the allegory (Halmi 7-8). Such a correspondence between the senses and intuition was a departure from earlier traditions, in which intuition tended to be deemed equally antagonistic to the senses as to the discursive faculty.[4]

Likewise, Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s conversation tends to align the intuitive faculties more closely with the visual than with the linguistic faculties, in Coleridge’s case describing “Reason” in its purest form as a “the mind’s eye” (Coleridge, *Fr1* 158). This mysterious interrelatedness between intuition and sense perception sometimes resembles a form of joint action, with intuition imparting a metaphysical framing that structures and deepens perception, and perception enlarging the store of sensory material that can be used to awaken and refine contact with intuition. Here, one could argue, something emerges that does not fit neatly within the conventional narrative of Romanticism as an 'inward turn': a bold attempt to put *intuition* in service of an attitude of *outwardness*, and one which must be grappled with on its own unique terms.

---

[2] Coleridge’s name for the most fundamental intuitive faculty was “Reason,” man’s “organ of inward sense,” and “power of acquainting himself with invisible realities or spiritual objects” (Coleridge, *Fr1* 156). The distinction between Reason and Understanding became so characteristic of his work that his detractors occasionally lampooned him for it. See, for instance, Thomas Carlyle: “[Coleridge] knew the sublime secret of believing by ‘the reason’ what ‘the understanding’ had been obliged to fling out as incredible” (Carlyle 63).

[3] For the Neoplatonic distinction, see Plotinus 25-26. Plotinus’ distinction was familiar to Coleridge, who cited it in *Biographia* (131). The reference to the relationship between Neoplatonism and *Vernunft-Verstand* is based on Beiser 59-61.

[4] Plotinus deemed both “Sense-Perception” and “Discursive-Reasoning” “foreign to the Soul” (Plotinus 22). A similar attitude was shared by the eighteenth-century popularizers of Neoplatonism, like Thomas Taylor, who claimed that “sense is nothing more than the energy of the dormant soul, and a perception as it were, of the delusions of dreams,” while words “are no otherwise valuable than as subservient to things” (Taylor, “Creed” 441; “Dissertation” 336; “Concerning the Beautiful” 136). For an assessment of Taylor’s influence on Coleridge, who was a great admirer of his writings, see Raine (3).

By presenting the argument that there is a tendency in Wordsworth's and Coleridge's work to align intuition and sense perception in ways that point outward (toward the world) rather than inward (toward subjectivity), this thesis seeks to problematize the popular narrative of Romanticism as an 'inward turn' in the history of Western thought. This narrative, most famously associated with M. H. Abrams' *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953), which argued that Romanticism entailed a transition from a 'mirror'-conception of art as reflecting external reality to a 'lamp'-conception of art as expressive of subjective feeling, remains highly entrenched in critical work irrespective of theoretical orientation, and is often taken for granted in critical and popular works alike.[5] In contrast, this thesis argues that Wordsworth and Coleridge were both attuned to and concerned by the problems associated with the attitude of inwardness, and instead sought to establish a doctrine or method characterized by outwardness, in the sense of an 'objective' attention to externals, augmented with a belief in the objectivity also of a spiritual dimension to the world. In the following chapters, I argue that this aspect has been underemphasized in scholarship due to a tendency to read spiritual statements as actually statements about the imagination, a tendency to read Romanticism teleologically in the light of what came later, and as a consequence of where the theoretical and ideological fault lines in Romantic scholarship have traditionally been drawn.

With regard to sources, this thesis takes into account all genres of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's work, from prose and poetry to personal writings like letters, notebooks and marginalia. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, due to its psychobiographical orientation, the thesis is primarily concerned with finding evidence of long-term patterns of thinking, and so taking multiple multiple genres into account not only offers the largest amount of material to work with, but also makes it possible to treat patterns of thought as separate from the structural or conventional demands of a particular genre. Secondly, reading multiple genres of side by side allows the analysis to be attentive to the pre-disciplinary dimension of Romantic-period discourse, in which poetry and philosophical prose were often treated as parallel contributions to the same conversation. For example, when Coleridge expresses his grave disappointment with Wordsworth's *The Excursion* because it had failed to "remov[e] the sandy sophisms of Locke, and the mechanic dogmatists, and demonstrat[e] that the senses were living growths and developments of the mind and spirit, in a much juster as well as higher sense, than the mind can be said to be formed by the senses," he is assuming that a better version of Wordsworth's poem would have constituted not only a legitimate contribution to a philosophical debate, but one that would have single-handedly overturned a well-established tradition (Coleridge, *CL2* 648).

---

[5] Abrams bases his formulation on Hegel, who can be said to have been the first proponent of the notion of the 'inward turn', having referred to Romanticism as "absolute Innerlichkeit" (*Aesthetics* 519). Subsequent proponents include Marilyn Butler: "There was a watershed in European art at or near the year 1800, when Enlightenment confidence and universalism retreats into an irrational and gloomy introversion" (Butler 113); Tim Blanning, who follows Hegel in asserting that Romanticism is "absolute inwardness" (Blanning 186); Harold Bloom, who describes Romantic 'vision' as representing an *intensiveness* that breaks with Cartesian extensiveness (Bloom 38-39); Isaiah Berlin, who describes Romanticism as an offshoot of German pietism, a "retreat in depth" whereby "human beings retreat into themselves, become involved in themselves, and try to create inwardly that world which some evil fate has denied them externally (Berlin 36-37); Timothy Michael, who calls Romanticism the "cultural correlative" to "Kantian constructivism," whereby the life of the mind is posited as the "source of cognition, freedom, and even experience itself" (Michael 81). Abrams' own account is, interestingly enough, more nuanced then many later accounts, in that Abrams acknowledges that theories of the "'Aeolian Harp'-kind" which situate art as the "joint effect of inner and outer" also occur alongside the purely inward-focused "lamp"-kinds (Abrams, *Mirror* 50-51).

Furthermore, in Coleridge's case the boundaries between private and public writings are fairly blurry, a fact that has long been accepted in Coleridge studies, where the poet's notebooks and marginalia are often read in conjunction with his published work.[6] With regard to their poems, the distinction between a poem's speaker and its author is often non-existent, so that trying to artificially enforce one to accommodate twentieth-century notions of the death of the author tends to drain the reading of important biographical subtext. In the preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, for example, Wordsworth explicitly differentiates the mode in which "the Poet speaks to us in his own person and character" from the mode in which he speaks through the mouth of his characters (Wordsworth, "Pf1802" 107). Furthermore, scholars such as Eugene Stelzig have argued that this feature, namely that "the speaking voice in these poems is not some fictional persona" but in fact "clearly the author," is a central "feature of the 'greater Romantic lyric' as practiced by Wordsworth, Coleridge, Percy Shelley, Keats and others" (Stelzig, "Lives" 56).

Additionally, several of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's most famous poems take the form of personal confessions, dramatizing real-life crises in ways that complement, and occasionally deepen, the descriptions of the same events in their private writings. The fact that Coleridge's depression of 1800-1802 is habitually been referred to as his "Dejection crisis" even in recent scholarship exemplifies the way in which poems like "Dejection: An Ode" have always, to some extent, been mined for biographical meaning. Conversely, Coleridge's notebooks contain many phrases that he was later to incorporate verbatim into his poems, making it likely that many of the entries that are unique to the notebooks were also intended at some point to be repurposed this way. The authorial voice in these notebooks often feels fickle and inconsistent, with entries frequently contradicting each other, as though 'trying out' alternative voices and perspectives rather than sanctioning them outright. Thus, it is likely that the notebooks, in addition to storing individual phrases for future poems, were also, as Josie Dixon has argued, a form of "testing ground" for poetic ideas (Dixon 77). Against this background, the decision to study multiple genres of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's production in conjunction should not, however, be construed as a claim that their poetry can always be read reliably as autobiographical material. Instead, what I argue is almost the opposite: that their personal writings can fruitfully be read with the same critical distance and attention to symbolic and intertextual aspects as their poetic work. In other words, it is the two idiosyncratic voices that speak through all of their writings that constitutes the 'works' under analysis.

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[6] Lucy Newlyn has argued that "there is always a difficulty, with Coleridge's writing, of placing it either as 'public' or 'private.' The extemporaneous forms he favoured allowed him to make a stylistic feature of this slippery demarcation" (Newlyn 8). Similarly, H. J. Jackson, who calls Coleridge a "performer with an acute sensitivity to his audience" and that Coleridge's writings were "generally composed with someone particular in mind," argues that "it behooves us to keep the invisible audience in mind as we consider what Coleridge has to say" (Jackson 579).

At the same time, any study of this kind has to take into account that Wordsworth's and Coleridge's writings differ in their generic composition, with scholars having access to vastly more private writings by Coleridge than by Wordsworth. For this reason, one has to avoid the danger of projecting too much psychological meaning on what in some cases may be simply a question of access. It is, for instance, deceptively easy to treat the fragmentary state of Coleridge's oeuvre as indicative of something fragmented or chaotic in his thinking, and to forget that the 'Coleridge' that has been passed down to us is mediated through how often he committed stray thoughts to paper, and how many of those thoughts have been made accessible to scholars. Conversely, in Wordsworth's case, the preponderance of poems to other writings has resulted in a 'self' that is far more of a public persona, and as such a product of careful planning, reflection and revision. While this discrepancy is of course partially a product of to their real-life working procedures, it also makes it treacherously easy to attribute patterns of thinking to these writers that may in reality be merely the scholar's impressions of reading a fractured and heterogeneous bibliography next to one that is uniform and retroactively streamlined. In the chapters that follow, this is a danger that I have done my best to avoid.

The thesis begins with a background chapter, the purpose of which is to contextualize the thesis against both the larger framework of Romantic studies and in the more local context of Wordsworth and Coleridge studies. The subsequent five chapters constitute as a single, biographically and chronologically subdivided 'narrative.' Chapters 1 and 2 trace the development of Coleridge's engagement with sense perception over time, with Chapter 1 focusing on his output up to and including the "Dejection crisis" of 1800-1802, and Chapter 2 focusing on the (predominantly prose) work of his later career. Chapters 3 and 4 trace the development of Wordsworth's engagement with perception, including his responses to Coleridge's views, focusing on the shorter poems in Chapter 3 and the unique case of the two *Recluse* poems (*The Prelude* and *The Excursion*) in Chapter 4.

Finally, Chapter 5 explores the late phase of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's relationship, and how a disagreement over perception can be seen to inform Coleridge's belated responses to *The Prelude* in his *Biographia Literaria* and *Opus Maximum*.

Critical Background

Romantic criticism: long-term trends, new historicism and the limitations of ‘critique’

The study of Romanticism has undergone many changes over the last century, and while it is beyond the scope of this chapter to account for all of them, there are two that can be considered particularly relevant to this thesis and its place in the current critical landscape.

Firstly, as is true of literary studies as a whole, the study of Romanticism has seen a long-term shift away from ‘self-contained’ aesthetic discourses toward a reading of texts as inseparable from their sociopolitical and material contexts. Foundational to this new paradigm, as summarized by George Levine, has been a shift from “questions about what texts might ‘mean’ to questions about the systems that contain them,” a “resistance to (or demystification of) the idea of literary value,” a “virtually total rejection of, even contempt for, ‘formalism’,” and the assumption that literature is fundamentally “indistinguishable from other types of language” and thus “merely another part of the culture” (Levine 2). Notably, the transition into what its critics have sometimes termed the ‘age of cultural studies’ was accompanied by a heavily politicized academic debate, reaching a particular peak during the ‘culture wars’ of the 1990s, one consequence of which has been that context remains an ideologically-charged concept that is rarely discussed in purely methodological terms.[7]

Secondly, and partially overlapping with the first, there has been a long-term shift away from a literal reading of Romantic aesthetics, including the uncritical use of Romantic terms to describe Romantic practices, toward readings that redefine or recontextualize their operations. This process of ‘demystification’ can be said to have begun in the late nineteenth century with a sense that changing scientific assumptions about the world had removed the intellectual foundation for an unreconstructed Romantic worldview. This was understood to include not merely Romanticism’s conceptualization of its own practices but also the various emotional associations that its poetry had been understood to rely on for its aesthetic effect. By

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[7] For a brief sampling of critics who pushed back against ‘context,’ see the essays in *Beauty and the Critic: Aesthetics in an Age of Cultural Studies* (1997, ed. James Soderholm) as well as *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (1997, Susan J. Wolfson).

1909, A. C. Bradley can be seen lamenting this development in his Oxford lectures, where he accuses major Victorian critics like Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater of devaluing and slighting the “mystic strain” in Wordsworth’s poetry in favor of the more popular and uncomplicated “Wordsworth of the daffodils” (Bradley 127-129). By 1936, there was enough of a consensus that Joseph Warren Beach could write, without further provisos, that “the almost complete decay of the nature-philosophy that gives support to Wordsworth’s feeling – and particularly the teleological interpretation of natural phenomena – has removed the whole support to the esthetic structure of romantic feeling” (Beach 179). Likewise, secularization and urbanization contributed to slowly changing the emotional vocabulary of much of the reading public, so that, as Stephen Gill notes, soon “Wordsworth’s ‘sense sublime’ was increasingly alien, or simply unintelligible, to a post-Christian, urbanized readership” (Gill 3). The ‘modernization’ of Romantic studies was accelerated by the emergence of new critical schools (New Criticism and psychoanalytical criticism) which restated the movement’s aesthetic operations in purely formal or psychological terms. While these schools were, of course, not unique to the study of Romanticism, their application in this field took on a more markedly revisionist edge. The reason for this is that debates over Romantic terms, due to the unusual degree to which many Romantics sought to ‘philosophize’ their aesthetics, tend to require critical approaches to take a stand on philosophical questions that rarely surface on their own in the study of literature. In short, ‘de-mystifying’ Romanticism was to involve not merely formal, but also ideational, reinterpretation.

On one level, ‘de-mystification’ can, of course, be regarded as a direct consequence of secularization in the West over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Early twentieth-century literary critics, like the Victorians before them, used an aesthetic discourse that had been largely inherited from the Romantics, so separating the original terms from any underlying religious assumptions would presumably have been seen as an efficient way to secularize not just the study of Romanticism but literary studies as a whole. On another level, de-mystification can be seen as an overcorrection of a Victorian tendency to gauge the success of Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s accomplishments in conventionally Christian terms. By the mid-nineteenth century, the predominant image of Wordsworth had been that of a stolid marble titan of Anglican propriety who had peaked late in life with the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* and *The Excursion,* while Coleridge, shortly after his death in 1834, had been eulogized by Julius Hare as “the great religious philosopher to whom our generation in England owes more than to any other man,” whose great accomplishment was to “spiritualize, not only our philosophy, but our theology,” and thereby raise them above the “trammels of logical systems” (Hare xv-xvi). A sense that future scholarship on Romanticism had to either dissociate the movement from its later nineteenth-century appropriations or pass some form of shared editorial judgment on both, both tendencies still discernible in modern critical writing on the Romantics, is likely to have contributed to the perception that secularizing the movement’s ideas was a necessary step toward ‘redeeming’ its poetry.

Today, with the pendulum having swung decisively in the other direction, a vast gap between Romantic and contemporary ways of thinking and feeling is often taken for granted, such as in Lucy Newlyn’s introduction to the *Cambridge Companion to Coleridge*, where she states outright that “secularisation […] has rendered the idea of spiritual meaning opaque” (Newlyn 3). A basic aversion to overt religiosity, and therewith a near-reversal of Victorian assessments of Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s respective accomplishments, has also become a critical norm. Occasionally, this aversion takes its own dogmatic forms, such as Peter F. McInerney’s observation about *The Excursion* that “we feel a sort of knee-jerk repugnance to the epistemology appended to [the Wanderer’s] religious sublime, and assume it is supported by a Christian and therefore unexamined piety” (McInerney 188). Yet, having dissociated Romantic aesthetics from the spiritual content that was once recognized as its core, the scholarly picture has been left with a gap in its ideational fabric which has been left largely unaddressed as the debate shifted toward the new horizons of context and ideology.[8]

Before proceeding, it may be worth discussing two components of the Romantic aesthetic that have been central to the ‘de-mystifying’ project, and which are particularly relevant to this thesis. The first is the idea that aesthetic experience (understood as encompassing the whole range of the mind’s sensory and emotional responses to the ‘external’ world) shares the experiential understructure of religious experience, so that the two are either related or, at rare times, fundamentally indistinguishable. Two consequences of this belief are that the use of religiously-loaded language in an aesthetic context is to be understood as extending beyond the merely metaphorical, and that art, in that it reproduces, directs and structures more general aesthetic responses, is to be seen as a valid mode to pursue mystical and spiritual insights.[9] Like traditional mysticism, of which it is arguably a relative, the

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[8] Another factor that has contributed to the diffusion of the sense of a Romantic ‘core’ is the notorious difficulty involved in defining Romanticism, compounded by the regional differences between different romanticisms, and the slippage involved in using the term both to denote a set of ideas and a historical period. As early as 1903, Glen Levin Swiggett lamented that critics who try to define the term “become enmeshed inextricably in a net of contrarieties” (150), while Kuno Francke went so far as to say that “the formation of an international league for the suppression of the terms both Romanticism and Classicism would seem to me a truly philanthropic undertaking” (401n1). Most famously, A. O. Lovejoy has suggested that the term encompasses at least two distinct traditions, one pursuing an ideal of simplicity, the other one of diversity and complexity (Lovejoy 10-16). Needless to say, such problems with categorization also makes discussion about Romanticism’s ‘core’ features more difficult.

[9] Some scholars have questioned whether it is possible to define the sublime without recourse to some form of transcendence in the metaphysical sense. For example, Brady has argued that the sublime can only be differentiated from feelings like awe and wonder by retaining its function as metaphysical intuition (Brady 175); likewise, Weiskel has argued that “without some notion of the beyond, some credible discourse of the superhuman, the sublime founders” (Weiskel 3).

‘high Romantic’ aesthetic tends to describe its operations holistically and with recourse to intuitions rather than conceptually, in keeping with the mystical and Neoplatonist convention of opposing intuition to the ‘discursive understanding,’ which it tends to position as a lower faculty of the mind.[10] A second component is the assumption that psychological (and, by extension, social) phenomena are to be understood as akin to organisms, their properties and changes attributable to internal processes of growth, equilibrium or decline, rather than as particularistic systems of functions that can be subdivided and accounted for in instrumental terms. As with spiritual meaning, the assumption of organicism functions holistically and ultimately appeals to intuition rather than to reasoning or definition: in short, it proceeds directly from experience to conclusion rather than through the intermediary step of what Coleridge, following the Neoplatonists, called ‘discursive reasoning.’ Both spiritual meaning and organicism, then, are discursive shorthands for *non*-discursive forms of meaning.

The problem that non-discursive meaning poses for literary scholarship has long been obscured by more well-known ideological fault lines within the discipline. The nature of the problem, however, seems to me to be meta-theoretical rather than ideological. For example, let us compare Marjorie Levinson’s claim that “Romantic transcendence is a bit of a white elephant,” which readers ought to “refuse until such time as we can trace its source and explain its character,” to the response by Lyle H. Smith that “’such time’ means never,” since “a utilitarian ‘transcendence’ transcends nothing” (Levinson 57; Smith 304). In other words, if the term ‘transcendence’ is used most accurately when it refers to something outside of language altogether, should this usage be retained, or reconsidered to ensure that the critical idiom only contains maximally well-defined terms? Understood as such, one side of the argument is a Romantic-adjacent, loosely formalist position committed to the notion that art and analysis should not overlap completely, so that the integrity of aesthetic operations which resist precise definition can be preserved. On the other side, there is a range of perspectives that for various reasons require maximal discursive transparency, including poststructuralism, with its assumption that all reality is mediated through language, and cultural materialism, for which concepts like ‘transcendence’ have no meaning since a purely materialist reality cannot meaningfully be transcended.[11]

If discursive transparency enjoys more support today, one major factor has arguably been the growing status of the tradition of ideological critique, which posits a separate argument for maximal linguistic transparency. Within this approach, associated primarily with Marxist, feminist, postcolonial and, to a lesser degree, new historicism, the conversion of non-discursive into discursive terms has typically been deemed necessary for ideological exposure, which has therefore given discursive transparency a form of moral priority. Under the ideological lens, Romantic appeals to faculties like intuition have often been interpreted as smokescreens for political interests, making a preservation of such practices not only naïve but also complicit in the perpetuation of the hidden ideology. The famous Marxist critic Terry Eagleton has argued that the "semi-mystical doctrine of the symbol" should be understood as an illusory "panacea" for social problems, and that the notion of a "mysterious organic unity" forms an imaginary compensation for the "fragmented individualism of the capitalist marketplace," reversing capitalism's faults by being "'spontaneous' rather than rationally calculated, creative rather than mechanical" (Eagleton, *Literary Theory,* 19-20, 21). Eagleton's primary concern is with the sociopolitical application of the concept of organicism, in which the "supposedly spontaneous unity of natural life-forms" came to prop up the legitimacy of a rose-tinted, status quo-friendly view of society as made up of "symmetrically integrated systems characterized by the harmonious interdependence of their component elements" ("Ideology" 103-104). Other studies have called into question the whole foundation of Romanticism's presumed unworldliness, such as Marilyn Butler's thesis that the Romantic promotion of the imagination should be seen as deeply intertwined with a competition for sociopolitical status between artists and other mind-working professions. Butler argues that artists had a collective political interest in making grand claims for a newly-discovered creative intelligence, and in rejecting the lowlier and more mechanical competence associated with the term "craft," as well as to relativize the importance of "reason," the faculty used in the most culturally hegemonic types of mind work (Butler 72). Likewise, Butler claims that the "emotional, mystical, irrational religiosity" that characterized the Romantic movement in Germany often had less to do with developments in philosophy than with unglamorous social factors like "unemployment, frustration and rejection of the outside world" (74).

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[10] See general introduction, page 17.

[11] This summary builds on L. Smith, 304.

Ideological critique has won a strong foothold in today's academic landscape, and few would deny that it has nuanced and deepened our understanding of Romantic thought in a number of ways. However, when its particular problem formulations became hegemonic, it also sidelined, and thereby in practice settled, a number of disputes that could have been waged on completely different terms. The problem of non-discursive meaning belongs to this category of less ethically urgent problems which were abjudicated by default, since confidence in one side's terms had been undermined by its ideologically compromised status in other contexts. Thus, Romantic terms were now usually understood as pure discourse, and any inherent resistance to this function, rather than grappled with as a meta-theoretical problem, could be dismissed as a lingering consequence of past ideological obscurantism.

The tradition of ideological critique has itself engendered some criticism over the years, particularly from critics of the formalist school.[12] Therefore, when new historicism appeared on the academic scene in the early 1980s, it seemed poised to occupy a niche between ideological critique on the one side and old-guard formalism on the other, this by offering an approach that combined rigorous ideological analysis with attentiveness to the internal and unique standards of historical ways of thinking. The new historicist solution, advanced by critics like Jerome McGann and Clifford Siskin and heavily influenced by Foucault, was to present literary history as a succession of semi-closed discourses, each dictating the ideological terms under which a work of literature could make itself known and understood, and each of which was to be thought of as incompatible with the present ideological vantage point of the critic. Seen this way, Romantic discourse possessed its own terms, deriving their unique meanings and associations from unique and constantly changing historical circumstances. A critical reading of these terms was to be informed by an extensive knowledge of their surrounding contexts, which would preserve the terms in their local historical coloring, while simultaneously also be informed by a contemporary critical sensibility which would avoid reproducing past ideologies in the present, what McGann termed "cooptation" (McGann 2).

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[12] See, for example, Wolfson 1-30.

Since the 1980s, new historicism has enjoyed a comfortable lead as the most common theoretical approach in Romantic studies. One of its obvious advantages is its broadening of literary methodology to encompass what could be called a "thick" cultural context, joining together previously disconnected research and data sets to allow for bold and adventurous syntheses of literary and non-literary knowledge. Its foregrounding of context has also helped rehabilitate biographical information as research material, long half-discredited due to the lingering interdict resting over intentionalism; from this viewpoint, it is fair to say that this thesis owes an important debt to new historicism. However, while new historicism is not generally recognized as having critical 'dogmas' – David Simpson characterizes the movement as "evasive on the question of theory" and "prefer[ring] to operate by pleasure and surprise" – it does adhere to a few theoretical assumptions to an arguably dogmatic degree (Simpson 436).

For instance, while new historicism can be said to be maximally inclusive on the methodological level, this freedom has been bought at the price of a corresponding rigidity at the meta-theoretical level, where new historicism remains fundamentally poststructuralist. This can be seen mostly clearly in its strong aversion to all forms of universalism, an aversion that directly or indirectly relates to several common criticisms leveled at the movement: that it cannot account for "transtemporal movement" or the inherent "affective resonance of particular texts" (Felsky 574), etc. This rigid anti-universalism also has a bearing on its treatment of non-discursive meaning: while new historicism's context-sensitivity guarantees that such forms of meaning must be entertained as coherent conceptions within the Romantic episteme, the impossibility of relating them to anything more fundamental than data-points in a now-obsolete discourse means that they cannot have any possible reference: paradoxically, they are preserved by becoming 'pure' discourse. Moreover, new historicism's de-mystification of Romanticism takes the form of a commitment to anti-universalist positions that are both unnecessarily and problematically absolute.

To illustrate this, I now turn to Jerome McGann's seminal new historicist study *The Romantic Ideology* (1983), which because of its influence and preoccupation with finding a theoretical basis for new historicist research serves as a useful point of reference for the orientation of Romantic studies since the 1980s. Making the following argument will entail going into more detail with regard to a single study than is customary for a background chapter, but I hope that this digression will both serve to position this thesis more clearly in the current theoretical landscape, and serve as a contribution to the critical debate in its own right.

McGann's book argues that non-historicist Romantic criticism have traditionally erred by uncritically adopting the terminology used by the Romantics themselves when describing Romantic practices. In doing so, Romanticists like M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Hartman have reified certain Romantic self-definitions that would not have survived a rigorous critical analysis, and unwittingly presented a "program of Romanticism" rather than "a critical representation of its character" (McGann 28-33). Such practices have also ensured the institutional preservation of what McGann calls the "Romantic ideology," a "false consciousness" in the Marxist sense in that it displaces human concerns to an imagined "ideal space," forming a tradition of inward and politically disengaged thought that McGann associates primarily with Hegel's followers in Germany, and Coleridge's followers in Britain. Among its modern adherents, McGann includes not only conservative or politically quietist thinkers but also modern Marxist critics like Althusser, Macherey and Eagleton, who reproduce the same ideology when they remove art from the world of praxis and study it in the "ideal space" of dialectic. This, McGann argues, makes them heirs not of Karl Marx himself but of the splinter tradition of left-wing Hegelianism criticized by Marx in *The German Ideology* (153).

Rather than produce further programs for Coleridgean-Hegelianism, McGann recommends that Romanticists adopt an 'ironic' mode of analysis inspired by the critical practices of Heinrich Heine, in which understanding emerges in the comparison between irreconcilable ideologies (i.e. the ideology of the past as juxtaposed with the ideology of the present). In other words, a text is to be situated first within the context of the unique cultural and historical moment in which it was produced, then contrasted with equivalent ideas or practices in the present, a study which McGann argues will create a form of "double vision," with past and present each laying bare the ideological 'illusions' of the other. This double aspect sets McGann's new historicist critique apart from older forms of ideological criticism: while ideological exposure is the first step, true knowledge emerges reciprocally when "the critic lays art under the microscope, [and] a mordant eye returns his quizzing gaze" (151-152). Thus, the end-point of criticism is not merely ideological clarity, but ultimately an "alienated vantage" beyond ideologies, which McGann argues "permits us a brief objective glimpse at our world and our selves" (66).

As is the case of new historicism as a whole, McGann's book is also a product of its own historical context: a time in which many critics longed to break up the twin tyrannies of formalism and critical theory with something methodologically richer and more diverse. This explains the tendency of a book which, on the face of it, imposes limitations on critical practice, to so often default to the language of liberation: Romantic poems "have been mastered by a critical history which has come to possess them in the name of various Romanticisms," but "when criticism restores poetry to its historical determinations – it will have begun to set itself 'free' as well" (92). After overthrowing the old critical hegemony, context will be a force of renewal, radically broadening the scope of materials available to criticism: "To take up the subject of poetry's conceptual and ideological elements is to allow criticism once again to intersect with those other traditional fields of inquiry so long alienated from the center of our discipline: textual criticism, bibliography, book production and distribution, reception history" (81).

However, in order to secure this methodological wealth, new historicism must find a theoretical basis for it, and McGann does so by adopting the poststructuralist framework held by most modern schools of ideological critique. This, as the following analysis will show, entails going beyond value-neutral *contextualization* to ideologically-dependent *historicization*. This offers clear strategic benefits to McGann's argument: the tool of historicization allows McGann to relativize the claims of one academic competitor (formalism) as a "Romantic ideology," and supersede the other (critical theory) by appropriating, broadening and refining its method. However, it has resulted in an uneasy alliance between an inclusive methodology and an unnecessarily dogmatic metatheory which becomes problematic in practice.

Firstly, although the book justifies renewed attention to historical context by citing its utility for exposing ideology, its central ideological critique is arguably trans-historical, and thus functions independently from the discursive boundaries which it draws up in order to delineate contexts, and as a safeguard against presentism and cooptation. As an example, McGann's recommendation is for literary criticism to model itself on Heine's 'ironic' countervoice, but it is unclear why this would not constitute a new form of ideological cooptation (a practice that McGann forbids without reservations, deeming it "intolerable" to the critical consciousness; 2). To object that Heine's critical position is less ideologically compromised because of its greater commitment to self-criticism is, in my view, not sufficient, given the definition of ideology that is employed in McGann's analysis of the Romantic ideology (where it designates the totality of a text's ideas and self-representations). Furthermore, any claim that Heine's position qualifies as an exemption only confirms the sense that historical distance is not the determining factor in the analysis, which now distinguishes between forms of cooptation based on *qualitative* ideological differences. Likewise, McGann argues that the "Romantic ideology," his primary object of critique, has survived into the present largely intact in its Coleridgean-Hegelian form, where it "has been incorporated into our academic programs" and enshrined "as one of the most important shibboleths of our culture," its characteristic idealizations and displacements now serving present ideological purposes and thus functioning independently of their historical origin (McGann 91).

However, if the current debate is essentially a choice between trans-historical irony and trans-historical idealism, is this not rather an argument *against* context-specificity and discursive boundaries between epistemes altogether?

Instead, McGann's analysis follows the norms of earlier forms of ideological critique by using context for the purpose of historicization. While 'context' on its own may not necessarily mean more than the network of historical reference-points surrounding a text's origin, 'historicity' implies something narrower and more conclusive: that the assigning of an idea or event to its historical context relativizes its claim to universality. Historicization, in effect, is an act of epistemic limitation which, by divesting ideas and events of metahistorical significance, is ideological both in its form and in its application. As an example, there has been a long-standing debate in Germany about whether the Holocaust can and should be historicized, with critics claiming that such a designation would, per definition, deprive the event of its "moral dimensions" (Rüsen 116). Jörn Rüsen has called historicization the transformation of a "dearth of experience replete with (normative) meaning into a meaninglessness rich with experience," in effect arguing that the loss of such 'meaning' is integral to the logic of historicization (117). Like deconstruction, then, historicization entails a judgment as well as a perspective: in addition to offering context, it is also a form of abjudication. In my view, McGann and subsequent new historicists working in the ideological vein have erred when they use historicization in this strong sense of the term, since it ties a much-needed project of methodological renewal to certain philosophical positions that are needlessly, and problematically, absolute.

Throughout the book, McGann uses historicization to undermine a number of Romantic claims to universal truth. In response to Coleridge's statement that "cultural facts" have a "central 'idea' […] which balances and reconciles all their opposite and discordant qualities," McGann asserts that this is, in fact, a "limited and time-specific idea," which he takes to suggest that it is an "ideology of knowledge" rather than a "universal and transcendent truth" (McGann 44). Similarly, "[ideas about] the creativity of the Imagination and the centrality of the Self, about the organic and processive structure of natural and social life" are stated to be "all historically specific in a crucial and paradoxical sense"; this fact is then placed in opposition to the representation of these ideas as "transhistorical – eternal truths which wake to perish never." Indeed, McGann concludes that "the very belief that transcendental categories can provide a permanent ground for culture" is an "illusion" (McGann 134). In each case, the anti-universalist conclusion is not so much argued as simply asserted, following the logic that if the form of a particular notion is unique to its time period, this notion ceases to have universal reference or applicability and instead becomes ideology. However, since all ideas necessarily take on some of the coloring of their time period, the conclusion is arguably predetermined by the method: in other words, the method will not find any universal truths because it takes their impossibility as a precondition. Furthermore, it hinges on what is arguably a false dichotomy between "time-specific" (as in bearing a unique linguistic/conceptual form determined by a particular historical moment) and "universal": in essence, any new idea must either have been 'created' by the context or have existed as a constant throughout history. However, this dichotomy assumes that transient 'moments' are the only causal agents capable of producing novelty, already presuming the impossibility of change coming from the discovery or contact with something universal. This, in my view, cannot simply be assumed as a fact; a method that already excludes universals as a precondition cannot be used as *evidence* against universality.

Another problem with a presumptive denial of universality is that each critical method requires some form of trans-historical meaning to become useful, and these will have to be admitted at the price of contradiction.[13] This occurs when McGann proposes a dichotomy between (historically specific) ideology and two trans-historical forms of meaning he terms "emotional syntax" and "human drama." Using a sonnet by Philip Sidney as a case study, McGann argues that while it is ideology that "gives to poetry its local habitation and a name" and serves as "the locus of what is unique in a poem," "the poem's trans-historical character does not reside in its ideas or themes; on the contrary, the sonnet continues to speak to us by virtue of its emotional syntax. Certain of the poem's ideas seem dated or even, perhaps, wrong: the human drama it presents is complete and true, however, and must surely seem as fresh today as it was for Sidney at the end of the sixteenth century" (McGann 65-66). In a different chapter, McGann reiterates that poetic conceptions ultimately draw their importance not from the "Truth-content of the ideas" but "from the human commitment with which they have been invested" (McGann 104). One may wholly agree that elements of human experience transcend the vagaries of culture and history, and yet at the same time feel compelled to ask: by what methodological principle is the universality of "human drama" granted? This is not specified by McGann, indicating perhaps that experiences at the deepest human level cannot, and need not, be justified as universal. Yet, this is an assumption that the book criticizes when held by adherents of the Romantic ideology: the assumption that certain, necessarily unspecified terms are "fundamental concepts" that "need not – cannot – be analyzed" (McGann 32-33). In short, this exemption turns the distinction between universal and time-specific into merely a question of where to draw the line: consequently, McGann's opponents could claim that many so-called Romantic “self-definitions” fall into the same category as “emotional syntax” and “human drama.”

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[13] McGann's language keeps groping toward universalist language even in sentences disallowing it; having established that "neither poetry nor literary criticism operate in trans-historical realms" since "both are cultural phenomena which take part in the special, historically determinate characteristics of their time and place," he determines that "the idea that poetry deals with universal and transcendent human themes and subjects is a culturally specific one, and it assumes different forms of expression in different epochs, depending upon the different historical circumstances that prevail" (McGann 71). But how can a "culturally specific" notion that does not operate in "trans-historical realms" simultaneously be something that assumes "different forms of expression in different epochs?"

However, when McGann criticizes proponents of the Romantic ideology, he posits a strict distinction between “fundamental concepts” and ideological “self-definitions.” In his criticism of M. H. Abrams, McGann uses a low bar for classifying self-definitions, arguing that terms like “spirituality,” “creativity,” “process,” “uniqueness,” “diversity,” “synthesis” and “reconciliation” are important Romantic self-definitions that must not be “taken at face value” but treated as inseparable from the ideology that they seek to manifest (McGann 32-33). However, McGann never defines the terms “self-definition” or “fundamental concept,” nor does he explain why a self-definition might not simply be the ideological ‘use’ of a fundamental concept. For example, an identification of a feeling could potentially play double roles as a fundamental concept (the designated feeling) and as ideological self-definition (if elevated to an aesthetic ideal). If so, ideological function cannot be used as justification for rejecting a particular term: its validity would depend on the context in which it is used.

In contrast, when it comes to the self-critical Romantic position of Heine, which I will refer to as “disillusionment ideology,” McGann applies different standards. At one point, he states that disillusionment is “preferable” to the Romantic ideology, irrespective of context: “Shelley’s presentation of the tensions and contradictions which typify Romantic poems seems preferable to the formulations of much contemporary criticism, because Shelley’s verse has fewer illusions about the truths it speaks of” (136). This tendency to make exemptions for disillusionment ideology is a problem in that it once again banishes historical distance to the margins of McGann’s analysis: a disillusioned Romantic is simply a ‘better’ critic than an ideologically naïve contemporary. Similarly, by embracing the ironic ‘crisis’ mode of late Romantics like Heine as a “model” that critical analysis “must follow,” McGann loses credibility in his criticism of other scholarship as being “dominated by an uncritical absorption in Romanticism’s own self-representations.” Moreover, this Heine-inspired position, in which a critical comparison of past and present leads to an “alienated vantage” that allows for an “objective glimpse at our world and our selves,” seems itself to be only at a small remove from what McGann calls “the grand illusion of every Romantic poet,” namely “the idea that poetry, or even consciousness, can set one free of the ruins of history and culture” (137). Finally, despite chastising previous Romanticists for writing “program[s] of Romanticism” rather than critical examinations, McGann concludes that “all Romantic poems repeatedly discover […] that there is no place of refuge, not in desire, not in the mind, not in imagination,” and “the literary criticism of Romantic works will justify itself, therefore, when it is seen to have followed the example of the poetry itself” (136). If this is indeed the lesson that all Romantic poems learn, does the suggestion that criticism should replicate the same lesson, *in* the criticism of these very works, not itself amount to writing a “program of Romanticism” (145)? It is possible that all Romanticists become partisan one way or another, but it is hard to avoid the conclusion that McGann's belief is not that we have mistakenly accepted certain Romantic beliefs as critical axioms, but that we have enshrined the wrong ones.

The implication of McGann's argument seems to be that ideologies of disillusionment are objectively preferable to, and thus less urgent to critique than, ideologies of affirmation. However, this would only hold true if conditions like self-criticism, irony and paradox occupied a 'meta-state' outside of the ideological spectrum, exempt by virtue of their advanced state of self-criticism. The underlying thinking resembles what in philosophy has been termed "naïve falsificationism": the notion that falsifying statements have a greater degree of authority than truth-claims, so that we are essentially more correct when we deny than when we affirm.[14] Naïve falsificationism, however, has been criticized on the grounds that our grounds for rejecting statements are as epistemologically unstable as our grounds for affirming them. In other words, if it is always possible that future observations will contradict a theory, then it is also possible that future observations may resurrect a theory that has previously been falsified; therefore it is just as reasonable (or unreasonable) to assume that theories can be confirmed as that they can be falsified (Horgan 40).

Moreover, a consistent application of new historicist metatheory would have to conclude that the preference for a 'wise' state of disillusionment over a 'naïve' state of sympathetic interest is not absolute but relative and context-dependent: a confluence of current tastes, moods and political interests.[15] In fact, a rigorous process of new historicist self-critique would likely conclude that this preference originates in a post-World War II intellectual consensus about how to undermine the political foundation for authoritarianism, one which has given moral preference to the local and relative over the universal and essential. In my view, it is not justifiable to elevate such a preference to some special metatheoretical status, since the decision to do so must, it seems to me, base itself either on personal ideological conviction or the sense that the biases of the contemporary critical vantage point, by virtue of being 'ours', should be held to a different ideological standard.

Since McGann's book, there have been a number of influential studies devoted to historicizing important Romantic themes and motifs.[16] One of the most influential has been Clifford Siskin's *The Historicity of Romantic Discourse* (1988), which argues that the central Romantic ideas associated with organicism, dynamism and the imagination did not represent a revolution at the philosophical or scientific level; instead, they should be understood as "formal changes," whose claim to being discovered natural truths were part of their ideological self-legitimization. Thus, notions like the dichotomy between 'organic' and 'non-organic', between distinctions of ‘kind’ and ‘degree’, and the pursuit of a “Unity that transcends difference” are time-specific notions responding to particular cultural and political challenges, and therefore lack universal applicability (Siskin 27-29, 46-47). Once again, as in McGann, the combination of a poststructuralist framework of self-contained epistemes and the axiom that historicization implies relativization arguably only allows for one conclusion: if the expression of an idea has temporal coordinates, it cannot be universal. In other words, if there were points at which Romantic discourse touched base with universals, this methodology would not be able to discern it. This, combined with the more general limitation in humanities methodology that bars access to psychological levels deeper than ‘discourse’, automatically stacks the deck against ideas that, by their own account, rely on intuition for corroboration.

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[14] See, for example, Chalmers 59-73.

[15] Likewise, an aesthetic that elevates self-criticism and paradox into ideals cannot be said to become a 'meta-aesthetic': it will be simply reflect a taste for structural features and emotional frequencies that mimic the psychological experience of fragmentation.

[16] Other major new historicist studies on Romanticism include Alan Liu's Wordsworth: *A Sense of History* (1992) and James Chandler's *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture* (1998).

Part of the problem is the fact that, without the possibility of using (non-contextual) psychological evidence, Siskin’s method has no way to assess the authenticity of writings about mental processes. Since it makes no difference to the method if a “formal change” represents an attempt at accurate description or whether it is merely a stylistic exercise, the method cannot test the universal validity of its claims. If a method recognizes only formal evidence, it can only account for changes in formal terms: thus, concluding “formal changes” is more of a statement on the methodology than on the ideas themselves. To assess such claims one would have to consider evidence from disciplines like neuroscience and anthropology, as certain new branches of literary studies are beginning to do. For example, anthropologist Tim Ingold has argued that what is often called “cultural variation” in fact “consists of variations of *skills*,” as in “capabilities of action and perception of the whole organic being (indissolubly mind and body) situated in a richly structured environment,” not “transmitted from generation to generation but […] regrown in each” (Ingold 5). If true, this would suggest that the transition from static ‘distinctions of kind’ to dynamic ‘distinctions of degree’ in discussions of the mind has a considerably stronger claim to being a ‘discovery’ with universal applicability.

While new historicism retains a somewhat hegemonic stature in the field, it has also come in for a fair amount of criticism. Rita Felsky, in an article forthrightly titled “Context Stinks!”, argues that to assign priority to context over text is to make the mistake of assuming that context is inherently more stable than literary meaning. Instead, she argues, “the very question of what counts as context, and the cogency of our causal and explanatory schemes, may be anticipated, explored, queried, relativized, expanded, or reimagined in the works we read” (Felsky 580). There is, I would agree, something slightly unaccountable in the way that new historicism treats meanings as inherently fluid and malleable, while ‘contexts’ or ‘discourses’ are assumed to be a fixed medium in which these meanings can crystallize: why do meanings and contexts fall into such different epistemological categories? One could even argue that, if anything, ‘context’ should be the less stable of the two, given that it 1) is more abstract, 2) involves a far greater (indeed near-infinite) number of variables, and 3) is something that scholars construct retrospectively based on often incomplete and ambiguous data. If literary periodization is liable to being criticized as, in the words of Bruce Robbins, "a pseudo-anthropocentric norm that has been adopted for a long time out of laziness […] one level of magnification among others, no less valid than any other, but also no less arbitrary," what makes 'context' essentially different (Robbins 1650)?

At the same time, the rehabilitation of context under new historicism has contributed to a renewed interest in the psychological dimension of literature, or at least one aspect of it: by rendering biographical information once again legitimate as research data, it has restored interest in the lives and minds of its authors. For most of the twentieth century, from New Critics Wimsatt and Beardsley's 'intentionalist fallacy' to Roland Barthes' declaration of the death of the author, there was a deeply-rooted aversion to acknowledging any connection between texts and the internal processes of an author's mind. Instead, the close reader-writer empathy that still permeated non-academic biographies was, in academia, eschewed in favor of either different versions of formalism or appeals to sociological 'superstructures'. This suspicion of psychological speculation drew support from the then-dominant school of psychology, behaviorism, with its prescription that psychology should confine itself to only studying observable behavior, and the popular subject of sociology, which strongly favored social over psychological explanations.[17]

However, a broad dissatisfaction with this paradigm has been brewing for the last few decades, not only in certain quarters of new historicism, but also in such critical schools as 'cognitive literary studies', represented by critics like Mary Thomas Crane, Alan Richardson and Ellen Spolsky.[18] In her book *Gaps in Nature*, Spolsky attempts to root the writing and reading of literary language (along with other artistic activities) in neurological processes, ultimately subsuming aesthetics under a framework of evolutionary biology, with art explicable as progressively advanced "hypotheses about the coordination or enregistration among otherwise incompatible structures of knowledge" (Spolsky, *Gaps* 10). In another article, Spolsky proposes the term "iconotropism" for the visual appetite that leads artists, including poets, to observe or create meaningful images, a tendency which Spolsky argues stems from evolutionary imperatives. Spolsky deliberately chose an expression that could be aligned with biological terms like 'heliotropism' (the urge in flowers to turn toward the sun) and 'hydrotropism' (the urge in roots to grow toward water), with the aim of creating an 'objective' neurological basis for the terminology of the humanities ("Iconotropism" 12). Although knowingly skirting reductionism, and admitting the desperation of resorting to biology to escape from what she calls "deconstructive language games," Spolsky does offer a potentially credible biological-materialist basis for a new theory of literary psychology (Spolsky, *Gaps* 11-12). Whether successive refinements will complete the bridge from evolutionary biology to modern literary representation without becoming overly reductive remains to be seen.

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[17] The anti-psychological bias of academic sociology goes back to its earliest days, with Émile Durkheim declaring already in 1896 that "every time a social phenomenon is explained by a psychological phenomenon, we may rest assured that the explanation is false" (Durkheim 7).

[18] See, for instance, Crane and Richardson 124; Spolsky, *Gaps* 2-12.

Some critics of new historicism, such as Rita Felsky, have suggested Bruno Latour's 'actor-network theory' as a viable replacement. Actor-network theory (or ANT) seeks to undo the flattening effect of subordinating individual objects (including texts) to their surrounding discourses, and does this by attributing a kind of agency to what it calls 'non-human actors', including texts and ideas. Thus, ANT sees culture as a vast network of communication between a wide variety of human and non-human actors, with both possessing the capacity to shape the patterns of communication in ways that are unique and independent from their role in any larger system. By positing texts as actors rather than exponents of a fixed historical discourse, ANT can be said to restore a sense of literary texts as unique accomplishments whose influence is better understood through their originality than through their representative status in a particular discourse. However, Latour's use of the term 'agency' has been controversial, as have the underlying assumptions of his theory, which I will argue share many of the structural weaknesses of the theories that it positions itself against.

Latour's resistance to previous theories often seem rooted in a preference, at least partially aesthetical, for metaphors that connote heterogeneity, movement and life. Several of his descriptions of ANT's advantages are ornate and Whitmanesque, groping toward some ideal of organic complexity: "modern societies cannot be described without recognizing them as having a fibrous, thread-like, wiry, stringy, ropy, capillary character that is never captured by the notions of levels, layers, territories, spheres, categories, structures, systems" (Latour, "On…" 370). His critical interests are sensory-intuitive to the point of being almost tactile: "ANT is a simple material resistance argument. Strength does not come from concentration, purity and unity, but from dissemination, heterogeneity and the careful plaiting of weak ties […] resistance, obduracy and sturdiness are more easily achieved through netting, lacing, weaving, twisting of ties that are weak by themselves" (370). At its root, Latour makes clear, "ANT is a powerful tool to destroy spheres and domains, to regain the sense of heterogeneity, and to bring interobjectivity back into the centre of attention" (380). Yet, in its combination of a longing for absolute heterogeneity in theory with problematically rigid critical restrictions in practice, ANT often resembles the type of theory that it defines itself against, and these similarities become even more prominent at the structural level.

Firstly, Latour admits that "the slogans of the 60s and 70s 'everything is a text', 'there is only discourse', 'narratives exist by themselves', 'we have no access to anything but accounts' are kept in ANT," with the only difference being that they are "saved from their ontological consequences" (374). Indeed, both 'context' and critical theory are "subsumed" in their entirety into the ANT network, under the argument that they describe local functions of a larger web of relations (376-377).

Like new historicism, it is avowedly anti-universalist: "[ANT] starts from irreducible, incommensurable, unconnected localities which then, at a great price, sometimes end into provisionally commensurable connections […] whereas universalists have to *fill in* the whole surface either with order or with contingencies, ANT does not attempt to fill in what is *in between* local pockets of orders or *in between* the filaments relating these contingencies" (370). Furthermore, while Latour repeatedly argues that ANT rejects the ontology of 'discourse'-theories, it is unclear what he proposes in place of it. Some of his statements seem to suggest that ANT should not concern itself with ontology at all: "[ANT] does not say anything about the shape of entities and actions, but only what the recording device should be that would allow entities to be described in all their details" (374). At the same time, as will be shown, he commits to positions which indicate at least a plausible adherence to the ontology of propositions like "everything is a text."

Like early new historicism, Latour's theory merges an ideal of heterogeneity with epistemological commitments that often seem untenably, and unnecessarily, absolute. Thus, an interesting project of methodological liberation is joined to propositions like "[l]iterally there is nothing but networks, there is nothing in between them, or, to use a metaphor from the history of physics, there is no aether in which networks should be immersed" (370). It announces itself as a project to dispense with the "epistemological myth of an outside observer," to dissolve the "dual illusion" of a distinction between "account" and "reality," so that scholars will not concern themselves with "whether there is a fit between account and reality" but only "whether or not one travels from a net to another." In ANT, "explanations" are no longer in conflict with each other but indefinitely cumulative, so that producing explanations is simply a way of "adding things to the world" (377). Yet the sum of all these statements appears to be that reality is, in the end, reduced to something akin to a single uniform 'discourse', at least in the sense that 'account' cannot be meaningfully distinguished from 'reality.'

That leaves the notion of non-human 'actors', which in the absence of any positive ontological commitments becomes vague: if ANT is only concerned with the "description" of entities and not their actual form, is the attribution of agency real or merely a metaphor? Many of ANT's critics have taken it to be the former, so that Latour has been criticized for effectively promoting a new version of "hylozoism" (Schaffer 182) and for "abandon[ing] all distinctions between humans and nonhumans" (Amsterdamska 499). In an attempt to clarify the concept, Edwin Sayes chooses to downplay Latour's "colorful language," and reiterates that "there is nothing in this conception of nonhumans that stipulates that they have purpose, will, a sense of justice, or that they are moral or political actors in the precise senses in which humans are" (Sayes 139). Yet, in the light of ANT's "'critique' of the object/subject dichotomy" and its "desire to institutionalize this uncertainty," as well as its "direct attempt to introduce a radical uncertainty concerning *what action consists of*," Sayes concludes that "there is no absolute or final division made between the capacity of humans and nonhumans to exercise agency." Both Sayes and Latour admit that there is “within ANT a profound uncertainty about *who* or, more correctly, *what* is acting,” and this arguably undermines some of its utility as an analytical tool (Sayes 141).

It seems to me that ANT correctly identifies that there are unique ‘processes’ in culture that cannot be accounted for through theoretization or contextualization, but errs by interpreting them as ‘agency’, thereby intentionally blurring distinctions between processes of mind and mere semiotic entities. Such subject-object uncertainty can only be achieved at the price of any meaningful dimension of psychology, and indeed, Latour has expressed hostility to any “explanation of forms” rooted in “the mind and its cognitive abilities,” and even proposed “a moratorium on cognitive explanations of science and technology” (Latour, *Science* 247). This, it seems to me, is too great a price for saving an analytical concept.

In summary, I would argue that there are many forms of literary meaning which neither appeals to context, discourse nor ideology can get at without a considerable degree of distortion. Furthermore, while scholarship that uncritically coopts the Romantic language of intuition, organicism or essences has tended to be treated as highly problematic, it seems clear that the basis for our capacity, and desire, to recognize certain practices as more scholarly than others is itself largely intuitive. For example, in the academic trends discussed thus far, from post-Victorian criticism’s growing alienation from Romantic feeling, new historicism’s axiomatic preference for ‘thick’ cultural contexts, McGann’s favoring of disillusionment over idealism, Latour’s championing of heterogeneity and dynamism over statism and systematism and Spolsky’s instinctive aversion to “deconstructive language games, critics can be seen to freely defer to their ‘intuitions’ in even their most theory-inclined scholarly recommendations.

In all probability, intuitions have always been at the heart of all critical work, but the selection of which intuitions are valid or invalid appears to be largely normative and rooted in the epistemic biases of each generation or school of academics. When an intuition is ‘current,’ it tends to be affirmed with enthusiastic lyrical flourishes; when an intuition is no longer ‘current,’ calls for elucidations in the form of analysis become more frequent.[19] The question instead seems to be: how much can be included in the category of intuition, which intuitions do we treat as viable, and what standards do we use to make that judgment?[20] [21]

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[19] On one level, disputes over intuition always concern specifics rather than base principles, since some recourse to intuition is necessary for a system of knowledge to avoid becoming a closed discourse. Thus, for example, even Descartes’ *cogito* requires the intuitive recognition that there *is* an occurring process of thought in order to become admissible as a first principle.

Finally, it is worth considering the intuitive biases of the tradition of ideological critique, which have had a significant effect on our own critical norms. Here, I do not want to stray too far into the highly polarized debate about the role of ideology in criticism, any committed stance in which appears doomed to come across as either hopelessly reductive or naïve.[22] However, there is a species of ideological critique which, once it becomes normative, tends to reward literature that is socially and politically transparent while penalizing literature that is more diffusely introspective, the latter of which tends to be forcefully reconfigured as 'actually' participating in a hidden discourse of power.[23] Poems with no manifest political content can thus be deemed guilty of "evasion" or "displacement," so that "Romantic poems, at all levels," according to McGann, are "marked by extreme forms of displacement and poetic conceptualization whereby the actual human issues with which the poetry is concerned are resituated and deflected in various ways" (McGann 70). The equation is simple and absolute: there are no spiritual or ideal interests, only human interests and *displaced* human interests. Thus, Alan Liu, analyzing the description of spear-grass in Wordsworth's "The Ruined Cottage," concludes that, because the Pedlar "makes no attempt to account for [its worth] in open terms," "like the holy of holies behind the veil of the Jerusalem Temple, spear-grass is an icon whose unrevealed worth has the effect of separating believers from nonbelievers, the sheep from the goats" (Liu 323). This instant leap from the identification of discursively "unaccounted worth" to the conclusion of a covert ideological sorting device indicates an assumption that beauty or feeling are never sufficient reasons for a gap in discursive explanation. Instead, power must be present even when it appears to be absent, or, as per McGann, "ideology is made out of what it does not mention; it exists because there are things which must not be spoken of" (McGann 91). However, to read everything that is concerned with the aesthetic or ideal as "evasions" of political reality is, in my view, to take some of the most interesting data of human consciousness and reassemble them into a featureless edifice labeled 'false consciousness'; it is distortive and leads to a net loss of information.

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[20] Furthermore, not all historical definitions of intuition come with a spiritual baggage. Edgar Allan Poe, in 1848, defined intuition merely as "the conviction resulting from deductions or inductions of which the processes were so shadowy as to have escaped [one's] consciousness, eluded [one's] reason, or bidden defiance to [one's] capacity of expression" (Poe 15-16). Isaiah Berlin, in 1957, described intuition as "a sense for what is qualitative rather than quantitative, for what is specific rather than general; it is a species of direct acquaintance, as distinct from a capacity for description or calculation or inference" (however, Berlin found the term itself problematic in that it "dangerously suggests some almost magical faculty"; "Political Judgment," 46).

[21] Even the yet more controversial concept 'essence' is beginning to be reconsidered in surprising ways. Terry Eagleton, while criticizing previous attempts at foundationalism as incoherent, has nonetheless suggested that some form of essentialism is necessary to ground a worldview, as well as to safeguard it against dangerous 'grand narratives.' "Essentialism," he argues, "is the enemy of grand narratives, since it takes its stand purely on the self-realizing, self-delighting nature of a thing and refuses to find its raison d'etre in some overarching project for which that thing is purely instrumental" (Eagleton, "God, the Universe, Art and Communism" 10-11). He even finds a precedent for his essentialism in Marx, who had found it necessary to ground human behaviour in an essence called *Gattungsbewesen* ("species being"; Marx 112-114).

[22] However, a number of scholars have made important observations about the effects of critique on the emotional stance of the reader, which is relevant to the point that I am making here. For example, some critics have argued that 'critique', far from being emotionally disinterested, has its own affective bias: Ricœur calls the tradition, which he argues began with Freud and Nietzsche, a "hermeneutics of suspicion," while Kosofsky Sedgwick terms it a "paranoid consensus," which attains its efficiency as a critical tool through a deliberate "disarticulation" and "misrecognition" of other ways of knowing, principally those that do not rely on suspicion (Sedgwick 144, Ricœur 32-37). Likewise, Felsky has argued that suspicious reading is "not just an intellectual exercise, but a distinctive disposition that is infused with a mélange of affective and attitudinal components," mainly "detachment, negativity, and doubt" (Felsky 575).

[23] See, for instance, Manning 300-307. The particular weakness of ideological critique when applied to Coleridge has also been noted by scholars. Seamus Perry says that the "necessary partisan language of ideology does us few favors" when grappling with Coleridge's philosophical vacillations, and argues that more psychologically-attuned polarities like "one of dilemma and indecision" would address their complexities better than the "rhetoric of collusion, complicity, and implication" (Perry, "Other Things" 40).

Coleridge, who based much of his writings on child development on his experiences of raising his son Hartley, has written that there are certain insights that appear when observation makes use of the "combined interests of the parent and the philosopher, where science corrects what the magnifying power of love was necessary to render visible" (Coleridge, *OM* 127). This strikes me as important. Sympathy has long been deemed unrespectable as a critical attitude, but as both Wordsworth and Coleridge argued, it can be a powerful guiding emotion, rendering visible connections that detachment and skepticism is ill-equipped to notice. In the next section, I survey some of the critical studies which were written in what I call the 'sympathetic' style, which in turn leads into a more specific discussion of the studies which have been most important to this thesis.

'Sympathetic' criticism: Its advantages and disadvantages

Before proceeding to the studies that have been most relevant to this thesis, it will be worth discussing a few characteristics of an older approach within literary criticism, which I propose to call 'sympathetic criticism.' One of the hallmarks of this approach is that it tends to be psychologically attuned and explicative, as opposed to sociologically attuned and deconstructive. In other words, sympathetic criticism tends to be interested in reconstructing the individual practices of each poet from the 'inside', i.e. as intricate structures of intellectual, sensory and affective associations, as opposed to the ‘outside’-oriented approach that treats these practices as participating in larger discursive or ideological systems.

As a consequence, sympathetic Romantic criticism tends to comparatively at ease with using the terminology and problem formulations of the Romantics themselves, which it tends to treat as inextricable from their overall ways of thinking and feeling. Thus, some sympathetic Romanticists retain the Romantic identification of the aesthetic and the religious; Stephen Prickett, for example, analogizes the relationship between Romantic aesthetic and religion to the relationship between form and content, with “poetic” designating form, and “religious” designating content. “As the Romantics believed,” he argues, “the content of religious experience is inseparable from the medium through which we know it, we end up with the conclusion that poetic language, by its very nature, raises questions that are inescapably religious” (Prickett, *Romanticism and Religion* 10-11). Other critics who retain this identification, like Hunt Jr., do so while at the same time attempting to explicate this connection in philosophical terms. To Hunt Jr., the ‘transcendent’ dimension of poetry is its capacity to operate as pure ‘style’ when the subject is no longer communicable as ideas. In other words, when philosophical prose exceeds its capacities and tries to represent the transcendent, the language can only function “paralogically,” in that it “enters the order of art, and becomes an achievement, insofar as it achieves anything, of style” (Hunt Jr., 837). Thus, it is not that poetry ‘describes’ that which lies beyond the scope of philosophy, but rather that the failure to describe what lies beyond the scope of philosophy inevitably crosses over into poetry.

Sympathetic criticism, because of the time in which most of it was practiced, has tended to utilize a ‘history-of-ideas’ model of historical change instead of the more recent focus on asynchronous historicity. The history-of-ideas approach, favored by scholars like Arthur Lovejoy, Isaiah Berlin and M. H. Abrams, has sometimes been accused for implying teleology, with ‘unit-ideas’ developing gradually along a trans-historical axis, with each incarnation imperfectly pointing toward a ‘finished’ form in the present. Quentin Skinner has claimed that the approach tends to forego historical precision in favor of a reification of doctrine, with a projected pattern of development determining the reading of historical evidence in a way that can easily become distortive (Skinner). While these criticisms are justified when the approach is used singly as opposed to as part of a larger analytical toolkit, there are other areas in which the history-of-ideas approach compares favorably to asynchronous contextualism. Firstly, the history-of-ideas approach recognizes that all phases of culture have inhabited the same physical universe and that ideas, while often historically ‘specific’, are just as fundamentally strategies for solving problems that persist over time. Secondly, whereas contextualism struggles to explain historical change other than as one discourse supplanting another, the history-of-ideas approach provides a more coherent explanation by positing that each generation evaluates its inherited problem-solving strategies anew, retaining some and rejecting others. Thirdly, the history-of-ideas approach provides a solid foundation for the analysis of transhistorical types of context (e.g. influence), which tend to remain either vague or unaccounted-for in contextualist theories.

As a positive example of its application in literary criticism, M. H. Abrams' *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971) uses a history-of-ideas-argument to buttress its reading of Wordsworthian nature-communion as a non-denominational evolution of older Christian devotional practices. Abrams singles out three beliefs from "Neoplatonized Christianity" as particularly fundamental: 1) the reinterpretation of God the Father as an impersonal principle or absolute unity, 2) the reinterpretation of the Fall of Man as a falling-away from the One into a position of self-centeredness or selfhood, and 3) the concept of *circuitus spiritualis*, a powerful current of 'love' which flows ceaselessly from God and holds the whole universe together (Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 151). Likewise, Abrams argues, Wordsworth's "speaking face of nature" is a "a lineal descendant of the Christian liber naturae, whose symbols bespeak the attributes and intentions of its author," while *The Prelude* function as a personalization of the Christian theodicy into a "biodicy," using the materials of an individual life in place of Biblical myth (Abrams 88, 96). These are arguments that do not require any assumption of teleology, nor does their suggestion of relatedness reify any extraneous and distortive developmental 'pattern'; thus, such selective and local applications of the history-of-ideas method do not necessarily conflict with present-day academic norms and could, moreover, still yield new and important knowledge in Romantic studies.

Finally, 'sympathetic' scholarship tends to combine a close attention to biographical materials with an equally close attention to recurring motifs and associative patterns to arrive at a theory of the larger psychological or intellectual drama underneath a poet's body of work. This mode of criticism has produced many of the most influential works of Romantic scholarship, including *Northrop Frye's Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (1947), Geoffrey Hartman's *Wordsworth's Poetry: 1787-1914* (1964), and Thomas McFarland's *Coleridge and the Pantheistic Tradition* (1969). Occasionally, the 'explicatory' character of such studies runs the risk of universalizing the artist's philosophical or psychological proclivities, which may produce essays of great literary value and profundity, but also a philosophizing tendency that would be more frowned-upon in contemporary academia. On the local level, however, the sympathetic method is well-suited for accessing subtle psycho-biographical dimensions of large and heterogeneous bodies of work, and is particularly useful when, as with Wordsworth and Coleridge, the personal and the poetic overlap to such a significant extent. Today, such a method can also draw sustenance from a vigorous tradition of Romantic biography, including works such as Richard Holmes' *Coleridge: Early Visions* (1989) and *Coleridge: Darker Reflections* (1999), Jonathan Bate's *Radical Wordsworth* (2020).

The combined psychological and philosophical approach exemplified by Frye's, Hartman's and McFarland's studies can be contrasted with the more detached and empirical-minded approach taken in John Livingston Lowes' *The Road to Xanadu* (1927). Lowes attempts to chart Coleridge's creative process by establishing a vast collage of possible literary inspirations, taking at face value Coleridge's description of himself as a "library-cormorant" who had read more or less everything that was available to him. Lowes' study is astonishingly rigorous and well-sourced, but its source-based focus has a tendency to reduce the creative process a bit too neatly to patterns of borrowing. When analyzing poetic imagery, Lowes has a tendency to equate similarity of description with direct inspiration, and to disregard a bit too quickly the possibility that a certain metaphor may have originated independently in many different works, and that the range of poetic descriptions that are both short and intuitively satisfying might often be narrow, particularly when using meter. This is not a criticism of Lowes's study as much as an observation that all methodologies risk overemphasizing the type of evidence that they have been specifically designed to find, and so another metric may be needed to determine when such conclusions go too far. Poetic labor also involves the invention of language for the purpose of processing personal experience, and this, I would argue, is a dimension of creative thought that Lowes's method shows less sensitivity to than, for example, McFarland's.[24]

The remainder of this chapter will be dedicated to discussing some of the most influential readings of 'master-patterns' in Coleridge's and Wordsworth's work, particularly with regard to perception, and to carving out a niche for my own argument. As the following chapters will show, I am arguing that many of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's writings on perception can be seen as engaged in a 'conversation' between, on the one hand, Coleridge's view of the mind-world relationship as paradoxical, and Wordsworth's tendency to seek resolution in the emotional processing of sensory gaps. To establish the originality of this argument, and to acknowledge those areas where it overlaps with previous conclusions, a comparison to previous critical studies will now be undertaken.

With regard to Coleridge, the classification of his thinking as disturbed by an unsolvable paradox is not itself new; most commonly, critics have tended to conceptualize it as a tension between some facet of mental or ideal reality on the one hand, and an uncooperative and psychologically inassimilable 'world' on the other. The precise description of the two poles differs from critic to critic. Tim Milnes argues that the tension exists "between the contrary demands of creationist religion and logical completeness, between a voluntarism […] and a global logic or architectonic," so that "Coleridge's failure as a philosopher can be traced to the impossible task of reconciling voluntarism with dialectic by somehow drawing the notion of an absolute will through the "looking-glass" of polarity" (Milnes 321). Seamus Perry, remarking that "authentic inconsistency" is Coleridge's "home ground," posits a tension between the aesthetic-ideal and the individual-real, between the “genuine claims of the aesthetic, of the idealizing on the one hand, and yet, on the other, the persistent claims of the individual reality of other things” (Perry, “Other Things” 36-40). Most famously, Thomas McFarland has posited a tension between the ‘I AM’ and the ‘IT IS’; this influential distinction, which he explores at length in *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* (1969), has been important to this study and will therefore be outlined in some detail.

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[24] Lowes' analysis has also received criticism for not doing justice to Coleridge's poems as unified, cohesive visions. See, for instance, Schneider, who argues that Lowes' method concludes that "'Kubla Khan' is a glorious but irresponsible fabric of free associative links, elaborate but loose in texture, and wholly meaningless" (Schneider 4).

McFarland’s book takes its departure in the observation that Coleridge’s philosophical work possesses a “remarkable unity and cohesiveness,” a sharp departure from the assessment of critics like René Wellek, who had argued that Coleridge assembled “heterogeneous adaptations of other thought into a contradictory whole” (McFarland xxiv, Wellek 67). At the same time, McFarland argues that an internal division exists at the core of this philosophy, namely Coleridge’s “inability to either really to accept or wholeheartedly to reject pantheism,” an indecision that makes him an indirect participant in what was then the formative controversy of German Romanticism: the *Pantheismusstreit* (McFarland 107) This conflict manifests itself as an opposition between two modes of aesthetic-philosophical thought which McFarland terms the ‘IT IS’ and the ‘I AM’. The ‘IT IS’ corresponds to an affirmation of nature in all its sensory depth and complexity, Goethe’s “green and golden life,” a mode of thinking that artists and poets at the time recognized as an essential foundation for ‘inspiration’, but the embrace of which required some acceptance of Spinoza’s claims for monism, which many considered the philosophical version of pantheism. The opposite mode, the ‘I AM’, corresponds to an affirmation of an internally coherent system of moral and intellectual principles, the embrace of which was felt to buttress a feeling of intellectual rootedness and moral agency, but which was increasingly felt to be divorced from the evidence of the material world. Thus, the ‘I AM’ required some assumption of dualism to be maintained, which would necessarily “distort the texture of experience to achieve a completed network of abstraction.” Committing too firmly to either mode of thinking entailed a grave sacrifice; as McFarland poetically puts it: “The green and golden meadow beetles dreadfully over the abyss of moral nullity; opposed to it is a chill moral freedom which, though grey, may also be seen as the light of a hopeful dawn” (109-110).

In McFarland’s analysis, all philosophers have to take up a position on this problem; thus, even nominal idealisms like Berkeley’s, Fichte’s and Schopenhauer’s “end in one-world cosmologies and thereby reveal their real structure [as ‘IT IS’-philosophies]” (146). Similarly, McFarland collapses the whole tradition of eighteenth-century materialism, exemplified by figures like Hartley, Priestley and Godwin, into the ‘IT IS’-camp, sidestepping its unique claims a bit too lightly by terming the tradition “undoubtedly […] provincial” and “a kind of bargain-basement Spinozism,” offering little more than a “quintain that prepared Coleridge for his later jousts with Spinozism itself” (169). As for Coleridge, his torment, and ultimately triumph, was to embody this contradiction without forcing himself to choose: “he bore the pain of conflicting interests rather than choose the anodyne of a solution that did violence to the claims of either side in the conflict," and "his mind played between its two poles with matchless vitality" (McFarland 107-110).

When addressing Coleridge's religious anxieties, McFarland avoids an easy identification of Coleridge's 'I AM'-commitment with a beleaguered Christian faith beset by 'IT IS'-atheism. Instead, McFarland argues that Coleridge looked to Christianity hopefully as a synthesis of the two, positioning Christ as more attuned to the natural world than philosophers in the Socratic tradition ("Die Bäume und die Felsen sagen mir nichts, said Socrates […] the endless superiority of Christ over him in this respect"; McFarland 205; Coleridge, *CN1* 1686). In fact, McFarland argues, both 'IT IS' and 'I AM' presupposes divinity in Coleridge's reasoning, with 'IT IS' taking the divine as its first step while the 'I AM' takes it as the last step of a syllogistic process. Thus, according to McFarland, Coleridge saw the problem as finding a correct synthesis between these two divine definitions: "to define God in such a way as to guarantee both the living richness of the world and the moral freedom of the person" (McFarland 222-223).

McFarland's study makes a compelling case for the 'I AM'-'IT IS'-distinction as an important component of Coleridge's philosophy; however, its elegant polarity has a tendency to smooth over the many internal differences within the 'I AM'- and 'IT IS'-categories. Thus, one could say that my reading of Coleridge will focus on the tension between two subdivisions of McFarland's 'IT IS', namely the seen and the unseen. This approach will show that Coleridge also perceived a gap at the heart of "green and golden nature," with an unseen substrate that was as remote from concrete poetic experience as it was from the neat syllogisms of the "I AM." The seen-unseen gap introduces a number of distinctions between the philosophies that McFarland assembles in the 'IT IS'-camp, unsettling the neat aligning of German idealists with British materialists and making visible the different challenges that they posed to Coleridge's philosophical development. Finally, and most importantly, the seen-unseen division in Coleridge's thinking plays an important role in the way that it interacted with the development of Wordsworth's evolving treatment of perception, a key area of interest in this study.

At the opposite end of the spectrum from McFarland's portrait of Coleridge as a rock of tormented consistency stands Norman Fruman's *Coleridge: The Damaged Archangel* (1971), which could be said to exemplify the 'antipathetic' counterpart to the sympathetic method. Fruman's book argued controversially that Coleridge, while brilliantly talented, was a fundamentally unoriginal poet and thinker. Coleridge's self-destructive and insecure personality, in Fruman's reading, made him habitually dependent on "older," "stronger" and "more stable" personalities like Wordsworth, Poole, Morgan and Gillman, leading to a lifelong pattern of unacknowledged borrowings, personally as much as professionally. Thus, Fruman argues that Coleridge's great flowering as a poet comes "after, and only after, the close friendship with Wordsworth," and that Wordsworth was ultimately the source of their shared poetic sensibilities, with Coleridge falsifying similar patterns of thought and feeling for the sake of remaking himself in the image of a Wordsworthian poet (Fruman 267, 280). Consequently, Coleridge's attributions of such sensibilities to the period preceding 1797 are deemed by Fruman to be retroactive falsifications or 'misremembering' on Coleridge's part, inventing a new past as a Wordsworthian nature-seer. Thus, when Coleridge described "his dear native rural haunts, and sunset over the peaceful village, he was not describing anything he could have personally experienced after the age of nine," while, conversely, despite his formative years growing up in London, "we do not have from him a single important poem about the city, nothing remotely resembling a 'Westminster Bridge'" (262-263). Fruman rejects statements by Coleridge about his mind having been "habituated to the Vast" early in childhood as equally false; in reality, Fruman argues, "Coleridge's discovery of 'Religious meanings in the forms of Nature' comes in a sudden rush in the middle of 1797," as a consequence of Wordsworth's direct influence (301). All of this has an important biographical implication: namely, that Coleridge's "Dejection" crisis was essentially a crisis of faith in Wordsworth's patterns of feeling, which Coleridge had never recognized as his own. Indeed, this is what Fruman concludes: "The earth which he was to describe in the "Ode to Dejection" as once having been "enveloped" in a "fair luminous cloud" (Wordsworth had already "appareled" it in "celestial light") was not something Coleridge had ever really seen in this way but was rather something he had learned from Wordsworth" (Fruman 302-303).

Fruman's book was controversial upon publication, and while it offered a useful counterpoint to the rising critical estimation of Coleridge that had then become the norm, some of its conclusions have been called into question. John Beer, in a review, criticized the book for blurring the differences between the overt plagiarism of Coleridge's post-1806 period with his substantially different motivations for borrowing material in his youth, obscuring necessary context to paint an inaccurate psychological portrait of Coleridge as having always been the "broken man" of his post-Malta years (Beer, "Review" 348). Beer also cites Fruman's assumption that Coleridge's peers 'covered up' his debts as methodologically unreliable, since it steers the analysis toward a predetermined conclusion: "If Coleridge acknowledges a debt to Wordsworth, it is a moment of rare honesty; if Wordsworth acknowledges a debt to Coleridge he is simply covering up for his fraudulent old friend" (347). While acknowledging that the book contains few outright factual inaccuracies, Beer levels his harshest criticism at Fruman's distortive presumption of guilt, arguing that the book is "disturbing" in its prosecutorial zeal and that it lays a "deadening hand on Coleridge's intelligence," one "distinguished particularly by its processes – and to these processes Mr. Fruman seems totally unresponsive" (352).

On the whole, I agree with Beer's criticisms, and I think Fruman paints an ungenerous psychological portrait that is too quick to leap to conclusions of intellectual dependency. Many degrees on the spectrum of a co-dependent relationship, while occasionally acknowledged, are underemphasized in Fruman's analysis, such as the possibility that an original thinker may require external sympathy to engage in rigorous and authentic introspection (a type of ‘influence’ which does not undermine originality). Similarly, in response to the overarching charge of Coleridge as a ‘borrower’, there is another factor to take into account, which is that Coleridge has a tendency to externalize what are partially, if not completely, his own opinions in other people and then criticize those people when he loses faith in those opinions. This, I would argue, has to be seen as distinct from overt plagiarism or unoriginality.

At the same time, Fruman’s book is alert to undertones in Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s collaboration that have been neglected in more narrowly Coleridge-focused scholarship, and which an impartial reading of their relationship does well to consider. For example, Fruman’s case that Coleridge’s ‘Dejection’ crisis was a rebellion against internalized Wordsworthian ways of feeling strikes me as highly persuasive, and aligns with my own reading that Coleridge depended on Wordsworth for experiential confirmation of ways of feeling that he himself intuited were ‘healthy’, but generally failed to awaken in himself. Furthermore, this would explain such peculiarities as Coleridge offering criticisms of Wordsworth in *Biographia Literaria* which, as Fruman correctly points out, constitute a direct repudiation of the message of his conversation poems, indicating that he must have felt that those on some level ‘belonged’ to Wordsworth (Fruman 307).

In the case of Wordsworth, scholars have long been alert to the role that sense perception (and vision in particular) plays in the development of his thought; thus, the literature on this topic is vast. In the interest of accessibility, specific sources will be cited when they become relevant in the thesis, although I will mention two studies which provide large-scale ‘theses’ about Wordsworthian perception and which will therefore need to be grappled with here. The first, Colin Clarke’s *Romantic Paradox* (1962), argues that Wordsworth’s most successful poetry hinges on the recognition of a paradox inherent in sense perception: the simultaneous belief in an outside world that transcends the mind, and the belief “that this world can somehow be brought within the compass of our own life without annulment of its externality” (Clarke 1-2). Consequently, objects in these poems tend to hover indeterminately between being reassuringly external on the one hand and “hauntingly insubstantial” (and thus ready to be integrated into a mental reality) on the other. This solution offers a prosaic explanation for such entities as the “life of things” in “Tintern Abbey”: it is Wordsworth’s ability (atypical for his time) to perceive what he sees as images (and thus “half-mental”) rather than wholly external ‘things’ that creates the impression that they possess intrinsic life. In other words, the ‘life’ is the sense in which they are partially psychological constructs, and thus not “alien to the mind” (63). Yet, at the same time, Clarke deems it crucial that Wordsworth perceives images as having a “depth” that indicates some partial externality to the mind (“merely tenuous and dream-like landscapes were of little interest to him”). Thus, Wordsworth’s secret poetic ingredient is a deliberate blurring of distinctions between solid/external and insubstantial/internal, something that "accounts for that satisfying sense of difficulties met which accompanies our reading of his best poetry" (Clarke 69).

Clarke's thesis works best for lynchpin 'nature' poems like "Tintern Abbey" and *The Prelude,* and becomes a bit more problematic in its treatment of poems preoccupied with the remote and otherworldly, like "Ode: Intimations of Immortality." Clarke excises such exceptions from his overall analysis by presenting them as unfortunate, even inauthentic, anomalies: thus, in contrast to Wordsworth's "otherwise successful endeavour to make consoling and ennobling poetry out of the image" in his earlier poems, he deems the "Ode" to be "brilliant but broken-backed," "marred by uncertainty of tone, and even a kind of dishonesty" (Clarke 93). With regard to "Tintern Abbey" and the poems that resemble it, Clarke's conclusions, as we shall see, resemble Coleridge's observations, and will be entertained as one of several competing 'explanations' of Wordsworthian perception throughout the thesis. However, my own reading of Wordsworth's perceptual habit focuses on the way that it seeks resolution to problems through the emotional processing of sensory gaps, and, as such, is very distinct from Clarke's.

Another highly influential 'master reading' of Wordsworth's thought has been offered by Geoffrey Hartman, primarily in *Wordsworth's Poetry: 1787-1814* (1964), where Hartman proposes that Wordsworth's work is oriented around a gradual process of the mind securing its independence from the world of perceptions. While acknowledging that Wordsworthian vision is cloaked in what he calls a "mild *anima mundi* mysticism," occasionally blending with a "second-hand-Spinozism," both of which Hartman argues were influences from Coleridge, Hartman's analysis has Wordsworth gradually moving toward a full recognition of the independent powers of the human mind in relation to the world, with *The Prelude* positioned as the climax of this development. At the same time, Hartman argues, Wordsworth was anxious not to attain an independence that would be antagonistic to nature (which would be a breach of his moral principles), something that would create the total, hostile withdrawal of mind from world which Hartman terms 'apocalypse', citing William Blake as a prototypical example (Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry* 175, 193). Instead, Wordsworth sought a mental sovereignty which also had an "excursive power," the power to rejuvenate itself at will in the external world. As such, Hartman assigns Wordsworth's ideal a moderate position between radical inwardness (apocalyptic solipsism) and passive outwardness (e.g. the "tyranny of the eye").

In my two Wordsworth chapters, some of the analysis will align with Hartman's conclusions. For example, my reading of the earliest phase of Wordsworth's career (up to and including *Descriptive Sketches*) harmonizes with Hartman's, and more generally, I wholly agree that Wordsworth's 'creed' is tightly intertwined with the formal aspects that convert "fixities into incremental contrasts or blendings," "verbal" as well as "visual" (175-176). My overarching argument, however, is distinct from Hartman's. While I share Hartman's assessment that the moral danger of solipsism is a key concern that permeates Wordsworth's later production, and while I acknowledge that there is an explicit attention to mind-independence concerns in those parts of his work, I do not share the opinion that his engagement with absences and gaps can be so cleanly correlated with this pull toward mental sovereignty.[25] Instead, I will treat 'gap-mindedness' as a distinct epistemological category, a type of projected 'outwardness' enabled by certain modes of spiritual feeling. Furthermore, unlike Hartman, I will also contextualize my reading of Wordsworth's late trajectory more firmly within his relationship to Coleridge. Thus, I will argue that the development of Wordsworth's gap vision, with its sensory-affective resolution of contraries, is connected to Wordsworth's increasing recognition of its attractiveness to Coleridge, who cannot organically think and feel in these terms. Thus, Wordsworth's poetic treatments of gap-vision become, increasingly, attempts to communicate to Coleridge how the friction between seen and unseen is resolved. Likewise, I will read Wordsworth's mind-independence concerns more narrowly within the context of Coleridge's and Wordsworth's relationship, arguing that these concerns are late-career developments which, in part, function as responses to Coleridge's criticisms of Wordsworth's philosophical limitations.

To conclude, this thesis presents what is, to my knowledge, a new theory of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's treatment of perception, proposing a model in which two separate 'habits' of perception develop in conjunction with each other, and finally diverge due to irreconcilable differences. Secondly, it constitutes an argument for returning to modes of analysis that have been unjustly neglected, and treated with undue skepticism, since the early 1980s, but which I argue can now be reinvigorated in the light of the new methodological horizons opened up by the rehabilitation of biographical context. Thus, the thesis has been written in the belief that the questions that Wordsworth and Coleridge grappled with were meaningful on a level that requires both sympathetic involvement and an attunement to a thick biographical context to adequately convey. Consequently, this thesis is intended to combine the old and the new, and – hopefully – inspire others to do the same.

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[25] On the whole, as impressive as Hartman's scholarship is, he has, in my opinion, a tendency to denigrate spiritual in favor of psychological aspects on clear grounds of personal preference. Sometimes, this bias is declared openly, such as in Hartman's observation that Chaucer and Shakespeare were "often greater poets of natural life than Wordsworth," since "they know that nature is a constipated or frozen form of imagination and refuse to worship its randomness" (Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry* 298). This preference leads Hartman to somewhat uncharitably present passages that do not fit within his psychological reading as "deception"; thus, when Wordsworth "sees Imagination by its own light and calls that light Nature's," this becomes, somewhat unaccountably, an act of "deception or transference" (254).

Chapter 1: Perception and paradox in Coleridge’s poetry of 1794-1802

Overview

In a notebook entry from December 1803, Coleridge states that he could write a whole book about the proverb “extremes meet,” a saying that eventually ends up becoming something of a leitmotif in his prose writings. By that time, Coleridge appears to have grown accustomed to the experience of emotional or intellectual extremes producing the same end-result: the experience of “Nothing” and “absolutest Being,” darkness and “excess of light,” the “dim” and the “perfectly clear Intellect” all seemingly landing in void-like uniformity, with all the shades of “Distinction & Plurality” occurring only along the interval (*CN1* 1725). Yet, as disheartening as this philosophy may have been to a writer whose life so often appears to have been governed by extremes, the increasing frequency of this phrase from 1803 and onwards also indicates a *need* to believe in its truth. It is often wise to look for complex reasons behind Coleridge’s stated convictions as he sometimes put certain feelings in words not because he was experiencing them but because he was trying to induce them in himself, often for superstitious purposes.[26] Perhaps, then, there is a sense in which this proverb doubled as a creed of faith for a man who knew all too well that extremes often do *not* meet, and that the pain of being torn between irreconcilable states, both of which make claims on one’s deepest convictions, constitutes an equally potent source of dissatisfaction. In short, “extremes meet” may also on some level be a hopeful affirmation, reflecting a conscious choice to believe that there is an intellectual vanishing point where miracles occur: a point where strenuous attention to one of the extremes pays off, and where, at some point, “that which suits a part infects the whole” (“D:O” line 92).[27]

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[26] For example, one of his notebook entries acknowledges that a previous entry contained a “superstitious Trick” of “baffling” or “appeasing possible evil by a feeling & expression of forced Fear, and encouraged Boding” (*Notebooks II* 2045).

[27] While “extremes meet” typically expresses more of a law than a desire on Coleridge’s part, a more unambiguous desire to unite opposites has historically been a characteristic feature of mystical thought. Mircea Eliade has classified the *coincidentia oppositorum* as one of the oldest ways to imagine the divine (Eliade 214-215, quoted in Valk 32). For specific examples, see the fifteenth-

There has been a long-standing critical debate about whether it is possible to attribute a unified and coherent system of philosophy to Coleridge. In early twentieth-century scholarship, the norm was to accuse him of incoherence; most famously, René Wellek criticized Coleridge for "lack[ing] an understanding of the incompatibly of different strains of thought" as well as "subtle differences in terminology, which leads him to unite heterogeneous adaptations of other thought into a contradictory whole" (Wellek 67). Later, the tide shifted toward more generous assessments, leading to what Marshall Suther, in 1960, called a "Coleridge 'boom'" in which scholars began to increasingly argue that "[Coleridge's] philosophical, psychological, and critical works need only a little reorganizing to be seen as finished monuments of thought" (Suther 2). This change was not without its detractors – I. A. Richards, for instance, griped that some of those studies suggested more about their authors than they did about Coleridge – but it was important in rehabilitating Coleridge as more than merely a promising poetic talent 'lost' to unproductive metaphysics (Richards, "Vulnerable Poet" 491-500).[28] Although subsequent decades saw the topic becoming less crowded with scholarly contributions, intermittent studies have continued the trend of promoting Coleridge as a cogent thinker and system-builder. Raimonda Modiano, for example, presented a strong case for coherence, arguing that Coleridge's later writings on natural philosophy "reveal the essential features of a coherent and integrated system that is thoroughly structured and even conceptually rigid, notwithstanding the fact that it is dispersed in bits and pieces throughout Coleridge's works" (Modiano, 187-188).

Other critics have attempted to create a 'unified theory' of Coleridgean thought through his various disagreements with Wordsworth. William Ulmer has argued that such criticism, in which periodic quarrels between the two poets are used as a springboard for casting them as "personifications of antithetical principles" came to gradually supplant the older, more complementary readings of their relationship (Ulmer 189). However, most Coleridge studies tend to agree that his *whole* body of work resists being read as having a uniform trajectory toward a single finished system or position. Most commonly, his career tends to be structured into loosely defined phases, demarcated alternately by changing intellectual influences, biographical milestones or the ebbs and flows of his personal relationship, or some combination of all three.

Yet despite this overall lack of cohesion in the work itself, there is a curious contrast in the cohesiveness of Coleridge's persona as a writer. Even a brief perusal of Coleridge's earliest poems reveals a psychological attitude not substantially different from the middle-aged poet so often faulted for having 'squandered' his

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century Nicholas of Cusa on the "Simplicity where contradictories coincide," William Blake on the wedding of "Contraries," and Carl Jung's experience of having "united the opposites" during the experiences recorded in his controversial *Red Book* (Nicholas of Cusa 77-78, 159; Blake 7; Jung 419-421).

[28] Quoted in Suther 4n5.

early potential, down to the presence of traits which might superficially seems like the product of a long life of failure and disillusionment. "Easter Holidays" and "Dura Navis," both written around age fifteen, center around a young speaker already bracing for an adulthood full of misfortunes and unfulfilled hopes. In "Quae nocent docent," written at seventeen (more than a year before Coleridge arrived at Cambridge), the speaker is lamenting a youth prematurely wasted in "Sloth," which could have been spent more constructively on learning (Coleridge, "Docent" lines 1-18).

Furthermore, reflections on the permanence of memory and the past occur in "Anna and Harland," while the prospect of illness becoming an obstacle to normal life appears in "Pain" – both poems written approximately a year before the first recorded instance of Coleridge using laudanum (Abrams, *Milk* 53). This would appear to indicate that even the rudiments of Coleridge's "opium personality" may have preceded his experience with the drug. "Nil Pejus est Caelibe Vitae," written at seventeen, expresses fears that the speaker will live a life without love, anticipating one of the signature themes of his later "Dejection crisis." In "Progress of Vice," written at eighteen, the speaker describes how having a constitutionally weak will prevents him from abstaining from wrongdoing, describing it as a two-pronged problem: "Shame" and "Conscience" impede his chances of self-betterment, while "stern Necessity" urges him deeper into his morass of troubles (Coleridge, "Progress" lines 17-24). Finally, hovering over the majority of his earliest poems is the notion of Christian faith or virtue as the saving graces when all else fails, of reality as fundamentally an arena of human failure, of the mind as powerless to solve its own problems, and of a divine authority as the only available corrective. In all of the above examples, the germs of Coleridge's future psychological crises appear to be present in embryonic form. In stark contrast to his career as a thinker, then, Coleridge's personality seems stuck in a nearly fixed mold.

It may be, then, that the best way to understand the development of Coleridge's thought is to think of it less as an evolution of certain ideas, and more as a psychological disposition which tries to articulate itself in different poetic and philosophical ways. Richard Haven has suggested that Coleridge's borrowings from philosophers are often best viewed through the lens of how they assist him in overcoming problems that are a combination of personal and intellectual in nature (Haven 478). Something similar, I argue in the following two chapters, can be observed in the way that Coleridge, in his poetry as much as in his philosophical prose, engages with the topic of sense perception.

In short, the following two chapters propose that Coleridge's writing expresses an intuitive awareness of experience as "broken" on the level of perception, and that much of his philosophical writing represents attempts to find a linguistic solution to what is fundamentally a non-linguistic problem. The problem appears to be a paradoxical relationship between perception and meaning: Coleridge needs to believe that the higher "meaning" of appearances resides in an unperceivable layer of reality, while at the same time requiring it to be accessible to perception to satisfy his needs as an artist. In a sense, then, Coleridge is trapped in the position of needing simultaneously to perceive and not to perceive. Stephen Prickett has said that Coleridge's principal objection to Wordsworth's philosophy of nature was that it failed to explain whether nature is "merely a language which expresses an invisible reality" or "herself the soul of all being" (Prickett, *Romanticism and Religion* 85-86). As for Coleridge's own disposition, one could describe it as torn by the contradiction that, for deeply-rooted psychological reasons, he needed both to be true.

Chapter 1 focuses on the years 1794-1802, Coleridge's most prolific and celebrated period as a poet, and the years in which Coleridge was convinced that poetry, rather than philosophy, was his calling. This chapter focuses primarily on Coleridge's so-called 'conversation poems.[29] In chapter 2, the narrative continues through the philosophical phase of his career, bringing the argument to a tentative conclusion.

1794-1797: Passive and developed perception

In December 1794, following "intense study" of David Hartley's *Observations on Man* (1749), a 22-year-old Coleridge professed to Southey that he was now a complete adherent of Hartley and the school of associationism (Coleridge, *CL1*, "To Robert Southey" 429). Hartley's system, which holds that all mental phenomena are reducible to vibrations, caused first by external stimuli and then recombined through the laws of involuntary association, is a sternly mechanistic doctrine that leaves no room for free will or a creative imagination.[30] As such, the teachings of associationism accorded well with the young Coleridge's belief in necessitarianism – a stronger version of philosophical determinism that denies even the logical possibility of a causal chain other than that which has been predetermined. Finally, the young Coleridge was also an avowed Unitarian, believing in a unified God as opposed to the Trinity. These three convictions – associationism, necessitarianism, Unitarianism – constitute the intellectual context of Coleridge's early descriptions of the mechanics of sense perception; they appear to be not only the engines that drove him toward intellectual experimentation, but also the constraints that determined the limit of those expressions.

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[29] Unlike most career-length studies of Coleridge's work, this thesis does not examine the poems of his so-called 'daemonic triad' ("The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," "Kubla Khan" and "Christabel"), despite being arguably Coleridge's three most famous works. This is because, unlike the majority of the 'conversation poems,' neither of these three texts can be said to deal with sense perception *itself* as a subject, focusing instead on issues of morality, dreams and desire.

[30] To summarize briefly, perception in Hartley's model occurs when a physical stimulus (e.g. a frequency of light or sound) strikes the nerve fibers, triggering a corresponding "vibration" in the brain, which is then invariably accompanied by a specific experience in the mind. Like Locke, Hartley argues that the human brain is a blank slate until it receives its first vibrations from without – however, as the mind gradually becomes habituated to certain simple sensations often occurring together, associated clusters of sensations soon begin to merge into complex ideas. Eventually, it is sufficient for only one of those sensations to be experienced for the whole complex idea to emerge automatically (Hartley 7-34).

Before 1796, Coleridge's descriptions of perception tend to be either allegorical (such as in "On Bala Hill" (1794), where a panoramic view from a just-ascended hilltop becomes an allegory for the relationship between memory and experience) or else describe perception as a wholly passive process operating according to associationist principles. In the latter case, the agent of perception is implied to be "Nature," with the mind merely a passive beneficiary of a creative energy that is ultimately not its own. In some formulations of this idea, Coleridge represents the mind as a musical instrument that is either tuned or played by animating influences from without. The choice of this symbol is particularly important in light of its pantheistic implications. Coleridge will later refer to the notion of the brain as a musical instrument, more specifically an organ with the keys facing inwards so that it is "played" from inside, as a conventional metaphor for the individual soul, so that the inversion of the same symbol (i.e. an instrument played from without) would appear to point toward a notion of a "world-soul."[31] In short, the animating force of this poetic universe is an all-suffusing movement that connects perceiver and perceived into a sensation of shared being – the "one life" – very often associated with the motif of a mechanical instrument played by a wind or breeze.

Most famously, this symbol serves as the centerpiece of "The Eolian Harp" (1795). This poem, which tends to be placed at the beginning of Coleridge's series of so-called "conversation poems," exists in multiple versions, and the version that most readers encounter today was in fact written much later, having been revised by Coleridge for his 1817 collection *Sibylline Leaves* (1817). In Abrams' comparison of the four different versions written between 1795 and 1817, he concludes that the poem existed in more or less finished form by 1796, and that the sole difference between 1796 and 1817 are lines 26-33, beginning with "O! the one life, within us and abroad…" (Abrams, "Light in Sound 458-461). In the interest of chronological accuracy, lines 26-33 will therefore be considered separately on the next page.

In the 1796 version of "The Eolian Harp," the sound of a wind playing the strings of an Aeolian harp in an otherwise still, near-silent landscape begins as an innocent symbol, paralleling the tender caresses that pass between the speaker and his wife as they enjoy the quiet evening scene. As the poem progresses, however, the wind playing the harp begins to parallel another process: a series of "idle flitting phantasies" sweeping through the speaker's "passive and indolent brain" (lines 34-

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[31] The comparison between the individual soul and the organ played from inside occurs in a letter to John Thelwall from December 1796, in which Coleridge calls it an orthodox interpretation of the term "soul," which is shared by "all our poets." At that point, however, Coleridge says that he emphatically does not share this view, not because of his materialism, but because he has become a "Berkeleyan" (*CL1* 195).

43). Suddenly, the universal pattern of a caressing seems to resolve itself into the suggestion that everything (harp, brain, world) is animated by a single pantheistic ‘influence’, a suggestion that is phrased, delicately, as merely an innocent question:

> And what if all of animated nature
> Be but organic harps diversely framed,
> That tremble into thought, as o’er them sweeps
> Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
> At once the Soul of each, and God of all?
> (Coleridge, “The Eolian Harp,” lines 44-48)

Here, the initial romantic symbolism of the harp, whereby the instrument was described as yielding to the wind “like some coy maid half yielding to her lover,” lends its symbolism of seduction to what the poem presents as a loosely speculative theory of how nature interacts with the mind (lines 15-16). The wind, in being like the lover, is also like the “one intellectual breeze,” while the harp, in being like the coy maid, is also like the mind. Despite having been advertised by the speaker as mere “idle flitting phantasies,” then, this central passage can be seen to represent the culmination of a carefully crafted symbolic progression, bringing the disparate elements of the early passages into a final unifying conclusion. In this Hartleian poetic universe, perception involves neither a subject nor an object in any meaningful sense – instead, both are mere vessels for an invisible divine breeze, sweeping through all things. Sense perception has become a divine conduit, the mind a “passive and indolent” receiver.

In the lines that were added for the 1817 version, Coleridge deepens the vision with subtly paradoxical language, through which the quality whereby what is now termed the “one life” manifests itself always seems to exist below the threshold of actual perception. It is described as a “sound-like” quality in light, a “light” in sound, the abstract notions of a “rhythm” in thought and “joyance” everywhere – each creating an impression of mere half-existence either through physical impossibility or apparent immateriality. The mute air itself is “music slumbering on her instrument,” another paradoxical phrase indicating the presence of the same unperceivable presence even in nature’s emptiest places. The result is a world where things are intuited as “filled,” but the filling substance itself remains unperceived. The strange quality that Coleridge takes pains to express seems to reside in the twilight zone between the seen and the unseen – the almost-seen – by which things can magically appear to be simultaneously empty and “filled” (Coleridge, “The Eolian Harp,” lines 26-33).

Naturally, the late addition of lines 26-33 means that the ideas expressed may not necessarily have corresponded to Coleridge’s philosophical opinions in 1796. Abrams argues that these lines suggest “a much heavier ‘burthen of ideas’ than that under which his early bardic poems had sweated and strained,” so that they are unmistakably colored by his post-1802 philosophical research (Abrams, “Light in Sound” 461). I agree with this assessment, while at the same time find it important that these lines are offered not in opposition to, but as *part of* the careful symbolic progression which concludes in the "organic harps"-vision of lines 44-48, that which the speaker later, pressured by Sara's seeming disapproval, disowns. In other words, it seems safe to conclude that Coleridge took the sentiments of lines 26-33 to be at least complementary to the argument that he had written in 1796. Possibly, he may also have deemed these sentiments implicit in the earlier version, so that in 1817 he simply offered a philosophical update of what he felt was an intellectually immature description. Even then, "the One Life within us and abroad, / Which meets all motion and becomes its soul" appears fully compatible with Coleridge's earlier Hartleian conviction that impressions shape the "motion" of the mind, particularly when read in the light of Coleridge's assertion to Southey that "I go farther than Hartley, and believe the corporeality of thought, namely, that it is motion" (*CL1,* "To Robert Southey," 113).

The way in which the speaker recants his "idle flitting phantasies" in response to Sara's disapproving gaze has tended not to convince too many critics. Harold Bloom believes that the poem remained committed to pantheism in ways that "sneaked past his [Coleridge's] orthodox censor," while Abrams argues that the recantation "strikes the modern reader as a timid and ineptly managed retreat to religious orthodoxy from the bold speculation of the middle of the poem" (Bloom 40, Abrams, "Light in Sound" 458). Indeed, the decision to include the passage along with an obligatory retraction seems like a clear case of having one's pantheistic cake and eating it. After all, a genuine recanting of the "idle flitting phantasies" would have entailed excising them from the poem altogether rather than keeping them, especially in the form of a climax that builds upon the rest of the poem almost like a conclusion.

However, the fact that "The Eolian Harp" ends with a passage recanting its own argument is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, it serves as a proto-example of a tendency in the conversation poems of Coleridge deferring to someone else as more metaphysically 'worthy' than himself. From "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" and onwards, this merges with his problems with perception to form what I call his subordination to the "ideal perceiver" (see pages 60-61). Secondly, the recantation occurs at the first moment in Coleridge's career where he appears to be at the cusp of an experience of transcendent nature-communion via his senses (the type of experience that Wordsworth would later make his niche), and deliberately averts it. Could it be that Coleridge sensed, already in 1796, that this type of experience was not quite what he is seeking, setting the tone for the way in which he would later diverge from Wordsworth's trajectory?

In 1796, Coleridge continued to mine his musical metaphor for "divine organist"-type meanings. In "Lines on Observing a Blossom on the First of February, 1796," it is used to describe the effect on the speaker's mind by observing a flower in winter:

> And the warm wooings of this sunny day

> Tremble along my frame, and harmonize
> The attempered organ, that even saddest thoughts
> Mix with some sweet sensations, like harsh tunes
> Played deftly on a soft-toned instrument.
> (Coleridge, "On Observing a Blossom," lines 22-26)

In contrast to the treatment of a corresponding symbol in "The Eolian Harp," there now appear to be three contributors to the finished music rather than two: a player (the external sensation), an instrument (the mind) and a tune (the individual thought). In this process, the creation of an emotion is more complex and involve two different emotional values – the inherent mood of the thought ("saddest") and the tempering influence of the sensation ("sweet") – each combining to form a mental experience akin to a complex chord.

Although the ultimate reasons for Coleridge's intellectual allegiance to Hartley have been the source of some critical contention, it is clear that he was becoming alert to the limitations of assocationism as early as 1797. Richard Haven has argued that Coleridge's interest in Hartley's theories was always founded on the hope that they could be used to legitimize the higher life of the mind. In other words, Haven claims, if mystical or spiritual experiences could be explained as a natural product of the laws that govern the mind, Coleridge would have felt himself to have proved that such experiences were as "real" as any other natural phenomenon (Haven 480).[32] Over time, however, Coleridge appears to have been increasingly bothered by the fact that this very grounding in natural necessity can be seen to simultaneously relativize the value of any given type of mental experience. For example, Coleridge failed to come to an agreement with his friend Thomas Wedgwood over Hartley's theories, Neil Vickers has shown, with Wedgwood proposing a genuine materialism in which all mental functions could be broken down into the same composite parts, and Coleridge insisting that there must be some qualitative difference between the higher and lower lives of the mind (Vickers, "Wedgwood" 88).

Furthermore, in addition to Coleridge's increasing frustrations with Hartleian orthodoxy, his letters give voice to another internal conflict about the nature of reality, pertaining specifically to the relationship between perception and meaning. In two letters, both written in October 1797, Coleridge outlines the problem in a way that illustrates why his personal writings are occasionally as unreliable a glimpse into his 'true' feelings as some of his poems. The first is sent to his close friend Thomas Poole:

> From my early reading of Fairy Tales, & Genii &c &c – my mind had been habituated to the Vast -- & I never regarded *my senses* in any way as the criteria of my belief. I

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[32] Similarly, Walter Jackson Bate has argued that Coleridge was attracted to Hartley's philosophy for its "systematic inclusiveness," and for its promise to unite "the head and the heart" (W. J. Bate 12-13).

> regulated all my creeds by my conceptions not by my *sight* – even at that age […] Those who have been led to the same truths step by step thro’ the constant testimony of their senses, seem to me to want a sense which I possess – They contemplate nothing but *parts*, and all *parts* are necessarily little. And the universe to them is but a mass of *little things*.” […] I have known some who have been *rationally* educated, as it is styled. They were marked by a microscopic acuteness, but when they looked at great things, all became a blank and they saw nothing, and denied (very illogically) that anything could be seen, and uniformly put the negation of a power for the possession of a power, and called the want of imagination judgment and the never being moved to rapture philosophy! (*CL1* 226)

This criticism of rationally educated empiricism hews closely to attitudes that Coleridge would continue to express throughout his whole life. However, shortly afterwards, he sends another letter to John Thelwall, using almost identical phrasing to describe a philosophical predicament that he acknowledges as his own, reframing the critical observations from the letter to Poole as a personal confession:

> I can *at times* feel strongly the beauties you describe, in themselves and for themselves; but more frequently *all things* appear *little*, all the knowledge that can be acquired child’s play; the universe itself! What but an immense heap of *little* things? I can contemplate nothing but *parts* and parts are all *little*! My mind feels as if it ached to behold and know something *great*, something *one* and *indivisible*. And it is only in the faith of that that rocks or waterfalls, mountains or caverns, give me the sense of sublimity or majesty! But in this faith *all things* counterfeit infinity. (*CL1* 228)

The crux of the problem appears to be Coleridge’s emerging awareness that there is a rift between the world of his perceptions and the conception of the world from which he derives a sense of meaning. In short, the world that he perceives is inherently divided into parts, the sum of which is not a discernible whole but merely “an immense heap of *little* things,” whereas the underlying entity that he views as necessary for the creation of higher feelings (“sublimity or majesty”) must be one and indivisible. In order to solve this contradiction, the existence of “something one and indivisible” must be imagined beneath the appearances; this, however, has the unfortunate side effect of relativizing the value of the appearances themselves, since if everything becomes merely a cover for the same metaphysical substrate, all objects appear to become interchangeable in terms of meaning. In effect, “*all things* counterfeit infinity” – or if everything represents the infinite and nothing incarnates it, the value of representing the infinite becomes negligible, so that every object becomes a counterfeit for the real thing.[33] Coleridge, then, appears to recognize the problem as stemming from his belief in a world simultaneously transcendent and perceivable – in short, of his own need to see what needs to remain unseen.

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[33] The phrase ”counterfeit infinity” also appears in a notebook entry from Nov-Dec 1796, where it is used to describe unnamed “great things” in an obscure vision: “inward desolations—/ an horror of great darkness / great things that on the ocean / counterfeit infinity—“ (*CN1* 273). As David Jasper has shown, the phrase can be traced back to Ralph Cudworth’s *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678), where it is stated that “nothing which includeth any thing of

This problem is anticipated in a number of ways by the climactic passages of "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" (1797), where a similar insight is ostensibly offered as a salutary moral lesson. The fact that Coleridge's letter to Thelwall quotes seven lines from this poem appears to indicate a recognition that the two texts contain similar insights, but the parallel emerges especially when the stated "lesson" of the poem is carried to its logical conclusion.[34] The premise of the poem is that the narrator is denied a transcendent experience of nature of the type described in "The Eolian Harp," and must instead experience it vicariously through what he imagines his friend (identified as "Charles," i.e. his fellow poet Charles Lamb) to be seeing. This mode of vicarious perception is a composite state created by memory and imagination working in conjunction – the particular associations that the speaker attributes to Charles are drawn both from emotions that the speaker has himself experienced when observing the same sights and from the unique emotions which he imagines must come naturally to a city-dweller like Charles. This imaginative experiment eventually does culminate in an experience of the "one life," once again described in paradoxical terms that seem to render it indeterminately situated between the seen and the unseen: the world, transfigured by perception, suddenly seems "less gross than bodily: and of such hues / As veil the Almighty Spirit, when he makes / Spirits perceive his presence." As in "The Eolian Harp," the lines between what can be perceived and what can be merely intuited are blurred: it is stated that there are particular "hues" that indicate the presence of the "Almighty Spirit," yet the function of these hues is simultaneously to "veil" it. Nevertheless, this paradoxical act of veiling-through-colors ensures that "Spirits" can "perceive his presence," seemingly playing on the double meaning of the verb "perceive" to leave it ambiguous whether this presence is actually perceived or merely intuited (Coleridge, "Lime-Tree Bower" lines 39-43).[35]

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imperfection in the essence of it […] as number, magnitude and time" can be "truly and properly infinite," since this is a quality that inheres only in God, and as such the former can only "counterfeit infinity" (Jasper 20; Cudworth 490). Furthermore, Kaufman's register of Coleridge's borrowings from the Bristol Library reveals that Coleridge checked out Cudworth's *System* twice in 1796 (once in summer and again in late November), so the phrase could easily have been at the forefront of his memory around this time (Kaufman 319-320). However, the particular sense in which the phrase comes to stand for the specific dilemma of relating appearance to meaning appears to be unique to the 1797 letter.

[34] The seven lines quoted in the letter are: "Struck with the deepest calm of joy, I stand / Silent, with swimming sense; and gazing round / On the wide landscape, gaze till all doth seem / Less gross than bodily, a living Thing / Which acts upon the mind and with such hues / As clothe th' Almighty Spirit, where He makes / Spirits perceive His presence!..." (*CL1* 228). The quoted lines immediately follow the passage quoted on p. 57, and their relevance to the letter is not explained.

[35] The contradictory character of this description is highlighted in the 1829 and 1834 versions of the poem by the addition of the word "yet," rendering the full line: "As veil the Almighty Spirit,

The poem concludes with what appears to be a hopeful moral lesson:

> Henceforth I shall know
> That Nature ne'er deserts the wise and pure;
> No plot so narrow, be but Nature there,
> No waste so vacant, but may well employ
> Each faculty of sense, and keep the heart
> Awake to Love and Beauty! and sometimes
> 'Tis well to be bereft of promis'd good,
> That we may lift the soul, and contemplate
> With lively joy the joys we cannot share.
> (Coleridge, "Lime-Tree Bower" lines 59-67)

The lesson appears to be two-fold: 1) to the trained eye, any place in nature can be a conduit to "Love and Beauty," and 2) there must always remain a zone of experience off-limits to the individual mind ("the joys we cannot share"), so that some areas of life must be contemplated rather than perceived. The first lesson may be said to constitute a clear departure from the earlier poems, since the notion that perception can be developed through psychological growth grants a degree of agency to the subject hitherto unprecedented in Coleridge's writing. In "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," beauty is no longer bestowed passively onto a machine-like mind; instead, the self-regulating mind possesses the power to adjust its own receptivity, rendering it capable of seeing beauty anywhere or, just as conceivably, nowhere.

It is easy to read this message as fundamentally optimistic regarding the possibility of a deeper connection between perceiver and unseen.[36] The notion of perception as a faculty that can be developed not only empowers the mind, but also grants a moral dimension to perception in that it makes higher experience dependent on "work," so that not only effort but also virtue ("the wise and pure") becomes a requirement for attaining it. Furthermore, there is an unmistakably Christian cast to the idea that the humblest sights and experiences carry the same divine signature as even the most sensuously gratifying landscapes.[37] However, what appears to be an immediate victory for the mind and the moral framework of the cosmos also comes with a troubling implication, strongly reminiscent of the problem later to be outlined in the letter to Thelwall: namely, that if there is no essential difference between the sights that the speaker would have seen on the journey that he missed and the ones that can be found in the lime-tree bower, any distinction between the two places in

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when yet he makes Spirits perceive his presence," indicating the crucial contrast between the terms "veil" and "perceive" (manuscript change documented in Stillinger 49).

[36] McSweeney calls the poem noteworthy for the lack of "ideological tension": it has, he argues, "no dissonance between pantheistic tendencies and Christian supernaturalism" (McSweeney 78).

[37] Chandler calls it "proverbial wisdom, the kind of lesson that every Sunday-school pupil of Coleridge's day would have learned by heart" (Chandler 469).

terms of meaning becomes negligible. In other words, if the trained mind has the capacity to read the same meaning into both (i.e. if "all places are holy," as Christopher Miller takes the moral lesson of the poem to be; C. Miller 520), then all sights and places, in a sense, merely "counterfeit infinity."

At the same time, the second lesson maintains that some experiences must be closed off as inaccessible to the individual mind, so that they can offer an object for the imagination to "contemplate / With lively joy." The two lessons, then, can be seen as offering yet another variation on the Coleridgean notion of life as divided into that which can be seen and that which must remain unseen. However, in equally Coleridgean fashion, these two lessons also appear to be at odds: if the higher experience of nature can be obtained anywhere, why do we need to assign any particular value to the "joys we cannot share", when, after all, these can never more than equivalent in power to those that can be found anywhere? In short, the moral value of the realization that some things will not be granted to the individual mind seems to be at odds with the notion that the mind can grant itself an equivalent experience by cultivating the right attitude. Deprived of any greater significance, the zone of "joys that we cannot share" appears to become a blank canvas, valuable not for what it holds but for what can be projected upon it – the "unseen" becomes synonymous with the "seen-through-the-imagination." In the two lessons offered by "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," then, the crux of the problem outlined in the October letters appears to be already on the verge of articulation: if all appearances symbolize infinity, nothing does; along with a corollary: if the mind can develop its powers of perception indefinitely, the boundary between the unseen and the imagined begins to blur.

The decision to focalize the central events through the eyes of another person (Charles) can be seen as the first example of a recurring pattern in the conversation poems of the narrator foregoing the role of "ideal perceiver" and passing it on to another character. From 1798 and onwards, this consistently occurs whenever a speaker finds himself unable to perceive the world according to the standards he has set for himself, so that another mind has to be entrusted with the powers that he cannot awaken in his own. Notably, the recipient of this role tends to be a person who is either absent from the main setting of the poem or who does not yet exist, so that the possibility of perception transferred becomes, in some measure, a question of faith. William Christie reads these passages as symbolic expressions of "un-self-conscious love," enabling the speaker to find the union with nature that he seeks, if only as a "momentary object of desire" (Christie 56). Although the expression of love is undeniably a crucial function of these passages, it is also important to note that the redemptive power of such blessings stems partially from recognizing the recipient as possessing a talent that the speaker does not have: namely, the capacity to perceive the world as it deserves to be perceived. As such, it is not sufficient to describe them merely as expressions of love – they also involve, within the specific context of perception, a restoration of faith in the reality of higher experience. Adam Potkay, on the other hand, reads these passages as attempts to recreate aesthetically the joys that Coleridge has become blocked from experiencing in real life: by imagining such joys as experienced by another person, Coleridge can recreate what is missing through his capacity for empathy and reflection rather than his own inadequate emotional resources (Potkay 3-4). Morris Dickstein agrees, arguing that Coleridge is barred from experience due to being "too deeply inhibited": "Only the other, not he, can be 'Nature's play mate,' not he, the city-boy, the 'library cormorant,' the miserable unhappy adult" (Dickstein 382). However, it still bears mention that the joy that is being sought is invariably of a very particular kind: it is always the joy of *perceiving*, and always the person's susceptibility to the beauty of the world that renders them deserving of becoming "blessed," indicating that perception remains an important context wherever such passages appear.

By allowing the speaker to transfer the role of "ideal perceiver" to another person, an element of empathy and sharedness is introduced into the solitary world of philosophical speculation that otherwise predominates in the conversation poems. However, the notion that seemingly intractable intellectual problems can be evaded through passing the burden to someone else raises the question about the nature of such problems to begin with. Are the various dilemmas that are introduced in these poems objective questions about the relationship between mind and world, or rather individual problems pertaining to Coleridge's own mind? In other words, is the greater narrative of the conversation poems essentially philosophical or psychological?

1798: A language of the senses

If the problem described in the letter to Thelwall can be seen as emblematic of Coleridge's engagement with perception in late 1797, then the following year can be characterized by various attempts to move beyond it. Each of the three conversation poems published in 1798 – "Frost at Midnight," "Fears in Solitude" and "The Nightingale" – can be seen as presenting tentative solutions to the problem, albeit with varying degrees of certainty and optimism.

"Frost at Midnight" begins similarly to the other conversation poems by establishing a scene characterized by silence and stillness, creating an atmosphere of perceptual blocking that tunes out sights and sounds until only one perception predominates, which then comes to serve as the central metaphor for the relationship between mind and world. In "The Eolian Harp," this governing perception was the wind stroking the strings of a passive instrument, whereas in "Frost at Midnight" it is the image of frost – or, more specifically, the slow and imperceptible movements of frost as it sculpts itself into icicles during the night. Already in the opening lines, this far more stationary and obscure emblem of nature is placed in conversation with the earlier symbol: the frost, "unhelped by any wind," performs a sacred function ("ministry"), but unlike the wind that warbles, it does so in a way that does not necessarily involve the human mind (its ministry is “secret”). The only other impression of note is the occasional cries of an “owlet,” but these outbursts are implied to be an anomaly, since in the next stanza, the “sole unquiet thing” is stated to be the “film” which “fluttered on the grate.” The predominant mood in this world of glacially-paced mysteries is, despite such occasional interruptions, a “strange and extreme silentness” (Coleridge, “Frost” lines 1-16).

When the human speaker is introduced, he is established as someone who cannot penetrate past this veil of calm to the hidden meanings underneath – the silence “vexes” his meditation, and the “numberless goings-on of life” throughout “sea, and hill, and wood” seem to hover on the border of unreality, “inaudible as dreams” (lines 8-13). As Paul A. Magnuson has argued, the problem does not seem to be nature’s, but rather the speaker’s own inability to comprehend the “strange dreamlike vacuity” around him – in other words, it is not a failure of perception as much as a failure of interpretation (Magnuson, “Dead Calm” 58). The speaker has come to realize that his mind has become *projective* rather than *receptive*, an “idling Spirit” that interprets everything “by its own moods,” seeking everywhere an “echo or mirror” of itself, which thereby “makes a toy of Thought” (for the remainder of this chapter, I will refer to this notion as “the projective mind”). Consequently, the speaker’s attention is drawn not to the enigmatic symbol of the midnight frost, but instead to a mere “film,” “flutter[ing] on the grate,” which he finds to be a more “companionable form” on account of its “puny flaps and freaks,” making up a dim parallel to the workings of his own mind (Coleridge, “Frost” lines 15-23).

Unlike “Dejection: An Ode,” “Frost at Midnight” does not describe the sudden or even gradual abandonment of the mind’s powers of perception – instead, the problem is indicated to have been with the speaker his whole life, because of harmful influences in his youth. The extended recollection of his school days (drawing on Coleridge’s memory of the repressive atmosphere of Christ’s Hospital) indicates that he has, in a sense, always been watching the fluttering film, reading private meanings into unremarkable objects because there was nothing else to look at. The speaker, then, exists in a “fallen” state of perception, attributable to the stunting of his perceptual faculties by the monotony of the “great city,” where “pent ’mid cloisters dim,” he “saw nought lovely but the stars” (lines 51-53). In a striking reversal of the argument in “This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison,” the state of sensory deprivation has now become a harmful state – its tendency to induce perceptual development as compensation for its lack of riches, which in the earlier poem was exalted as a blessing, has now become a curse.

In a sense, the central paradox of the 1797 letters appears to have been carried to its logical conclusion: once the mind has been alerted to its power to read everything as a symbol of infinity, the world of appearances must on some level take on the quality of a Rorschach test – everything gains a duplicitous quality, rendering it at best a dream and at worst a mere counterfeit. Whatever higher life actually inheres in nature must now be deeply hidden, manifesting itself neither in visible movement, light nor sound, but instead performing a more inscrutable, “secret” ministry.

Meanwhile, the mind, cursed with the power to adjust its own powers of perception, now finds that it can only interpret the world "by its own moods."

To solve this problem, the speaker resorts to passing on the role of "ideal perceiver" to someone else: his infant son (eighteen-month-old Hartley) sleeping in the cot next to him, who is still young enough to be taught to receive all the influences that the speaker has been denied. This child can still be taught to "see and hear / The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible / Of that eternal language, which thy God / Utters, who from eternity doth teach / Himself in all, and all things in himself" (lines 54-64). To such a child, "all seasons shall be sweet" – even winter, the season governed by the inscrutable ministry of the frost, which the speaker can only fathom as a mystery (lines 65-74). Hartley, the future ideal perceiver, will be taught not to look at nature as a mirror of the mind, but rather as a complex language or alphabet, with each utterance corresponding to a unique, objective meaning. To the mind that reads nature like a language, the multiplicity of the world will be regained – this mind will be equally alert to the overt meanings of summer as to the subtler, more elusive meanings of winter.

Although the notion of God or nature as operating through "symbols" occurs elsewhere in Coleridge's poetry before 1798 (in "Religious Musings," the "Great Invisible" is described as "by symbols only seen"; lines 9-10), the notion of nature as a complete language with specific and heterogeneous meanings seems to make its first appearance in "Frost at Midnight." One probable source of this idea is Berkeley, of whom Coleridge confesses to being a follower as early as December 1796 (*CL1* 195).[38] In his *New Theory of Vision* (1709), Berkeley describes the world of vision as more akin to a language than a representation of an underlying reality, stating that its objects can be compared to words which may signify "this or that thing, or nothing at all" (Berkeley, *Vision* 38-41).[39] In fact, vision appears to constitute nothing less than the "universal language of the author of nature," in which objects are presented symbolically in ways that indicate their usefulness to us, which helps us to regulate our actions to acquire what we need in this life (34). Another possible source of inspiration is the older Christian notion of the book of nature, or *liber creaturarum*, described at length in Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici*, wherein divine revelation is thought of as divided between two books: scripture and nature. The latter, Browne writes, is legible also to heathens, who often read "these mystical Letters" better than Christians themselves, "who cast a more careless eyes on these common Hieroglyphicks, & disdain to suck Divinity from the flowers of nature" (Browne, *Religio Medici* 27). In Coleridge's marginalia, written at some point in early 1802, he comments that this strikes him as "very fine Philosophy" and "the best & most ingenious Defence of Revelation" (*CM1* 747).

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[38] This is also Magnuson's assessment; see "Conversation Poems" 37.

[39] Berkeley's thesis in *A New Theory of Vision* concerns only sight, since it is suggested that touch offers a different, more accurate contact with the external world. It is only later, in the *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710), that Berkeley makes his more radical claim, asserting that for all objects of our perception it holds true that *esse est percipi* (to be is to be perceived). I return to Coleridge's discussion of the later Berkeley in chapter 2, pages 96-97.

If Coleridge in 1798 can be assumed to still be grappling with the ramifications of the theory of developed perception outlined in "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," it becomes possible to see how a shift to a language theory of perception might avoid some of his problems. By positing that our perceptions are more akin to received linguistic utterances, each with its own individual meaning, it becomes possible to assign different meanings to different perceptions, thus restoring the phenomenal world as fundamentally diverse on the level of meaning. At the same time, by comparing perceptions to acts of language, perceptions remain two-sided in the way necessary for a transcendent understanding of reality: the material component of the perception constituting the "sign," and the transcendent component constituting the "meaning." Furthermore, by also conceptualizing perception as a divine language for mediating religious revelation, the language model also offers Coleridge an opportunity to close the gap between religious and scientific truth, serving as a solid foundation for Coleridge's belief, as expressed to Thomas Poole in 1801, that "all truth is a species of revelation" (*CL1* 351-352).

With this context in mind, it is interesting to note that in the other conversation poems of 1798, "Fears in Solitude" and "The Nightingale," a very specific perception functions as the symbol of the relationship between nature and the mind: birdsong, or more specifically the singing of an unseen songbird. Although this symbol receives its most comprehensive treatment in the latter poem, its peculiar significance is first hinted at in "Fears in Solitude" – a poem which can be seen to serve as a transitional text between Coleridge's "breeze"- and "language"-phases of describing perception. Although the argument of the poem concludes with what appears to be a gentle repudiation of solitary experiences of nature in favor of a more extraverted engagement with the world, its descriptions of the nature of perception are complex and ambiguous, providing few conclusive answers about its ultimate value and meaning.

As in the other conversation poems, a governing perception is established early on through perceptual blocking, as the silence and the stillness of the world is contrasted with a single sensation rising above it all: "A small and silent dell! O'er stiller place / No singing sky-lark ever poised himself" (Coleridge, "Fears in Solitude" lines 2-3). This, however, is not the dormant winter-world of "Frost at Midnight," and a multitude of other perceptions soon begin to crowd around the speaker; however, the symbolic preeminence of the skylark is maintained through repeated references to its presence at pivotal points throughout the poem. The next time that the bird is mentioned, the particular fact that it sings "unseen" is emphasized: "the singing lark (that sings unseen / The minstrelsy that solitude loves best)" (lines 18-19). At this point, a multitude of "sweet influences" come together as the sun and the "breezy air" are added to the skylark's song, forming a dense fabric of impressions that "trembled o'er [the perceiver's] frame" (lines 20-21), causing him to enter into a state of enraptured half-dream:

> And he, with many feelings, many thoughts,
> Made up a meditative joy, and found
> Religious meanings in the forms of Nature!
> And so, his senses gradually wrapt
> In a half sleep, he dreams of better worlds,
> And dreaming hears thee still, O singing lark,
> That singest like an angel in the clouds! (lines 22-28)

In this passage, the language of the early Hartleian poems seems to mix incongruously with emerging ideas about perception as a language. The description of sense-impressions "trembling" over the "frame" of the mind suggests a return to the "Eolian Harp"-model of perception as a mind-animating breeze – the same two words occur in "The Eolian Harp" (lines 45-46) and "Lines on Observing a Blossom in February, 1796" (line 23) in passages that link them specifically to this motif – as does the implication of the mind becoming a passive receiver for "breeze"-like natural influences. On the other hand, the description that the perceiver finds "religious meanings in the forms of Nature," along with another reminder of the presence of the "singing lark," are elements that seem to link the experience simultaneously with the symbolic universe later to be developed in "The Nightingale."

The complexity of this passage is compounded by its ambiguous positioning between dream and reality, which complicates its message about the ostensible inwardness of the nature experience. On the one hand, the description makes clear that the speaker is partially retreating into a dream-state: his senses are "gradually wrapt / In a half sleep," allowing him to "dream of better worlds." However, this state of reverie is kept carefully delineated from his perception of the skylark's song, which serves as an objective referent in an otherwise subjective state, the word "still" in "hears thee still, O singing lark!" indicating that these are two contrasting states of experience. It would appear, then, that the "one life"-experience described here consists of two different states: a subjective experience of dreaming, and an objective experience of nature mediated through the symbol of a hidden songbird, anchoring the dream tenuously to reality.

When the poem eventually builds toward a progression out of the "silent dell," it is specifically its character of inwardness and escapism that appears to be in need of a corrective. At the same time, a different facet of the nature experience is presented as a necessary precondition for an intellectually healthy mind: namely, its capacity to awaken the mind to higher spiritual values. When this argument is presented, the language becomes strongly reminiscent of how the future education that is being prepared for Hartley in "Frost at Midnight":

> O native Britain! O my Mother Isle!
> How shouldst thou prove aught else but dear and holy
> To me, who from thy lakes and mountain-hills,
> Thy clouds, thy quiet dales, thy rocks and seas,

> Have drunk in all my intellectual life,
> All sweet sensations, all ennobling thoughts,
> All adoration of God in nature,
> All lovely and honourable things,
> Whatever makes this mortal spirit feel
> The joy and greatness of its future being? (“Fears,” lines 182-191)

Unlike the narrator of “Frost at Midnight,” who imagined himself to still be suffering from sensory deprivation in his childhood, this speaker claims always to have been in touch with the beauties of nature, complicating the easy identification of Coleridge himself with either of these hypothetical pasts. In these lines, nature becomes once again a register of symbols for educating the mind, through which the multiplicity of nature’s forms (“lakes,” “mountain-hills,” “clouds,” “dales, “rocks and seas”) can be translated into “intellectual life,” “ennobling thoughts” and religious presentiments of “its [this mortal spirit’s] future being.” In other words, not all acquaintance with the forms of nature is a retreat from the world: by engaging with one’s perceptions of nature on a symbolic and intellectual level, the mind also has the power to acquire a lifetime’s supply of “ennobling thoughts.”

However, the speaker eventually feels himself called away from the silence and the “lonely sojourning,” and decides to begin his journey “homeward” (lines 210-213). After the “half sleep” of the dell, the outside world is described in terms that indicate a sudden awakening: the speaker is “startled” as the new, wider vistas appear like a “burst of prospect” (lines 213-215). In the following lines, the world appears as a complex panorama, encompassing nature as well as human civilization, stirring his mind to “livelier impulse and a dance of thought.” He sees a “huge amphitheatre” of “rich and elmy fields,” bounded in the distance by the “shadowy main,” all of it converging into the appearance of “society” “conversing with the mind” (lines 215-220). Next, nature blends seamlessly into civilization with all its human obligations as Nether Stowey rises up in the foreground, reminding the speaker of the demands of religion (“Thy church-tower”), friendship (“the four huge elms / Clustering, which mark the mansion of my friend”) and family (“my own lowly cottage, where my babe / And my babe’s mother dwell in peace!”). Having regained the sobering complexity of the real world, the speaker concludes by offering up a prayer of thanks to the “green and silent dell,” which has prepared him for life in the larger world by having “softened” his heart, and thereby made him worthy of “Love, and the thoughts that yearn for human kind” (lines 221-232).

As with “This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison,” the optimistic moralism of this ending appears to be masking a considerable ambivalence about the meaning of the mind’s relationship with the forms of nature. If the “green and silent dell” encompasses *both* a retreat into subjective dream and a book of nature to instruct the mind, can one ever safely demarcate one from the other? To which category do the “religious meanings in the forms of Nature,” “found” in the midst of “meditative joy,” belong? Furthermore, does the symbolic homeward journey represent a genuine recognition of the dell’s inwardness, or a gradual turning away from a type of experience that is perhaps becoming increasingly difficult for the author to make sense of? These are questions that indicate that the mysteries of perception were as intractable to Coleridge as ever in 1798, despite what the hopeful tone of the poems written in this year often suggests.

If "Frost at Midnight" affirmed the notion of nature as a language even as the speaker declared himself unable to read it, and "Fears in Solitude" registered ambivalence about the relationship of this language to subjective fantasy, "The Nightingale" represents perhaps the most unreserved affirmation of this belief. Using a familiar tactic of perceptual blocking, the poem begins by establishing the silence and stillness of the scene: "all is still," no "relique of the sunken day" can be seen on the Western sky, and a stream can be seen but not heard as it "flows silently / O'er its soft bed of verdure." The stars are "dim," yet by focusing on the invisible (the promise that the clouds will bring rain in the future), the speaker tells his companion to take "pleasure in the dimness of the stars" (Coleridge, "Nightingale" lines 1-11). In this obscure world, only the song of the nightingale comes through, quickly establishing itself as the governing perception, and symbol, of the poem. In this world, visible things are mute, whereas invisible entities (hidden songbirds, the promise of rain) become the carriers of transcendent meaning.

If the projective mind that read all things "by its own moods" was a state of chronic cognitive limitation in "Frost at Midnight," "The Nightingale" represents it as a state of error that can be overcome. Through a lengthy recapitulation of where previous poetic interpretations of the nightingale went wrong, the central thesis of the poem is gradually set out:

> A melancholy bird? Oh! idle thought!
> In Nature there is nothing melancholy.
> But some night-wandering man whose heart was pierced
> With the remembrance of a grievous wrong,
> Or slow distemper, or neglected love,
> (And so, poor wretch! filled all things with himself,
> And made all sounds tell back the tale
> Of his own sorrow) he, and such as he,
> First named these notes a melancholy strain.
> (Coleridge, "Nightingale" lines 14-22)

The precise identity of the "night-wandering man" is blurred by the amount of poets who make up equally viable candidates: Coleridge himself, writing about "Philomel" and her "pity-pleading strains" as late as 1795 ("To the Nightingale"), Milton, whose "Il Penseroso" and *Comus* appear to be directly alluded to in the poem (Randel 39-42), or the nameless Greek originator of the myth of Philomela – presumably the *actual* first to name "these notes a melancholy strain." Instead, the night-wandering man becomes an archetype for an error endlessly repeated (signaled by the blurring of "he" and "such as he"), the projective mind stripped down to its most ignoble psychological motivations.

Much like the speaker in "Frost at Midnight," the night-wandering man has committed the error of reading everything by his own moods, having "filled all things with himself / And made all sounds tell back the tale / Of his own sorrow." However, by changing the primary symbol of nature from the elusive movements of frost to the singing of a hidden songbird, "The Nightingale" develops the latter motif, previously seen in "Fears in Solitude," into an apt representation of the theory of perception as a language. Birdsong, unlike the breeze or the frost, becomes an utterance comparable to any act of human communication, with the implication that it expresses a message that can be correctly or incorrectly understood. To read the birdsong as a reflection of one's own private emotions is to fail to understand its meaning – "better far," the speaker suggests, if he had engaged with nature on its own terms and "surrender[ed] his whole spirit" to its "influxes of shapes and sounds and shifting elements" (lines 25-29). Conceiving of perception as a language comparable to the songs of skylarks and nightingales enables Coleridge to rehabilitate the experience of nature as an extraverted experience – an act of transcendent empathy oriented toward a real object – as opposed to an expression of irredeemable inwardness.

Compared to "Fears in Solitude," where inwardness was associated with nature and outwardness a return to society and culture, "The Nightingale" suggests a reverse relationship. The projective error will continue to predominate specifically because "youths and maidens most poetical" will choose to forego "the deepening twilights of the spring" in favor of "ball-rooms and hot theatres," where the nightingale's song will continue to be read as a lament (lines 34-39).[40] Only those who have learned a "different lore" – such as Coleridge and the Wordsworths – will refrain from "profan[ing] Nature's sweet voices," and recognize that the meaning of the song is "love and joyance" (lines 40-43). Finally, like "Frost at Midnight," the poem ends by appointing Hartley ("my dear babe") the ideal perceiver. Even in this group of enthusiastic listeners, the child takes precedence as the teacher of his seniors: if he were able to, the speaker muses, "how he would place his hand beside his ear / His little hand, the small forefinger up, / And bid us listen." Hartley, through becoming "familiar with these songs," may yet come to associate the night with joy – a reiteration of the moral lesson from "Frost at Midnight" that allows an obscure or misunderstood face of nature (winter or the night) to be correctly read as a sign expressing a hidden meaning: joy.

Furthermore, the spiritual optimism of "The Nightingale" even leads it to transgress the border between seen and unseen – a line that, while often blurred, is rarely actually crossed in Coleridge's works. Those who are alert to the secrets of nature, the speaker says, know that there is a place – a grove "wild with tangling underwood" close to an untenanted castle – where large groups of nightingales gather at night. In this grove, one can become privy to the internal conversations of nature, as the description of the birds "answer[ing] and provok[ing] each other's song, / With skirmish and capricious passagings" suggests a range of heterogeneous voices and messages. However, one sound rises above the others – "one low piping sound more sweet than all, / Stirring the air with such a harmony, / That should you close your eyes, you might almost / Forget that it was not day!" – indicating that there is a hierarchy even among nature's diverse sounds (lines 49-68).

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[40] The idea that composed music constitutes a corruption of the "true" music of natural sounds is elaborated upon in "Lines Composed in a Concert-Room," written the following year (1799). In this poem, the gaudy artificiality of concert music is presented as insensitive to "Music's genuine power," and that the best type of music merely "remeasures whatever tones and melancholy pleasures / The things of Nature utter; birds or trees" (lines 5-40).

Throughout the description of the hidden grove, language connoting multiplicity contends with language that seems to resolve it all into a single unity, as though the proximity of this location to the divine presence requires that it once again takes on the appearance of the "one and indivisible." No sooner has the heteroglossic character of the meeting of nightingales been established than the motif of the pantheistic breeze returns to seemingly dispel it; after the moon appears from behind a cloud, the birds "all burst forth in choral minstrelsy, / As if some sudden gale had swept at once, / A hundred airy harps" (lines 75-82). The need to deploy the central Hartleian symbol of "The Eolian Harp" even after its fundamental problems had been exposed indicates a recognition that the notion that nature encompasses a multiplicity of holy voices sits uneasily alongside the idea of perception as a continuous conversation with a single divine "speaker." As a result, the question of whether the nightingales express or merely counterfeit sublimity receives a seemingly inconclusive answer: the nightingales speak simultaneously with many voices and one voice, just as they are implied to constitute simultaneously many minds and many "airy harps" stroked by a single divine "gale."

However, the most significant function of the grove is that it offers a chance to perceive the songbirds themselves, turning the symbol of the bird "that sings unseen" on its head:

> On moonlight bushes,
> Whose dewy leaflets are but half-disclosed,
> You may perchance behold them on the twigs,
> Their bright, bright eyes, their eyes both bright and full,
> Glistening, while many a glow-worm in the shade
> Lights up her love-torch. […] And she hath watched
> Many a nightingale perch giddily
> On blossomy twig still swinging from the breeze,
> And to that motion tune his wanton song
> Like tipsy Joy that reels with tossing head. (lines 64-86)

In other words, an experienced nature-watcher like the "gentle maid" might eventually come in contact with the source of the perceptions themselves, closing the gap between the seen and the unseen. Although radical in its potential implications, the role of this passage in the poem is complicated by the fact that, as Randel has shown, the episode of the wild grove (along with the castle and the gentle maid) appears to be a variation on a scene from *Comus*, so that its primary function may be to serve as an argument in a larger poetic debate with Milton (Randel 39-40). In this context, the notion of calling Milton's own nightingales into existence and exposing them as cheerful, "tipsy" revelers could therefore simply be a rhetorical maneuver in a playful poetic context, rather than a passage with broader philosophical implications. Nonetheless, the presence of this passage places "The Nightingale" in a seemingly unique position among Coleridge's canonical poems as a text in which the tension between the seen and the unseen is actually resolved, if only for a moment. However, the notion of perception as a language can be said to possess its own fundamental problems, some of which will remain albatrosses around his neck for decades to come.

1799-1802: Crisis

Since envisioning nature as a language may have allowed Coleridge to sidestep some of the problems of seeking to perceive nature both as phenomenal diversity and noumenal unity, it was always going to be tested by exposure to more unfamiliar sights. For nature to be a language of signs corresponding to specific meanings that are objective and unique, there would need to be a substrate of meaning entirely divorced from personal association – otherwise meaning would once again become a projection of the mind. In view of this requirement, Coleridge's visit to Germany in 1798-1799 offered a unique opportunity to put the theory to the test, and his writings from this period indicate that the results were not promising.

The poem "Lines Written in the Album at Elbingerode in the Hartz Forest" (1799), ostensibly a description of a disappointing visit to the Brocken, appear to be also dramatizing the failure of Coleridge's perceptions in Germany. If the observations of the poem are taken at face value, the speaker does not experience the foreign sights of Germany as a tableau of new meanings; instead, these observations make painfully clear how dependent his enjoyment of nature had been on personal associations all along:

> Heavily my way
> Downward I dragged through fir groves evermore,
> Where bright green moss heaves in sepulchral forms
> Speckled with sunshine; and, but seldom heard,
> The sweet bird's song became a hollow sound;
> And the breeze, murmuring indivisibly,
> Preserved its solemn murmur most distinct
> From many a note of many a waterfall,
> And the brook's chatter […] I moved on
> In low and languid mood; for I had found
> That outward forms, the loftiest, still receive

> Their finer influence from the Life within;
> Fair cyphers else; fair, but of import vague
> Or unconcerning, where the heart not finds
> History or prophecy of friend, or child,
> Or gentle maid, our first and early love,
> Or father, or the venerable name
> Of our adored country!
> (Coleridge, "Elbingerode" lines 4-24)

As if to emphasize the challenge that this realization poses to the argument of Coleridge's earlier poems, the governing perceptions of earlier phases are introduced in ways that signal how impotent and devoid of meaning they appear when transplanted to a foreign context. The "sweet bird's song," as rare and elusive as in his home country ("seldom heard"), becomes "a hollow sound" at Elbingerode, seemingly rejecting the hopeful thesis of "The Nightingale." The breeze, still connoting the one life by murmuring "indivisibly," nonetheless receives a modest place as only one sound among many ("preserv[ing] its solemn murmur most distinct / From many a note of many a waterfall, / And the brook's chatter"), reducing the emblem of indivisibility to merely one part in another "heap of *little* things," to borrow a central phrase from his 1797 letter to Thelwall (*CL1* 228). Having come to Germany expecting a revelation, the speaker discovers that a foreign landscape devoid of personal or historical associations inspires no emotional associations at all. Anticipating the argument of "Dejection: An Ode" almost verbatim, the speaker has found that "outward forms" receive "their finer influence from the Life within" ("Elbingerode," lines 17-18). Without such associations, the lofty language of nature becomes mere "fair cyphers" of "import vague" – word choices that indicate that it is precisely as a language that nature appears to have come up short.

Having lost the mediating power of association, the speaker finds himself once again in the position of the "idling Spirit" of "Frost at Midnight," projecting its moods and expectations upon the objects around it. Turning "westward," he allows his imagination to sculpt England's "sands and white cliffs" from "the steady clouds," until he finds that the woods and hills of Germany have dissolved "like a departing dream / Feeble and dim" (lines 26-33). The poem ends with the speaker pre-empting any charges of irreligiosity for speaking so irreverently of nature, reassuring the reader that he is aware that another man, with a "sublimer spirit," would be able to feel God's presence everywhere (lines 33-39). Once again, a speaker, upon finding that the problem of perception has become unsolvable, abdicates the role of ideal perceiver to someone that he hypothesizes will be more receptive – but, as in the other poems, the leap of faith involved in doing so would appear to confirm the predicament rather than solve it. As a test of his *own* power to link perception with meaning, the visit to Germany has not been a success, either for the poem's speaker or – as the letters from this period indicate – its author.

However, while the argument of "Elbingerode" implies that the root of the problem is philosophical, Coleridge's failure of perception in Germany may, in fact, have stemmed from personal as much as intellectual factors. In February 1799, five months after Coleridge's departure from Britain, his infant son Berkeley dies, casting a pall of grief over his remaining time in the country that permeates most of his private writings from this period. In a letter to his wife Sara, written in March, he writes of having pictured his family so often that his "imagination is tired down, flat and powerless," and that he sits for hours "languish[ing] after home," his "feelings almost wholly unqualified by *thoughts*." "I have," he continues, "at times experienced such an extinction of light in my mind" and become "so forsaken by all the *forms* and *colourings* of existence, as if the *organs* of life had been dried up; as if only Being remained, blind and stagnant" (*CL2* 218). Such descriptions of having become blinded to the "forms and colourings of existence" by personal unhappiness may provide essential context for Coleridge's observations about perception from this period.

Similarly, grief appears to have made Coleridge unusually sensitive to the power that past memories and traumas possesses over our experience of the present, making it likely that the contribution of previous associations in the creation of new meaning would have seemed especially important at this time. In a letter to Thomas Poole, Coleridge describes how memories of his deceased child have the power to make him relive the discovery of his death as powerfully as though it was happening again: "for this bodily frame is an imitative thing, and touched by the imagination gives the hour which is past as faithfully as a repeating watch" (*CL2* 282). In short, it is possible that the effects of grief may have led Coleridge to over-emphasize the importance of personal association in his theories about the connection between perception and meaning, even as it exposed limitations in his previous engagements with his topic.

Nevertheless, the notion that memories of a deceased loved one may potentially distort the mind's relationship to its surroundings offers an alternative way for Coleridge to restage the problem of perception after 1799. In "The Mad Monk" and "A Stranger Minstrel," both written in 1800, the conditions for healthy perception are transferred to the perceiver's youth – now re-envisioned as a golden age of perceptual power – with the present described as a "fallen state" of sensory blockage. The first poem centers on the lament of a hermit who mourns the loss of his ability to find joy in nature, recalling the lost time when all of nature "lay before mine eyes / In steady loveliness" (Coleridge, "The Mad Monk" lines 9-13). The source of the hermit's sorrow is revealed to be memories of his dead lover, killed by his own hand even though he "lov'd her to agony," which now poison all sights with cruel associations. In his current state, all his perceptions of nature – the light from the setting sun, the "trickling stream," the flowers on the hills – can only remind him of the "murder'd maiden's blood" (lines 29-45). A similar predicament is described in "A Stranger Minstrel," where the speaker, surrounded by the natural beauty of the landscape around Mt. Skiddaw, finds himself blocked from enjoying it by interceding memories of his deceased loved one. This time, however, the speaker receives some hopeful consolation from the mountain itself, explaining that his love "dwells, belike, by scenes more fair," and that her absence from a mountain so comparatively "bleak" and "bare" is therefore not to be mourned ("A Stranger Minstrel" lines 1-67). In such poems, grief appears to offer another way for Coleridge to rationalize his perceptual predicament: were he not bereaved, then he would perhaps be able to perceive the world that it deserves to be perceived, but at present, the circumstances do not allow it.

During this period, Coleridge's private writings indicate a growing need to reject rigid, fixed conceptions of the world, in stark contrast to his earlier commitment to principles like associationism and necessitarianism. In a letter to Sara, sent in April 1799, he expresses revulsion at the idea that the universe operates according to immutable natural laws, asking: "who are these horrible shadows necessity and general law, to which God himself must offer *sacrifices*?" The belief in such a universe, he states, represents little more than the "dreams of reasoning pride" and the conceit "that there is sufficiency and completeness in the narrow present" rather than our "wide and widening immortality." Instead, he insists that God's governance of the universe takes the personal needs of each human being into account, working not only in "each for all," but also "in all for each" (*CL2* 286).

Similarly, in a letter to Poole, also from April 1799, he criticizes all theories that reduce life to a pattern of organization, asserting that it must instead be a "particle of Being," which – in consequence – would make it "imperishable" (*CL2* 283). When read against the context of Coleridge's grief, these letters suggest the understandable workings of a mind in mourning: an instinctive need to believe in a more personal and sympathetic logic to the universe, and an equally instinctive response to recoil from the non-human. Such a need, then, may constitute another reason why Coleridge's writings about perception during this period shows a greater emphasis on the "human" (personal and associative) over the non-human (material and abstract) components of perception.

The possibility that Coleridge's intellectual crisis in Germany may have been caused by exposure to the ideas of Kant and the German idealists, while somewhat unlikely, cannot be discounted. While Coleridge claims fifteen years of familiarity with Kant in 1817, implying first exposure around 1802, Giles Whiteley has revised the estimate to around 1798-1799 for Coleridge's first reading of both Kant and Fichte (Whiteley 52).[41] Coleridge's fast-improving German skills were probably sufficient to make the most of even such difficult reading, as he writes in January 1799 that he can now read "German as English – that is, without any mental translation as I read," that he can "talk tolerably" about trivial and metaphysical subjects alike, and that he can read old German "better than even most of the educated natives" (*CL2* 267-268). However, the paucity of direct references to idealist philosophy in descriptions of his anxieties around this period, and this by a writer whose notebooks tend to be precise about philosophical matters, renders it unlikely in my view that such influences were a determining factor.

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[41] There is evidence, however, that Coleridge would have encountered several of Kant's ideas even earlier via English-language mediators: Monika Class suggests as early a date as 1796 (Class).

However, the following year, 1800, is often seen as marking the beginning of Coleridge's "philosophical turn," an event that has been the source of extensive critical speculation. Neil Vickers has argued that this shift in interests can be understood within the context of Coleridge's fraying relationship with Wordsworth, so that rebranding himself as a scientific visionary becomes the best alternative after ceding mastery over the domain of poetry to his rival (Vickers, "Coleridge and Tom Wedgwood" 94-95). I. A. Richards suggests that it was prompted by the vacuum left after renouncing Hartley as his "guide in philosophy" (Richards, *Imagination* 11). Most famously, Coleridge himself described his philosophical turn as inseparable from his worsening health problems, initiating a pattern of association between illness and philosophical speculation that critics and biographers have often treated as a form of 'master narrative' for the second half of his career.

Indeed, Coleridge often repeats this association, and in ways that indicate an influence that runs both ways, with illness leading to metaphysical speculation, and metaphysical speculation exacerbating illness. In a notebook entry from December 1802, he writes that "metaphysics make all one's thoughts corrosive on the Body by the habit of making momently & common thought the subject of uncommon interest & intellectual energy" (Coleridge, *CN1* 1313). Later, in 1817, he will refer to "the unwholesome quicksilver mines of metaphysic depths" (*BL1* 17). Furthermore, Coleridge speculates that the lessons of philosophy will be powerless to offer help when the mind truly needs it: "our quaint metaphysical opinions in an hour of anguish like playthings by the bedside of a child deadly sick" (*CN1* 182). In sickness, Coleridge's thought often remains clear while his emotions are disconnected, leaving him in a state of excessive rationality with no corresponding alertness in his emotional life. This separation between thought and feeling, manifesting itself as the overdevelopment of "common" thought at the expense of more holistic modes of thinking, appears to have caused him major concern.

The notion that thought and feeling ought to constitute a distinctive whole is a recurring maxim throughout Coleridge's work. In a letter to John Thelwall from 1796, he writes that he tends to shun "unmixed" or "simple" passions in his writing, and that "my philosophical opinions are blended with, or deduced from, my feelings" (*CL1* 197). In 1801, he goes even further when he universalizes this claim in a letter to Thomas Poole: "My opinion is thus: that deep thinking is attainable only by a man of deep feeling, and that all truth is a species of revelation" (*CL2* 351-352). Thus, the artificial separation of thought from feeling that Coleridge experienced during his illnesses can be seen to violate his own notion of how his mind arrives at truth, resulting in a state of hyper-intellectualism that, despite its logical acuity, falls short of his own criteria for "deep thinking."

Furthermore, Coleridge's most productive periods of philosophical writing often seem to coincide with his periods of convalescence. The first letters in which

Coleridge states that he has begun the construction of his own philosophical system were written shortly after a long period of illness, during which he writes to Humphry Davy that he has been "*thinking* vigourously, so that I cannot say that my long, long wakeful nights have been all lost to me" (*CL2* 348). In another letter, he emphasizes that it was during his illness that he received his inspiration, writing that "the thoughts which had employed my sleepless nights during my illness were imperious over me," so that "it seemed to me a suicide of my very soul to divert my attention from truths so important, which came to me almost as a revelation." Moreover, the "intensity of thought" has made him "nervous and feverish" so that he cannot get enough sleep, and that sleep no longer offers him "due refreshment," creating a vicious circle that appears to be keeping his thought in a productive state of quasi-illness (*CL2* 348-349).

Although most of Coleridge's philosophically ambitious writing after 1800 seems to occur in prose, "Dejection: An Ode" (1802) is often treated as a key text for this transitional period, as well as a conclusion – and repudiation – of his earlier nature poetry. The canonical 139-line version of the poem, published in the *Morning Post*, is a significantly altered version of a 340-line original text sent to Sara Hutchinson (often referred to by scholars simply as the "Letter" poem), which situates the conflict more narrowly within the context of Coleridge's social life, specifically his loveless marriage and unreciprocated love for Sara Hutchinson. This has led some critics, like Luther Tyler, to assert the "true and urgent argument" of the poem "concerns imagination's relationship to other people, not to nature" (Tyler 439). Other critics place the poem's argument in a creative, rather than philosophical or psychological, context. Raimonda Modiano takes the foundation of the poem to be a poetic identity crisis, brought on by disappointment in the two poetic genres that were available to him: his supernatural poems (particularly "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel") were not appreciated by the Wordsworths, while his nature poems failed to live up to his own artistic standards (Modiano 41). Nevertheless, both "Dejection" and the "Letter" can be seen as utilizing a symbolic repertoire familiar from the conversation poems of 1795-1798, and, as such, appear to be at least superficially participating in the same symbolic conversation.

Like "Lines Written in the Album at Elbingerode," the poem begins by returning to natural symbols which in earlier poems were coded with the promise of higher perception, but which now register as powerless and devoid of life. The divine breeze that had animated the cosmos of Coleridge's early poems occurs already in the opening stanza, where it is reduced to a "dull sobbing draft, that moans and rakes / Upon the strings of this Aeolian lute / Which better far were mute" ("D:O," lines 6-8). There is, however, the expectation that this feeble wind will build into a storm, providing a sliver of hope that an experience that once would have caused his soul to "go abroad" will once again "make it move and live" (lines 15-20). Up until this point, the speaker has spent the calm evening staring at the setting sun in the West, a sight that has failed to rouse him. Instead, he finds himself trapped in a state of profound detachment: a hollow, grief-like feeling that can only be defined negatively by what it lacks or is disconnected from. This feeling lacks the recognizable qualities of normal depression ("a grief without a pang"), cannot be related to any normal means for expressing or assuaging it ("Which finds no natural outlet, no relief / In word, or sigh, or tear"), and, as the rest of the poem will make clear, entails a state of profound disconnect from the objects of the external world (lines 21-24).

In sharp contrast to the other conversation poems, "Dejection: An Ode" makes it clear that it is not a failure of perception that has induced this state, but a failure of the mind to synchronize perception with emotion. When the speaker turns to look at the stars – a sight which, as the earliest version of the poem informs us, he once used to gaze at "in ecstatic fit" ("A Letter," line 62) – the language does not connote mystery or obscurity, but rather a sky in which everything remains disappointingly fixed and in its place. The stars, which "glide behind or between" the clouds alternate only between being "sparkling" or "bedimmed" – in other words, the clouds provide only a superficial cover, since the stars are "always seen." The moon, the most mobile object in the night sky, is rendered "as fixed as if it grew / In its own cloudless, starless lake of blue." Yet, while nature has played its part, having offered up its best sights and removed all impediments for vision, the mind cannot reciprocate with the required emotion. It is not nature's fault – her objects remain "so excellent and fair"; it is the speaker that gazes at such sights with "how blank an eye!" and who can only "see, not feel, how beautiful they are" ("D:O," lines 27-38). Perception, in other words, is accomplished, but something has entered between intellectual sensation of perception and its expected emotional impact – and is keeping them divided.

The next stanza appears to provide an answer in the form of a "lesson" that ostensibly repudiates the idea of receiving the emotional value of perception from the objects themselves: "Though I should gaze for ever / On that green light that lingers in the west: / I may not hope from outward forms to win / The passion and the life, whose fountains are within" (lines 45-46). The inclusion of the word "life" appears to place this passage in direct conversation with Wordsworth's "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" (1798), whose lines about "seeing into the life of things" had been occupying Coleridge's attention in his notebooks for some time. This particular passage by Wordsworth, which serves as something of a leitmotif of this thesis and which will be analysed in more detail in chapter 3, had set the bar for perceptual transcendence by asserting boldly that "with an eye made quiet by the power / Of harmony, and the deep power of joy, / We see into the life of things" (lines 47-49). The previous year, Coleridge had offered his own interpretation of this passage, diagnosing what he took to be the secret process involved with seeing the world in such terms:

> —and the deep power of Joy / We see into the *Life* of Things – ie. By deep feeling we make our *Ideas dim* -- & this is what we mean by our Life – ourselves. I think of the Wall – it is before me, a distinct Image – here. I necessarily think of the *Idea* &

> the Thinking I as two distinct & opposite Things. Now (let me) think of *myself* – of the thinking Being – the Idea becomes dim whatever it be – so dim that I know not what it is – but the Feeling is deep & steady – and this I call I – identifying the Percipient & the Perceived--. (*CN2* 921)

As this passage suggests, Coleridge appears to be entertaining the notion that the "life" described by Wordsworth is merely the awareness of the observer's own presence, which emerges when the mind's intellectual focus on the "idea" is relaxed. Having seemingly reduced Wordsworth's experience into yet another expression of the "projective mind," Coleridge goes on to offer a variant of the same answer in "Dejection": "we receive but what we give / And in our life alone does Nature live; / Ours is her wedding garment, ours is her shroud!" (Coleridge, "D:O," lines 47-49).[42] In this argument, the thesis of "The Nightingale" appears to be reversed and the mournful night-wanderer proven correct: the meaning of the nightingale's song, whether it be joy or sorrow, is indeed the contribution of the mind – we bring the "wedding garment" (joy) and the "shroud" (sorrow) alike. The speaker, having struggled against the notion of his mind as fundamentally projective, now appears to have not only resigned itself to this fact, but to have realized that this feature was the source of the mind's higher life all along.[43]

The ease by which the aforementioned lines from "Dejection" can be isolated as the intellectual "thesis" of the poem, and – by extension – provide a key to the author's personal crisis during this period, has made them two of the most studied lines in Coleridge's whole production. Solomon Gingerich has summarized Coleridge's later engagement with philosophy as "one long peroration" on these two lines, which he reads as a straightforward declaration of "radical transcendentalism," casting nature as a "mirror, a mere mechanical instrument, in which man's mind can reflect itself" (Gingerich 28-29, 56). Panthea Reid Broughton, moderating this position slightly, nonetheless reads the poem as saying that "the active universe," while not an outright delusion, is a product of the mind imposing an "affective tonal unity" upon its disparate parts (Broughton 244). In contrast, A. O. Lovejoy has criticized the critical tendency to reduce the poem to a metaphysical position, claiming that what Coleridge is expressing is simply the "psychological fact that the power of natural beauty to give us pleasure is conditioned by our subjective states." Thus, according to Lovejoy, "we receive but what we give" implies a reciprocal relationship, whereby we must give in order to be given something in return (Lovejoy, "Two Worlds" 8-10). Luther Tyler, on the other hand, rejects absolute readings of the passage as philosophy and psychology alike, stating instead that the very power or these lines resides in their "encompassing vagueness"; they appear to represent a position that invites idealism while simultaneously doubling as an aphorism "that no sane person can take more absolutely than its contrary," thereby poeticizing a conflicted state of mind rather than an intellectual argument (Tyler 420-422). The very overtness of these two lines seems to have, paradoxically, turned them into the most contested part of the poem, and by extension a key battleground for solving an important mystery in its author's biography.

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[42] Further parallels between "Dejection: An Ode" and "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" are discussed in chapter 3, pages 146-149.

[43] George McLean Harper reads this section of "Dejection: An Ode" as a 'rebuke' of Wordsworth's belief in transcendence via the senses: "The sources of the soul's life are within. Even from the depth of his humiliation and self-loathing he ventures to rebuke his friend for thinking it can be otherwise; William, with his belief in the divinity of Nature, his confidence that all knowledge comes from sensation, his semi-atheism, as Coleridge had called his philosophy…" (199).

On the barest formal level, the poem appears to bear out the interpretation that the animating power of the world, the "one life" of Coleridge's earlier poems, has now become a product of the human mind. Without the aid of the imagination, the world is "inanimate" and "cold" – the lifeless matter of mechanical philosophy – and anything of "higher worth" "from the soul itself must issue forth." The contribution of the mind is to superimpose immaterial qualities upon the material world – "a light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud" from which "all colours" are a suffusion, and a "sweet and potent voice, of its own birth," from which "all melodies" are the echo (Coleridge, "D:O," lines 47-58). The light and the voice, in turn, are both identified with an emotion: joy. The symbolic vocabulary of "Dejection" is not unique; the animating spirit is described in similar terms in the 1817 additions to "The Eolian Harp," where it gives life to sights and sounds alike, "filling" the world with its imperceptible presence. Nor is the identification of the "one life" of nature with joy: the animating breeze of "The Eolian Harp" also becomes "joyance everywhere," just as "joy" was the meaning of the nightingale's song in "The Nightingale," and "the deep power of joy" was the gateway into "the life of things" to Wordsworth's speaker in "Tintern Abbey" (Wordsworth, "TA," lines 48-49). "Joy," throughout Coleridge's career, has always been a complex concept – the visible component of a process of interchange with the universe, as opposed to purely a private emotion. The main departure, in "Dejection: An Ode," concerns the decision to seemingly locate the source of these familiar symbols in the human mind.

However, there is a different reading of the description of the "inanimate cold world" which requires the sentence to be rendered in full:

> And would we aught behold, of higher worth,
> Than that inanimate cold world allowed
> To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd,
> Ah! From the soul itself must issue forth
> A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud
> Enveloping the Earth— ("D:O," lines 50-55)

There is, strictly speaking, no reason why "*that* inanimate cold world" (italics mine) must refer to the world as it exists objectively, rather than the world as it appears to observers whose perceptions are clouded by anxieties and the absence of love. The relativity of the designator “world” becomes apparent in the fifth stanza, where “wedding Nature to us gives in dower / A new Earth and a new Heaven, / Undreamt of by the sensual and the proud” (lines 68-70). Much in the vein of William Blake, a “world” may simply be a term for a “face” of creation that reveals itself to human observers in the right emotional state. “Higher worth,” it can thus be argued, is not lacking so much as insufficiently “allowed” to the “poor loveless ever-anxious crowd,” just as it is fully granted to the observer who pays his dues in the form of joy, to whom a different, equally real, world is revealed, “undreamt of by the sensual and the proud.”

Another important factor to consider is that the poem is written from the vantage point of a speaker who is in a state of self-acknowledged error. In a passage that can be read as a comment on the author’s own turn to philosophy, the speaker outlines his own current limitations:

> But oh! each visitation
> Suspends what nature gave me at my birth,
> My shaping spirit of Imagination.
> For not to think of what I needs must feel,
> But to be still and patient, all I can;
> And haply by abstruse research to steal
> From my own nature all the natural man—
> This was my sole resource, my only plan:
> Till that which suits a part infects the whole,
> And now is almost grown the habit of my soul. (lines 84-93)

Having lost the “shaping spirit of Imagination,” the speaker has been forced to overdevelop the only outlet that is available to him: analytical thought. In Coleridgean terms, “to think of what I need must feel” is to be a philosopher of the type that is produced by disease rather than health – someone who overuses a single faculty of his mind as opposed to the whole. The speaker’s only available strategy, however, is to retrieve “the natural man” through “abstruse research,” overdeveloping the part until it might somehow recover the whole (the verb “infect” suggesting once again the association between “abstruse research” and disease). This unnatural state of thinking, couched in the language that Coleridge has consistently used to denigrate scientific schools such as materialism, has now become his default pattern of thinking (“is almost grown the habit of my soul”). By the standards of Coleridge himself, having claimed that “deep thought” is available only to those who are capable of “deep feeling,” and having criticized “rationally educated people” for “putting the negation of a power for the possession of a power” and calling “the want of imagination judgment,” the speaker of “Dejection: An Ode” does not qualify as a deep thinker. As such, the poem can also be read as a description of the world as it *appears* to the sick and depressed, as opposed to an accurate diagnosis of its philosophical causes.[44]

"Dejection: An Ode" ends with the role of ideal poetic perceiver being passed down to "my friend" (Sara Hutchinson, to whom the original version of the poem was addressed), hoping that she will awake with feelings of joy that will enable her to envision a world in which "all things live, from pole to pole" (Coleridge, "D:O," lines 127-139). As such, the poem follows the pattern established by the conversation poems of 1796-1798: after discovering that the problem of perception has become insurmountable, the role of ideal perceiver is passed down to a person who will be more receptive to the beauty of the world. Interestingly, then, the poem's conclusion does not seem to represent any significant departure from Coleridge's earlier poems: much like in "Frost at Midnight," having passed down the role of perceiver to someone he trusts will perform it better, the speaker can go on believing in the possibility of higher perception through someone else's eyes.

Whatever one makes of the greater philosophical significance of "Dejection: An Ode," it fits into a larger pattern of 1802 poems in which naively idealistic theories of communing with nature are subjected to criticism. In "The Picture, or the Lover's Resolution" (1802), the speaker encounters a "love-lorn man," who, "sick in soul," has retreated deep into a dark forest to worship "the spirit of unconscious life / In tree or wild-flower." However, the terms that are used to describe the man's condition signal that the speaker reads his sympathy for nature as little more than a compromised death wish; by imagining himself "in winds or waters, or among the rocks," the love-lorn man "might not wholly cease to be," but simply "be something that he knows not of" – a state of escape into oblivion which he deems preferable to ordinary human existence (Coleridge, "The Picture," lines 18-25). "Answer to a Child's Question" (1802), on the other hand, offers a gentler deconstruction of the nature poems, as the lessons of Coleridge's earlier poems are reframed as "Songs of Innocence"-style answers to questions posed by a young child. When asked "what the birds say," the speaker sagely responds: "I love and I love," but when faced with the more difficult question of what the wind says, he confesses ignorance: "What is says, I don't know, but it sings a loud song" ("Answer to a Child's Question," lines 1-4). In both texts, the Wordsworthian attitude toward perceptions of nature is coded as fundamentally simplistic and possibly immature, whether expressed as a disguised longing for unconsciousness or the type of incomplete answers that an adult might give to a very young child.

On the other hand, other examples from the same period suggest that Coleridge continued to look for ways to engage with nature long after 1802, albeit in mostly new ways. Raimonda Modiano has argued that this year, although seemingly marking an abrupt end to Coleridge's courtship of nature, merely inaugurated a new phase in it: from 1802 onwards, his notebooks show increasingly ambitious attempts to create immensely detailed descriptions of natural scenery, with an exhaustive level of detail coming close to "paintings in the domain of language." These attempts, Modiano claims, represent a more nuanced engagement with nature than Coleridge's philosophical writings in that they avoid the tendency of the latter to reduce nature to simple subject-object oppositions (Modiano 4-15). Furthermore, Coleridge's letters often give voice to attitudes that, from his poems alone, one might suppose him to have abandoned long ago. One of Coleridge's letters from September 1802 contains an affirmation of the "one life" that could have been written at any point in Coleridge's early career: "Nature has her proper interest, and he will know what it is who believes and feels that everything has a life of its own, and that we are all One Life" (*CL2* 403-404). Even in his poetry, Coleridge made some halting attempts to return to the style of his old nature poems, such as in "Hymn before Sunrise, in the Vale of Chamouny" (1802): a poem whose reverential tone and Wordsworthian tenor seem wholly at odds with the narrative of the crisis predominating in many of his other writings. As with many post-"Dejection" resurgences of this older voice, however, it often seems as though Coleridge's desire to return the style of the nature poems outstrips his capacity to do so. In such moods, Coleridge became more prone to plagiarism; and indeed, "Hymn before Sunrse" was later revealed to have been partially plagiarized from a work by the German poet Friedrike Brun (Sisman 352-353).

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[44] Whether the poem itself was actually written in a state of imaginative abandonment is, of course, up for debate. As William Ulmer has argued, the poetic power and emotional range of the poem indicate a state of creative inspiration that partially refutes its own thesis – therefore, it is perhaps better thought of as a dramatization of a real-life crisis than as an expression of one (Ulmer 197)

In conclusion, there is an interesting paradox in the fact that the point at which Coleridge chooses to abandon the stereotypically 'subjective' genre of poetry for the stereotypically 'objective' genre of philosophical prose coincides with the point at which he begins to think of his predicament as psychological rather than philosophical. On one level, the shift can perhaps be explained by Coleridge's growing fear of interiority, exacerbated by the effects of opium on his inner life, so that once he comes to recognize the destructive powers of his mind, he simultaneously begins to realize the need for a language that transcends it through objectivity and reassuring externality. However, it can also be argued that Coleridge's scientific voice is the product of a mind grappling with illness: the voice of the overdeveloped "part" striving to "infect the whole." As has been argued in this chapter, the notion of a division between perception and meaning can be traced throughout all stages of Coleridge's career: first, in the tension between the imperceptible "one life" and the world of appearances, then through the problems stemming from his theory of developed perception, next in the ambiguities surrounding the notion of nature as a language, and finally in explanations that posit a state of psychological division induced by mourning or disease. However, as the next chapter will show, this central motif is to go through many more iterations as Coleridge embarks on a remarkable, multi-disciplinary journey to understand the world through prose.

Chapter 2: Philosophy and the reconstruction of perception in the aftermath of Coleridge's "Dejection" crisis

Overview

Given the dramatic way in which Coleridge announced his abandonment of poetry and his turn to philosophy in "Dejection: An Ode," it is understandable that there has been a long-lasting scholarly consensus that his late career saw a reorientation inwards, from sensory appearances toward immaterial ideas. Solomon Gingerich, in 1920, spoke of Coleridge's late career as "one long peroration on the text in 'Dejection: An Ode': 'We receive but what we give, and in our life alone does Nature live,'" an interpretation that collapses all of Coleridge's philosophical and religious endeavors into a single, uniformly inward turn (Gingerich 56). Similarly, Judson S. Lyon has argued that the senses, to which Coleridge had earlier attributed "important powers of access to symbolic values in nature," were "progressively de-emphasized" in Coleridge's later years (Lyon 258). Although such readings are clearly corroborated by the types of doctrines that Coleridge begins to embrace following his "Dejection"-crisis, there are more implicit patterns in Coleridge's prose writings which speak to a strong desire to simultaneously *reclaim* perception, and to do so in a way that conforms to his perceptual interests as outlined in the previous chapter. In other words, despite significant differences in the types of philosophical positions that Coleridge takes up during the post-1802 period, there is a sense in which the underlying psychological dynamic – the contradictory interest in simultaneously arguing for and against the possibility of perceiving 'invisible' qualities in nature – remains largely the same.

At the same time, Coleridge's post-"Dejection" writings indicate a growing sense that his perception has been *inhibited* in a way that sets him apart from someone like Wordsworth, and that this stems from psychological differences on an individual level rather than from the metaphysical dimensions of sense perception. Thus, during this period, Coleridge frequently phrases his criticisms of Wordsworth's ways of perceiving in terms that suggest less a philosophical disagreement than a feeling that these ways of perceiving cannot be made compatible with *his* particular mind. Furthermore, many of the changes in how Coleridge engages with the topic of perception following the "Dejection"-crisis can be seen, I argue, as part of a larger attempt to formulate a method of Wordsworthian nature-communion which will be compatible with Coleridge's specific mental habits. This, as I will show, can also be seen in the striking number of disagreements with Wordsworth that take the form of comparative reflections on their psychological differences.

Coleridge belonged to a generation of philosophical thinkers who, as Norman Fruman has argued, often did not engage in disinterested speculation based on extensive evidence as much as assert what they 'intuited' to be true (Fruman 183).[45] For this reason, I consider it to be legitimate to look for 'interests' underneath Coleridge's philosophical speculations in the same way that the previous chapter sought to uncover the interests underneath his poetic language. Essentially, this chapter proposes that Coleridge's prose writings in the post-"Dejection" period indicate an interest in 'recreating' poetic sense perception in a way that uses intuitions as its machinery where the senses have been proven to fail. Thus, I argue that the overall goal of Coleridge's speculations on this topic is not ultimately idealist, but that rather an attempt to establish a 'seeing into the life of things' which at all times are oriented toward real things. This can be seen in three recurring fixations, which I propose to call the interests of the 'seer', the 'seen' and the 'unseen'. The interest of the 'seer' is a desire to articulate perception as a free, active and spiritually-attuned (i.e. intuitive) process, a Coleridgean version of the joyful perceiver with the quiet eye in "Tintern Abbey." The interest of the 'seen' is the interest in placing the reality of external objects, including their aesthetic and spiritual dimensions, on an intuitive and objective basis. Finally, the interest of the 'unseen' is the interest in augmenting theories of perception to include the indirect, but similarly objective, discernment of hitherto unrecognized 'unseen' qualities. Together, these can be said to make up a kind of abstract counterpart to the transcendent seeing described in Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey," albeit one that does not fall prey to the mistakes that Coleridge argued that Wordsworth's "seeing into the life of things" was prey to.

Following a brief discussion of some of Coleridge's post-"Dejection" dissatisfactions with Wordsworth, the main material has been grouped into three subdivisions: the first concerns some of Coleridge's reflections on the mechanics of perception, the second his responses to various philosophical systems in his marginalia, while the third looks at the perceptual dimensions of his engagement with concept of 'Reason.' These subdivisions should not be construed as an attempt to invent new disciplinary or chronological phases: instead, their purposes is simply to group the material for the purposes of argumentation.

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[45] Fruman's actual wording is harsher: "This is a key fact that is almost always ignored. Coleridge, Wordsworth, Schelling – indeed, it is safe to say all the poets and philosophers of the period – offered no verifiable evidence in support of their doctrines. They simply made assertions. It was an explicit cornerstone of Schelling's method (and implied everywhere in Coleridge) that the search for principles was of necessity a process of pure abstraction. A generalization built up from numerous concrete examples was not only irrelevant to the philosopher's concerns, it degraded them. The philosopher was never to stoop to peering through microscopes or patiently studying rats in a labyrinth. Such activities were purely for the corroboration of theory" (Fruman 183).

Post-"Dejection" perspectives on Wordsworth

If Wordsworth's belief can be described as the conviction that nature is best approached through momentary, unmediated and (typically) solitary communion, then Coleridge's notebooks of 1803-1804 increasingly portray a mind out of lockstep with this ideal. In 1803, Coleridge writes in his notebooks that "nothing affects me much while it happens […] a moment is but a moment, it must be taken up into the mind and diffused through the whole multitude of shapes and thoughts…" (Coleridge, *CN1* 1597). Another entry, in 1804, states that "I never exist wholly present to any Sight, any Sound, to any Emotion, to any series of Thoughts received or produced," and that, instead, he is always possessed by a "feeling of yearning, that at times passes into Sickness of Heart" (*CN2* 2000). For the writer of "The Eolian Harp," who along with Wordsworth had made descriptions of rapturous, all-consuming moments of perception his specialty, to confess to candidly to having a personality non-conducive to this very type of experience is significant. However, it is also in line with an increasing post-1802 tendency to differentiate his ways of thinking and feeling from those which he tends to associate with Wordsworth. Rather than trying to replicate these ways, Coleridge proposes that the processes of his mind are more heavily weighted toward what *Biographia Literaria* will later term the secondary imagination: sense perception provides only raw materials that must be "diffused through the whole multitude of shapes and thoughts" for any higher meaning or emotion to emerge.[46] For someone like Coleridge, then, access to nature does not occur in a single, concentrated moment of perception; instead, it is delayed, mediated, synthetic and the product of an active engagement from the mind itself.

Elsewhere, the comparison is stated in terms less favorable to Wordsworth, so that it is the absorption in perception that is faulted as being shallow or deficient. In a 1803 notebook entry, Coleridge recounts an "unpleasant dispute" that he has just had with Wordsworth and Hazlitt, in which he claims to have upbraided the former for always looking "at the superficies of Objects for the purpose of taking Delight in their Beauty, & sympathy with their real or imagined Life." Such an attitude,

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[46] Here, Coleridge seems to be already aligning himself with what he would later call the 'secondary imagination', the portion of that faculty "which dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create" (*BL* 159-160*)*.

Coleridge argued in the dispute, must surely be “deleterious to the Health & manhood of Intellect” (*CN1* 1616). Similar attempts to reduce sympathetic identification with external appearances to psychological immaturity also appear in writings about less immediately related subjects. In one notebook entry on the topic of adolescent love, Coleridge theorizes that the vividness of teenage experience comes from an inborn tendency in the body to form strong attachments in youth, and that “puberty” is therefore a “distinct revolutionary Epoch in the human mind & body.” During this period, he speculates, strong and new feelings will easily “coalesce” with new objects, “the idea of this [the new object] becoming *vivid*, which an habitually familiar object can scarcely become.” However, Coleridge adds, “it is with the *Idea* that the Feeling coalesces, not with the Object itself” (1637). Here, strength and vividness of feeling for newly perceived objects is associated with the psychological experience of puberty, with the implication that a healthy adult will eventually outgrow it. This idea, of a ‘false unity’ in which an over-enthusiastic perceiver confuses its own emotion with the object itself, has strong similarities to Coleridge’s discussion of the “life of things”-passage from “Tintern Abbey.”[47] Moreover, as I will discuss in more detail in chapter 5, it is an idea that will in many ways shape Coleridge’s later disagreements with Wordsworth over perception, and one that becomes particularly prominent in *Biographia Literaria* (1817) and *Opus Maximum* (1819-1823).

In other notebook entries, Coleridge locates the difference between Wordsworth and himself in their different predispositions to health and happiness, a differentiation with both moral and religious undertones. In an 1804 letter to his friend Richard Sharp, Coleridge pays Wordsworth a barbed compliment when he states that he “deserves to be, and *is*, a happy man,” and a true “Philosopher” in the sense that he “knows the intrinsic value of the different objects of human pursuit, and regulates his wishes in strict subordination to that knowledge.” However, Coleridge continues, “[Wordsworth] does not excite that almost painfully profound moral admiration which the sense of the exceeding difficulty of a given virtue can alone call forth, and which therefore I feel exclusively toward T. Wedgwood (*CL2* 448-450). In other words, Wordsworth’s natural inclination toward happiness, for all its benefits, does not involve the requisite measure of difficulty and hard work that, in Coleridge’s view, would make him deserving of “painfully profound moral admiration.” The association between virtue and unhappiness occurs in many places throughout Coleridge’s writings, and can be said to constitute an important part of his religious ethic.[48] At this particular point in his life, it also appears to offer an honorable way for Coleridge to rationalize his inability to think and feel like Wordsworth. Wordsworth's apparent happiness now doubles as moral shallowness, while Coleridge (indirectly through identification with Thomas Wedgwood, a fellow sufferer of multiple mysterious illnesses) can think of himself as the unhappy possessor of hard-won moral depth.[49] [50]

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[47] “—and the deep power of Joy / We see into the Life of Things – ie. By deep feeling we make our Ideas dim -- & this is what we mean by our Life – ourselves. I think of the Wall – it is before me, a distinct Image – here. I necessarily think of the Idea & the Thinking I as two distinct & opposite Things. Now (let me) think of myself – of the thinking Being – the Idea becomes dim whatever it be – so dim that I know not what it is – but the Feeling is deep & steady – and this I call I – identifying the Percipient & the Perceived--” (*CN2* 921).

By the time that Coleridge began to sketch up *The Friend* in 1804, there are signs that he was attempting to leverage this psychological trait into an intellectual niche. In a letter to Thomas Poole, he declares that *The Friend* is to be aimed specifically at those in "sickness," "adversity" and "distress" from "speculative gloom," phrases which all made it into the first issue of the prospectus for *The Friend*, but which were moderated to "mental gloom" and later "dejection of mind" at the urging of the literary critic and editor Francis Jeffrey (*CL2* 453n1). As the writer for the sick and unhappy, Coleridge may have found a way to conceive of his mission as possessing spiritual and humanitarian dimensions that Wordsworth's work could not as easily attain.

At the same time as Coleridge appears to be experimenting with placing illness and suffering at the foundation of his identity as a writer, there are subtle indicators that his descriptions of nature were changing to reflect this new vantage point. In the late autumn months of 1803, as Coleridge was negotiating his differences with Wordsworth's placid, joyful communion with nature, his notebooks began to register an increasing number of descriptions of nature in which the serene mask slips and something darker seems to loom underneath. For example, it is striking how many notebook entries from October and November consist of troubled observations of the night sky, where the language seems to default to hellish or demonish descriptors. In two different sections, Coleridge draws a parallel between the "dingy paleness" of the sky and the phrase *pallidezza affumicata*, which he acknowledges having borrowed from a description of the demon Demogorgon in Boccaccio's *Genealogia Doeorum gentilium* (*CN1* 1649, 1653). In another entry,

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[48] As discussed in chapter 1, this association can be traced back to his earliest poems. Also, there is evidence to suggest that Coleridge may have occasionally "cultivated" or at the very least "performed" unhappiness for the purpose of satisfying his own moral demands (as mentioned on page 49). Furthermore, Coleridge often presents unhappiness as a prerequisite to spiritual growth; for instance, in a notebook entry from 1809, Coleridge lists "Sorrow" and "Sickness" alongside "Poetry and Religion" as what he calls the "Extenders of Consciousness" (*CN3* 3630).

[49] Coleridge's habit of identifying with Thomas Wedgwood in this particular context has been detailed by Neil Vickers, who has argued that Wedgwood was a "shaping influence" in Coleridge's intellectual development on account of the degree to which Coleridge seems to have used Wedgwood's "illness career" as a template to understand his own symptoms during the early stages of the 'dejection' crisis (Vickers, "Wedgwood" 90).

[50] Elsewhere, Coleridge speculates that health and happiness may inhibit empathy. One entry in his notebooks states simply "On the Hardheartedness of healthy People," saying all the more for needing to name anyone in particular (*CN1* 1825).

"an enormous black Cloud exactly in the shape of an egg" is said to have "impressed" him with "Daemoniacal grandeur" (1650). In yet another entry, the "dim" and "dingy" quality returns to the sky, this time prompting associations to the Renaissance alchemist Paracelsus' description of the "Astra tenebricosa, that radiated cold & darkness, with hollow rays, tube-like Hairs, ensheathing the rays of Light & Heat, so producing cold & darkness" (1674). It is important to note that Coleridge suffered from periodic illnesses during this period, and the tone in his writing reflects this fact; furthermore, the passages in question may have been intended to be repurposed into poems or some other fictional writing unconnected to his present state. However, the sharp contrast to Wordsworth's nature voice suggests at a willingness to attempt new ways of describing nature in its darker moods, an area where, perhaps, he would have the advantage.

Other notebook entries, however, record spectacular scenes of nature which cause Coleridge to relapse into a more familiar Wordsworthian idiom. During his long and lonely Mediterranean voyage of 1804-1805, Coleridge wrote down the following reaction to seeing the Rock of Gibraltar: "O! how quiet it is to the Eye, & to the Heart when it will entrance itself in the present vision, & know nothing, feel nothing, but the Abiding Thing of Nature, great, calm, majestic and one" (*CN2* 2045). Whether descriptions like these indicate a secret wish to walk the wider road of Wordsworthian joy, or simply that a quasi-Wordsworthian voice offered a ready vocabulary to talk about sights that still had the power to stir, they must be factored into the general assessment of Coleridge's writing during this period. However, it is also notable that the observation quoted above occurred during a time of Coleridge's life when, being alone, incognito and far away from home, the need to maintain an oppositional identity to Wordsworth's would not have been particularly pressing.

Most often, however, Coleridge's post-"Dejection" musings on perception describe a predicament familiar from his earlier work: that of trying to negotiate between the insufficiency of his perceptions and the value that he simultaneously feels must be accorded them. As late as the summer of 1810, a notebook entry records a sentiment that could have been uttered at any point during the preceding decade: "Sometimes when I earnestly look at a beautiful object or landscape, it seems as if I were on the *brink* of a fruition still denied – as if Vision were an *appetite*; even as a man would feel who having put forth all his muscular strength in an act of prosilience, is at the very moment *held back* – he leaps and yet moves not from his place" (*CN3* 3767). Eight years after "Dejection," Coleridge still has not escaped his predicament: he is still waiting for a "fruition" at the end of perception that continues to elude him.

In 1802, "Dejection: An Ode" had introduced the possibility of intellectual labor being used as a substitute for healthy perception: that "abstruse research" could be used to "steal from my own nature all the natural man" and that intellect could be overdeveloped until "that which suits a part infects the whole" ("D:O," lines 89-90, 92). In *The Friend* (1809), a similar sentiment is offered as advice to a disillusioned "youth," reassuring him that there is a way "back to the wisdom of Nature" which relies "less upon his sentient than upon his intellectual Being":

> He may, notwithstanding, be remanded to Nature; and with trust-worthy hopes; founded less upon his sentient than upon his intellectual Being—to Nature, not as leading on insensibly to the society of Reason; but to Reason and Will, as leading back to the wisdom of Nature. A re-union, in this order accomplished, will bring reformation and timely support; and the two powers of Reason and Nature, thus reciprocally teacher and taught, may advance together in a track to which there is no limit. (*Fr1* 396-397)

By using Reason and Will to guide himself back to nature, rather than "insensibly" using nature as a means to join "the society of Reason," the youth will be able to effect a union between Reason and nature, which may then "advance together in a track to which there is no limit." In *The Friend*, however, nature remains as cleanly bifurcated as it has always been in Coleridge's thought. One aspect, *forma formata* (in later works called *natura naturata*) corresponds to nature in its passive, material form, or the sum of phenomena perceived by our senses. The other aspect, *forma formans* (in later works called *natura naturans*) is the unseen active principle in nature which works through its many forms and constitutes its inner, invisible life (*Fr1* 467n).[51] This division serves as a template for Coleridge's engagement with perception in the post-"Dejection" period, even as – as we shall see – he occasionally toes the boundary between the two.

Coleridge's 'abstruse researches' and other reflections on the senses

There has been some critical dispute over Coleridge's account of burying himself in "abstruse research" during this period, with some critics arguing that this account cannot be taken completely at face value. A minority of critics, like Molly Lefebure, have claimed that the "abstruse researches" were essentially a fiction, a cover to give justification for Coleridge's descent into drug-addled passivity (Lefebure 331-333). Most critics, however, have tended to accept, with varying degrees of modifications, the truth of Coleridge's account. Neil Vickers has argued that Coleridge's "abstruse researches" do not designate all the philosophical research that he undertook in this period, but specifically a set of "experiments that Coleridge carried out in 1801 'on [his] own senses' and […] philosophical studies closely allied to these" (Vickers, *Doctors* 109-110). Vickers concludes that this set of experiments resulted in a theory by which Coleridge came to distinguish between mental activity connected to vision and mental activity connected to touch. This grew into a distinction between "organic" (cold, distant, vision-aligned) and "vital" (warm, intimate, touch-aligned) experience, which Vickers argues was the beginning of Coleridge's later differentiation between the fancy (organic) and imagination (vital) in *Biographia Literaria* (110-133). I agree with this assessment, and return to the distinction between vital and organic later in this chapter, where I discuss its relevance for Coleridge's differentiation between desirable and undesirable forms of inwardness.

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[51] The direct source of this distinction appears to be Schelling; McFarland traces it back to Schelling's *System der gesammten Philosophie* (1804) (McFarland 52).

However, my general interest in this chapter is not localized to a particular period, but focuses on Coleridge's post-1802 thinking more generally. In this section, I argue that Coleridge's reflections on perception tend to fall into three categories: those that argue for a free, empowered, spiritually-attuned perceiver (seer), those that seek to place the reality of objects, and their aesthetic qualities, on a simultaneously objective and intuitive basis (seen), and those that seek to establish a way to establish how invisible qualities can be indirectly discerned in normal perception (unseen). These categories will now be dealt with one by one.

To construct his 'seer', Coleridge must first settle accounts with David Hartley, whose associationism retains a lingering hold on Coleridge's philosophy of mind. In a 1803 letter, Coleridge states that he is no longer convinced by Hartley's theory that mental association depends on similarity of ideas, and that it seems more accurate to say that it depends on "resembling states of feeling." In fact, Coleridge goes on to suggest, "ideas *never* recall ideas, as far as they are ideas, any more than leaves in a forest create each other's motion," because it is the "breeze" "that runs through them – it is the soul, the state of feeling" which governs the process of association (*CL1* 427-428). This line of thought is expanded much later, in a notebook entry from 1811, becoming a more substantial argument about the reductionism of reducing all association to a single principle. It would be more reasonable, Coleridge argues, to suppose that "in different moods we naturally associate by different laws," so that in states of violent emotion the mind may recollect memories by their contrasts, while in pleasurable states of mind the associative logic will be that of similarity (*CN3* 4059). The passive, machine-like thinking of Hartley's philosophy has been shaken up, and a more active and emotionally vibrant pattern laid over it, paving the way for a 'seer' in accordance with Coleridge's specifications.

As with Coleridge's self-definition contra Wordsworth, his disagreements with Hartley appear to be partially informed by a need for psychological independence, to carve out a niche for *his* mind before he can proceed further. Thus, in some passages, it is the incompatibility between Hartley's doctrine and *Coleridge*'s mind, as much as the human mind more generally, that appears to be the main area of disagreement. Thus, Coleridge's discovery of what he calls "the streamy nature of Association" soon becomes abbreviated to simply "streamy," which in turn comes to serve as a descriptor for people who resemble himself. In a notebook entry from

1804, Coleridge speculates that there are certain defects that particularly befall "[those] who are most reverie-ish & streamy – Hartley [Coleridge's son], for instance & myself" (*CN1* 1833). "Streaminess," then, has become simultaneously a basic quality of the human mind *and* a trait that exists on a continuum, one which Coleridge believes himself to possess to a greater degree than other people. This ambiguity, whether Coleridge is attempting to describe a 'universal' human nature or merely his own, recurs at many points in his philosophical speculations, and even haunts some of his later appeals to intuition and Reason.[52]

Another attempt to construct the 'seer' can be found in Coleridge's disagreements with another antagonist in the arena of perception: Isaac Newton. In a letter from 1801, Coleridge faults Newton's *Optics* (1704) for transforming the human subject into a "lazy looker-on on an external world" (*CL1* 352). Newton's empiricist theory, Coleridge argues, is "so exceedingly superficial as without impropriety to be deemed false." Coleridge's objection in this case is theological: since the Bible holds that man was made in the "Image of the *Creator*," and since a creator per definition constitutes an agent, "there is ground for suspicion that any system built on the passiveness of the mind must be false as a system" (352).[53] Here, Coleridge is groping toward some way of conceiving the human perceiver as free and empowered, a *creator* like God (anticipating his definition of sense perception as partaking in the "infinite I AM" in *Biographia Literaria*), making sense perception contingent not merely on emotional investment, but an active, creative exercise of the will.

Coleridge's notion of an active faculty which focuses and guides perception recurs in numerous places throughout his notebooks, and may have offered him yet another means to establish intellectual independence from Wordsworth. In a notebook entry from 1804, Coleridge includes an account of a discussion with Wordsworth during which he claims to have tried to convince his friend of a distinction between perception in "repose" and perception that "acts":

> One travels along with the lines of a mountain. Years ago I wanted to make Wordsworth sensible of this. How fine is Keswick vale! Would I repose, my soul lies

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[52] Coleridge's recognition of the "streamy" nature of his own powers of association exemplifies his general tendency to gravitate toward water language, which includes identifying with bodies of water (see, for instance, "A Wish," "Religious Musings," "Kubla Khan" and "On Re-visiting the Sea-Shore"). For a discussion of the significance and elasticity of the term "water" in Coleridge's technical writing, see Miller 90.

[53] As has often been noted, there is a pattern in Coleridge's psychological writings of trying to rehabilitate and empower the role of the will, which seems in part to be motivated by a recognition of his own increasingly deficient willpower. As I. A. Richards has argued, Coleridge often argued against models which conceptualized the mind as passive "not because it was 'false', but because for himself, at some hours, it was too painfully true" (Richards, *Coleridge on Imagination* 60).

> and is quiet upon the broad level vale. Would it act? it darts up the mountain-top like a kite, and like a chamois-goat runs along the ridge… (*CN2* 2347)

Perception, as described in this passage, encompasses at least two distinct modes: a passive mode in which the observer's "soul lies and is quiet upon the broad level vale," and an active mode, in which "one travels along with the lines of a mountain." Another notebook entry discusses the interaction between perception and memory: Coleridge argues that a perceiver at night who, if he has a memory of the landscape around him, will be able to discern its outline in the dark with a definiteness that would not be possible if he had no memory of it (*CN1* 1648).[54] Once again, Coleridge's interest is in establishing perception as active and creative; however, crucially, only in such a way that the contribution of the mind reveals truths that would otherwise be left unnoticed, and never in way that distorts reality.

When it comes to Coleridge's attempt to reclaim the 'seen', I have defined this as an interest in establishing the existence of objects on a simultaneously objective and intuitive level. This interest will primarily be discussed in the second section of this chapter (as well as in chapter 5); in this section, however, I will concern myself with the smaller category of attempts to establish aesthetic and spiritual qualities as objectively inherent in the perceptions themselves. This aspect can be seen in another disagreement with Hartley, where Coleridge, in a notebook entry from 1804, expresses his revulsion toward "the all-annihilating system of explaining everything wholly by association/either *conjuring* millions *out* of 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0 – or into noughts (*CN2* 2093). In other words, if all mental activity is rooted in machine-like patterns of involuntary association, individual stimuli become interchangeable tokens – "zeros" – in a game of endless, arbitrary recombination. In such a system, intrinsic value cannot exist, since the idea of deriving "millions" out of zero would be an absurdity (or else some unexplained feat of "conjuring"). Instead, Coleridge suggests, the very idea of meaning necessitates that mental stimuli – which in Hartley's system begin as perceptions – must possess inherent qualities that do not emerge from associative patterns: that meaning is, in a sense, built into either the objects or the perceptions themselves.

Likewise, Coleridge finds himself rejecting any attempt to derive aesthetic qualities like sublimity from mere psychological association. In the same notebook entry, Coleridge quotes an observation by Erasmus Darwin that the perceived sublimity of the sound of thunder stems entirely from the way that the mind connects the sound to the idea of the natural phenomenon causing it. In other words, the emotional reaction to the same sound would be immediately deflated if the listener found out that its source was a cart rolling over a hollow road or going under an archway. Coleridge argues that Darwin is wrong, and that a sublime sound is sublime regardless of association. Instead, what Darwin describes in the second scenario is that the memory of the original sound is *replaced* with non-auditory information which has banal connotations ("the visual Image of a Cart and its low accompaniments[,] and of the word *Cart* and its associations"; 2093). Elsewhere, Coleridge goes even further and states that perceptions which recall no associations are actually more powerful because they have no associative links, that *omne ignotum pro magnifico* (everything unknown appears magnificent; *Table Talk* 10). By locating the emotional effect in the mechanics of the perception itself, Coleridge argues that certain aesthetic qualities are objectively part of the perceptions to which they apply: an important step toward establishing the reality of aesthetic perception in something more rooted and intuitive than mere subjective association.[55]

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[54] These speculations appear to have been inspired by the theories of Hermann Samuel Reimarus and Coleridge's friend Thomas Wedgwood, both of whom are named in conjunction with this idea in another notebook entry (*CN2* 2321).

With regard to the 'unseen', I have defined it as the interest in arguing that certain qualities that are normally considered invisible can nonetheless be considered 'indirectly' discernible in the act of perception. This is an important category in that even in its most conservative attempts, it shakes up the boundaries of perception, making it a process that can expand into hitherto unknown, even supernatural, territory. One unseen quality that preoccupies Coleridge during this period is the dimension of "magnitude," by which the mind can perceive the difference between solid matter and open space by means other than directly visible characteristics such as shape and color. "Spaciousness," he theorizes, can be felt in the moment of perception as "unresisted action," whereas "magnitude" offers a blending of "action and resistance to action" which is absolutely connected to "the idea of substance" (*CN2* 2402). The addition of an element of magnitude to everyday perception not only opens up the possibility that the mind can perceive qualities that Newtonian perception might have deemed invisible, but also serves to anchor perceptions more firmly in the world of substances, imparting a quality of reality to objects that could be used to differentiate them from dreams and hallucinations.[56]

Later in life, Coleridge began wondering if ordinary perception might be a subspecies of some neglected master sense which perceives in both space and time. In a notebook entry from 1816, Coleridge speculates that "man has foresight, sometimes as direct intuition in the form of Cause & Effect, sometimes as the same implicité as Presentiment," and that "Perception itself is but a species of this Power" (*CN3* 4319). In the appendix for *The Statesman's Manual* (1816), a version of this sense is described as being active particularly in dreams, where the faculties of "touch" and "vision" are combined into an inner sense that appertains "wholly to Time." Acknowledging the outlandish character of this idea, Coleridge defends himself by arguing that the notion of perceiving objects that are distant in time ought not to be more mysterious than the notion of perceiving objects that are distant in space ("Appendix B" 86-87). Besides dreams, the belief in a 'time-sense' appears to stem also from experiences in Coleridge's waking life, in the form of brief flashes of what seemed like precognitive insight into the lives of other people. For example, Coleridge sometimes felt that he possessed a "sudden second sight" by which he could intuit hidden vices and weakness in people, which for instance had allowed him to predict, upon shaking the hand of John Keats, that the poet would die young (*CN3* 4166; *Table Talk* 184-185). Although this conception was not integrated into any larger philosophical system, it constitutes a clear example of Coleridge attempting to stretch the accepted boundaries of sense perception into remote domains that would normally be classified as unperceivable.

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[55] Attempts to establish an objective or material foundation for "emotional" qualities were not uncommon in the Romantic period. For example, Goethe argues in *Theory of Color* that the emotional associations humans experience when perceiving colors are objective in the sense that they stem from the particular mixture of effects that colors cause on the retina. Thus, yellow objectively connotes a positive quality, due to its capacity to excite the retina, while blue objectively connotes a negative quality, owing to its opposite effect of relaxing the eye, etc. (Goethe 276-277). Such examples should be taken into account when considering whether the Romantic-period thinkers championed subjectivity over objectivity; in many cases, they proceeded in the opposite direction, by trying to legitimize the emotional or spiritual life of the mind by placing it on an objective foundation.

[56] That Coleridge conceived of it that way is further suggested by a passage in which he describes a hallucination that he experienced on Malta as possessing a "diminished sense of substantiality" (*CN2* 2583).

In this context, it is also relevant to consider Coleridge's reflections on what were then the relatively unformed disciplines of the life sciences. After all, Wordsworth had used the term "life" for the great unseen at the other end of transcendent perception in "Tintern Abbey," and so it seems only appropriate that Coleridge spent many years grappling with whether "life" is a perceivable entity, routinely landing in the characteristic position that it is simultaneously perceivable and *indirectly* perceivable.

To account for the failures of materialist philosophy to perceive the quality of life in an organism, Coleridge's notebook speculations provide a new variation on the idea of 'developed' perception. According to this variation, an observer's inward state conditions what he or she perceives in the external world, according to the principle that "like can only be understood by like." Therefore, as an observer undergoes emotional or intellectual growth, so will previously unseen characteristics gradually reveal themselves in the objects of perception (Coleridge, *CN3* 3630). Perception would thereby be able to identify 'living' qualities which are known through sympathetic *recognition* rather than direct *perception*.

The error of materialist philosophy, however, is to have begun the act of observation with a "Negation and voluntary act of *no*-thinking," which has left it unable to perceive anything other than 'dead' qualities in an object. On the one hand, this state of inhibition serves a practical purpose, according to Coleridge, since, although it is strictly speaking a mistake, "it is necessary for our limited powers of Consciousness that we should be brought to this negative state, & that it should pass into Custom." On the other hand, the next step must be to "awake & step forward," an awakening that, given the state of philosophy, can only occur through influences from poetry and religion. The problem, according to Coleridge, is that materialist philosophy has made the mistake of confusing this first, and necessary, reduction of our perceptual powers with the truth, "a precept of our Reason," and chosen to stay there. What it misidentifies as such a precept, however, is simply its own cognitive laziness, the inclination of the mind to "stop in the sense of Life just when we are not *forced* to go on" (*CN3* 3630).

The consequences of this mistake, Coleridge concludes, are severe. In the appendix for The *Statesman's Manual* (1816), Coleridge argues that materialist philosophy consistently mistakes "the products of destruction, cadavera rerum, for the elements of composition." By breaking living wholes into their dead component parts and attempting to derive a notion of life from the relationship between those parts in death, it has failed to imagine that there might have been a wholly different power active while the organism was alive ("Appendix B" 81-82). This prompts Coleridge to argue that the principle of equating visibility with reality has no place in a "living and spiritual philosophy":

> The leading differences between mechanic and vital philosophy may all be drawn from one point: namely, that the former demanding for every mode and act of existence real or possible *visibility*, knows only of distance and nearness, composition (or rather juxtaposition) and decomposition, in short the relations of unproductive particles to each other; so that in every instance the result is the exact sum of the component quantities, as in arithmetical addition. This is the philosophy of death, and only of a dead nature can it hold good. In life, much more in spirit, and in a living and spiritual philosophy, the two component counter-powers actually interpenetrate each other, and generate a higher third, including both the former, ita tame nut sit alia et major (In such a way, however, that it is different and greater). ("Appendix B" 94-95)

A philosophy which equates visibility with reality, and which therefore sees only "the exact sum of the component quantities," becomes, in Coleridge's view, a "philosophy of death" capable only of describing the properties of a "dead nature." Instead, a hypothetical "living and spiritual philosophy" must allow for the "two component counter-powers" to "interpenetrate each other, and generate a higher third," so that (unseen) life and (seen) matter can finally be perceived as interconnected.

Behind Coleridge's frustrations at the limitations of science in describing living things lies his own long struggle to come up with a satisfactory definition of life. Already in 1799, Coleridge had criticized what was then the prevalent notion that life arises from "organization" (i.e. as a byproduct of the 'mechanical' construction of an organism), claiming instead that life must constitute its own "particle of being" (Coleridge, *CL1* 283). Later, Coleridge found important intellectual sources to convince him that life transcends physical organization. One was John Hunter, who had argued in favour of an independent "life principle," and another was Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, who theorized that each organism was imbued with a *bildungstrieb* ("formative drive"), acting as a type of template that gives form to the organism, and which preserves and restores it after it is damaged or otherwise changed by circumstances.[57]

Coleridge's compulsion to keep the unseen uncontaminated by the seen extends also to his vigilance toward life-principles which do not sufficiently transcend crude biological matter. For example, Coleridge did not give credence to the idea of galvanism as a life principle, claiming that this mere "union of electricity and magnetism" is a function of the 'dead' organism which anatomists mistake for a vital function: "it exhibits an image of life; – I say an image only: it is life in death" (*Table Talk* 130). By the time of his 1818-1819 lectures on the history of philosophy, he had begun to turn against the idea of a life principle altogether, since it would appear to conflate mere animal life and the purer stuff that he believed must make up the human soul (*Lectures* 530). In the same lectures, Coleridge sternly rejects all forms of hylozoism (the idea of a universal life force inherent in all things), claiming that by defining everything as life the term loses all meaning; thus, hylozoism is "the death of all essential physiology" (520-521). In the end, galvanism, animal life and hylozoism all contaminated the invisible 'life' too much; the real solution would lie in something more purely immaterial.

In *Hints toward the formation of a more comprehensive theory of life* (1818), Coleridge lands in the idea that life is "not a thing" but an "act and process," to be understood as the "internal copula of bodies," one that emerges out of the union of the three "constituent forces" of reproduction, irritability and sensibility (*Theory of Life*, 41-42, 93-94). However, the problem remains: how can something that is not a "thing" but an "internal copula" be apprehended by an observing mind? In *Logic*, Coleridge tries to define life as a "whole antecedent to its parts," and once again tries to navigate the shadowlands between seen and unseen by trying to define this "whole" such that it avoids being an "object of the senses" without for that matter becoming a "mere thought or *ens logicum*." Instead, he concludes, it must "be a subject, or some act, mode, or attribute of a subject" (*Logic* 231-232). In attempting to explain how such an entity could be grasped by an observing mind, being neither accessible to the senses nor constructed by the mind itself, Coleridge finds himself unable to arrive at a definition that does not violate the laws either of the senses or the understanding. "From such contradictions," he concludes, "there is but one way of escaping, viz. by assuming, by WILLING to assume, that the truth passeth all understanding, and that a contradiction exists in the heterogeneity of the faculty, not in the object" (234-235). This seems as clear a statement of the paradox that drove Coleridge to the edge of perception as any.

In summary, I have argued that Coleridge's speculations on perception tend to fall into three broad categories. Firstly, the interest of the 'seer', of perception as an active, complex and spiritually-attuned process, which can be seen in Coleridge's criticisms of Hartley, his related writings on association by feeling, on "streaminess," in making volition a co-creator in perception, and the idea that perception bears the imprint on other mental faculties, such as memory. Secondly, the interest of the ‘seen’, of objects and their aesthetic and spiritual qualities as being confirmed as objectively and intuitively real, which (so far) can be seen in his argument that perceptions must have qualities that do not depend on subjective association, and his claims that qualities like sublimity are baked into the perceptions and objects themselves. Thirdly, the interest of the ‘unseen’, that unseen dimensions are indirectly gleaned even in the act of perception, which can be seen in his writings on “magnitude,” on the precognitive ‘master sense’, and his various attempts to find a definition of “life” which is both indirectly discernible through perception and yet uncontaminated by it.

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[57] For Blumenbach's own explanation, see Blumenbach 20.

Coleridge’s philosophical marginalia and the return to the ‘real’

One of the implications of “Dejection: An Ode” was that Coleridge turned to philosophy to ‘repair’ something about himself that he had lost. In my reading, that something was his faith in a unified perception that he previously thought would be attainable through nurturing his poetic faculties. If this is correct, it seems reasonable to conclude that an interest in recreating this type of perception, of constructing a bridge to the “life of things” which bypasses the broken faculty of ordinary perception, would be discernible also in his relationship to his philosophical influences during this period.

While Coleridge’s main philosophical influences – Berkeley, Spinoza, Kant, Fichte, Schelling – differ greatly in their views on the relationship between mind and world, this section argues that when Coleridge *resists* their views, his reasons for doing so tend to conform to a certain pattern. That pattern, I suggest, is one of frustration that a philosopher does not establish the existence of real and tangible objects on intuitive grounds, which would make his system a worthy substitute for perception. In other words, they do not permit Coleridge to ‘reason’ his way to a connection with the things which Wordsworth communes with through his powers of vision. Thus, this section does not detail Coleridge’s borrowings from the philosophers in question; a topic which has been extensively studied already.[58] Instead, I focus more narrowly on Coleridge’s ‘private’ thoughts to reading these philosophers as jotted down in his marginalia (and, briefly, on his philosophical lectures of 1818-1819, which offer his clearest criticisms of Spinoza), and what these more intimate notes suggest about his intuitive reactions to their systems.

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[58] See, for example, Frank Stokoe, *German Influence in the English Romantic Period, 1788-1818: With Special Reference to Scott, Coleridge, Shelley and Byron* (1926); John H. Muirhead, *Coleridge as Philosopher* (1930); René Wellek, *Immanuel Kant in England, 1793-1838* (1931); Monika Class, *Coleridge and Kantian Ideas in England, 1796-1817: Coleridge’s Responses to German Philosophy* (2012), Giles Whiteley, *Schelling’s Reception in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (2018), among other studies.

While Berkeley's philosophy, as we have seen, was an important influence on Coleridge's thought in his pre-"Dejection" years, Coleridge's marginalia records a number of objections to it, primarily with regard to the topic of perception. To give a quick background, Berkeley's most famous work, the *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710), argues that for all objects of our perception it holds true that *esse est percipi* (to be is to be perceived). In other words, any object is to be solely identified with the perception that it produces in an observing mind, and therefore cannot be assumed to correspond to any underlying 'real' object (Berkeley, *Treatise* 194-198). Thus, the only reason why objects continue to exist even when humans do not actively perceive them is because they are always perceived by God, whose gaze 'fixes' them without our assistance (217-218). Berkeley's world, like Hume's, contains no principle of cause-and-effect, but natural phenomena still proceed according to a certain logical regularity because God prefers to organize his creations in a well-ordered scheme (210-211, 228-229).

Coleridge's marginalia indicates, as per my hypothesis, that he was troubled by the way in which Berkeley's philosophy removed the foundation for a world of real objects. In his marginalia to Schelling's *System*, Coleridge takes issue with Berkeley's system for reducing perception (which entails both a perceiver and a perceived object) to sensation (which requires only a perceiver), which allows Berkeley to land in the idealist position that the mind creates its own perceptions. Coleridge, instead, asserts the opposite: it is perception that is the basic category, and sensation that constitutes the "minimum or lower degree of Perception," in the sense that it is simply a type of perception in which the awareness of object causing the perception is *least* powerfully felt.[59] Thus, Coleridge argues that any form of sensation without object, the foundation of philosophical idealism, is impossible. Even for a "polyp" without a nervous system, which Coleridge treats as the prototypical example of Berkeleyan sensation, sensation is in fact wholly "objective," in that it is the "light, warmth & surrounding fluid" (i.e. the 'objects' of perception) that constitute the organism's "Brain & Nerves" and not the other way around (*CM4* 447-448). In short, Berkeley's unwillingness to include the object in the process of perception makes his system untenable to Coleridge, for whom the rooting of sense experience in an independently existing object appears to be non-negotiable.

Likewise, Coleridge's admiration of Spinoza's philosophy eventually gives way to criticism about how it handles the "reality" of the external world. Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) had been the main exponent of philosophical monism in the West, arguing that the cosmos contained only one substance in different forms of modification, so that mind and world were simply attributes of the same entity. This all-encompassing entity Spinoza controversially identified with *Deus sive nature* ("God or Nature"), ensuring that he would be associated with accusations of being either a pantheist or an atheist over the next two centuries (Spinoza 1-67). Coleridge had several reasons for rejecting Spinoza's system beyond the issue of sense perception. For example, in his lectures on the history of philosophy, he objects to it on the same grounds as he objects to hylozoism: for failing to limit its own terms and therefore becoming meaningless. Spinoza's monism, he concludes, is "an unconscious something that being everywhere is nowhere, that being everything is nothing" (*Lectures* 538). Furthermore, as previous scholars have noted, Coleridge – like many others of his time – was far too attached to the personal God of his Christian faith to ever be comfortable with Spinoza's impersonal divinity (Muirhead 47). By 1828, his hostility toward Spinoza's system had hardened so that he could list it alongside Neoplatonic conceptions of divinity as "repugnant" to the dictates of conscience (Coleridge, *AR* 177). However, as we shall see, Coleridge also had a more technical objection to Spinoza's system that struck specifically at its inability to account for the phenomenon of perception.

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[59] Coleridge later returned to and expanded upon this line of criticism of Berkeley in *Logic* (128-129).

In a universe that contains only one substance, Coleridge argues, there must be some fundamental continuity between matter and perception, so that in the act of perceiving an object, matter must somehow "unite" with the perception itself. This, he states, is "conceivable only on one [condition], that is, if it can be shown that the *vis representativa*, or the sentient, is itself a species of matter"; however, it has never been explained how "any affection from without could metamorphose itself into perception or will" (Coleridge, *Lectures* 521-523). Here, Spinoza's approach is to "refine matter into a mere modification of intelligence with the two-fold function of appearing and perceiving," but this, Coleridge objects, is to strip matter of its material properties and leave it little more than a "ghost" possessing "only spiritual reality" (523).[60] Once again, Coleridge seizes on the inability of a philosophical system to allow for a tangible and 'real' dimension to the external world as sufficient reason for treating it as suspicious. Curiously enough, this brings his objection somewhat in line with his criticism of Berkeley; whereas he rejects the latter for defining the objective too narrowly, Spinoza fails by defining it too inclusively. Consequently, although on the opposite side of the philosophical spectrum, Berkeley's subject-centered philosophy and Spinoza's object-centered philosophy appear to land in the same blind monism in Coleridge's estimation, lending – perhaps – yet more credence to his oft-repeated adage that "extremes meet."

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[60] Coleridge also rejects what he describes as the materialist attempt to solve this problem. The materialist, he claims, has two choices. The first is reduce perception to an effect "caused" by the object rather than the object itself, but Coleridge argues that this is not how perception appears in the mind: "it is the object itself, not the product of a syllogism, which is present to our consciousness." The second is to claim that the object itself produces the perception through some inherent power of its own, but this requires an explanation of how such a power can emerge simply from the dimensions of "mere figure, weight, and motion," which Coleridge claims has never been adequately provided (*Lectures* 521-523).

With regard to Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), it would not be fair to say that Coleridge outright 'rejected' any parts of Kant's philosophy, since he probably remained a Kantian to some extent for his whole life.[61] However, what is of interest to this study are the parts of Kant's ideas about perception that Coleridge either struggled with or sought to reinterpret to fit with his own intuitions. To give a very brief sketch, Kant's philosophy of perception proposes that the world of appearances, or *phenomena*, is shaped by the mind through a set of cognitive functions which he collectively terms "categories." Thus, all the qualities that render the world intelligible, from spatial and temporal extension to physical appearance and causal relations, are created when mental categories are imposed upon the world by the observer's mind. Since the mind cannot perceive beyond the layer of phenomena, the actual objects beneath appearances, or *noumena*, cannot be apprehended by the mind, and the degree to which they correspond to the phenomena, or if they do so at all, remains unknown (Kant, *Pure Reason* 168-171). While this leads to an unbridgeable gulf between phenomena and noumena on the level of epistemology, Kant nonetheless argues that the noumenal reality must be a factor in our discussions of moral and religious issues. Thus, we should presuppose a "unity" between the noumena and certain moral and religious principles which shape good human conduct (*Judgment* 11-12).

As highly as Coleridge esteemed Kant as a philosopher and logician, he did not accept him as an authority on everything. For example, in one notebook entry, he admits that he finds Kant to be a "wretched Psychologist" (*CN1* 1717). Kant, Coleridge argues, attempts to make the "Will" synonymous with the "Reason," whereas Coleridge had first-hand knowledge that very little was required to make the two faculties dart off in opposite directions.[62] Once again, Coleridge evaluates a philosophical claim solely by weighing it against personal experience, blurring the line between ostensible interest in establishing universal truth and what may have been a partially therapeutic interest in finding a system adapted to his own individual mind.

The unbridgeable gulf between phenomena and noumena was bound to be another obstacle in Coleridge's mind, and here it seems like Coleridge often tried to rescue Kant from interpretations that would present this gulf in particularly stark terms.[63] In the marginalia to Tennemann's *History of Philosophy*, Coleridge takes issue with the interpretation of Kant proposed by Tennemann and "almost all the

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[61] However, scholars have disagreed over the extent of his influence. While René Wellek has called Kant's influence is "absolutely central" and Martin Roberts has argued that the entirety of Coleridge's philosophy amounts to "little more than a poeticizing of Kant," other critics, such as John. H. Muirhead, have downplayed Kant's role and stressed Coleridge's conflicted reactions to his system (Wellek 102; Roberts 495; Muirhead 84-93).

[62] "Now I do not feel this perfect synonimousness in Reason & the Wille. I am sure, Kant cannot make it out. Again & again, he is a wretched Psychologist" (*CN1* 1717).

[63] See also chapter 5, page 115.

Kantéans," which he argues reduces "all, that we can conceive, or perceive as existing" to "no more than ein Begriff-spiel" ("play of notions") with no basis in objective reality. According to this interpretation, all that can be called real is a "naked" thing-in-itself with no possibility of value ("=0"), which a mere act of faith (consistent with reason) is supposed to raise to a positive value ("+0") (*CM5* 701-702).[64] In other words, noumena, by virtue of being inaccessible to perception, cannot convincingly be correlated with value in any meaningful sense, since rooting any value in a wholly inaccessible reality is as empty a gesture as raising 0 to +0. Furthermore, it is a gesture undertaken not for the sake of truth but because of its practical utility (i.e. establishing a stronger footing for ethics and religion). Once again, the inability of a philosophical system to provide a meaningful role for the existence of objects, and in effect "de-realizing" external reality, is treated by Coleridge as deeply problematic.[65]

The same worry appears in Coleridge's marginalia to Kant's works themselves, with Coleridge clearly dissatisfied with the grounds that Kant offers him for believing in noumena at all. "I apply the Categoric forms to a Tree," he writes, "well! but first what is this tree? How do I come by this Tree? […] Kant I do not understand – i.e. I have not discovered what he proposes for my Belief" (Coleridge, *CM3* 248-249). Here as elsewhere, Coleridge appears unable to accept the idea of an ultimate reality that is not only inaccessible, but even potentially superfluous, to the activities of the mind. John H. Muirhead has argued that Coleridge's main objection to Kant's system concerns its denial of the mind's potential to transcend its own categories, which rendered the mind unable to access the only site at which authentic truth and unity can be attained (Muirhead 92-93). If so, Coleridge's reading of Kant seems to have done little to solve the ever-present contradiction: Kant too "fails" in the attempt to make perception meaningful in a world where the ultimate foundation of reality is assumed to be unperceivable.

While Coleridge's attitude toward Kant can be said to have remained respectful, and in places even reverential, until the end, the same cannot be said for his attitude toward Fichte, which gradually transformed into outright hostility. Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), following in Kant's footsteps, attempted to locate a foundation for all knowledge in the human subject's basic experience of self-consciousness. Our experience of reality, according to Fichte, begins with the fact that the Ego (or subject) "posits itself," then "opposits" to itself a "non-Ego" which encompasses all of that which is not part of the Ego. The non-Ego serves as a "check" to the natural strivings of the Ego, which would otherwise imagine itself all-encompassing, and provides the necessary opposite without which the Ego would not be able to define itself (Fichte 63-93). Since the non-Ego is inherently opposed to the activities of the Ego (even though it is itself a manifestation of the Ego), it must be externalized so that it manifests itself as something permanently "outside" the confines of the self: this forms the "ground" of the external world as apprehended by our perceptions (193-196). Perceptions, then, are essentially externalized feelings, which, in turn, originate in the frustration of the Ego's impulses. In other words, perceptions come from within and not from without, and the assumption of any corresponding "real" substance in the world is purely a "product of the imagination" (316-325). The vast canvas of life arises from the Ego having its impulses constantly "checked" by the non-Ego: this is the friction that gives rise to the perceived world in all of its complexity.

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[64] In full: "the sole objective reality is a naked Ding in sich = 0, which a Vernunft-glaube is to raise into a +0, not for the truth but for the interest of the Position!" (701-702)

[65] In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge tries to rescue Kant's philosophy from this conventional reading, claiming that Kant was under political pressure to disguise his "real" philosophy, which he could only disclose in symbolic form. "In spite therefore of his own declarations," Coleridge states, "I could never believe, that it was possible for him to have meant no more by Noumena, or Thing in itself, than his mere words express; or that in his own conception he confined the whole plastic power to the forms of the intellect, leaving for the external cause, for the materiale of our sensations, a matter without form, which is doubtless inconceivable" (*BL1* 145-146).

While Fichte's philosophy at the time was sometimes read as a radical idealism which posited that the universe existed only in the human mind, he saw himself as working relatively straightforwardly in the Kantian vein. While perceptions in Fichte's system are ultimately created by the mind, he recognized that the order of thought and the order of phenomena were distinct, and that when the mind externalized its perceptions, they were not 'projected' out into the world as much as recognized to correctly belong to the category of things that are not pure thought. However, Coleridge clearly interpreted Fichte's system as landing in radical idealism, regardless of the philosopher's intentions. While initially appreciating Fichte's elevation of the human subject, which Coleridge saw as a useful corrective to Spinoza's monism, this was followed by an over-correction in the opposite direction: a "crude egoismus, a boastful and hyperstoic hostility to NATURE , as lifeless, godless and altogether unholy" (Coleridge, *BL1* 148). Fichte's philosophy, Coleridge came to believe, was simply pantheistic solipsism, as indicated by the short satirical poem which he wrote in response to it:

> The form and the substance, the what and the why.
> The when and the where, and the low and the high.
> The inside and outside, the earth and the sky,
> I, you, and he, and he, you and I,
> All souls and all bodies are I itself I! (*BL1* 149n)

Coleridge also argued that Fichte's system offered insufficient empirical justification for its claims. In the marginalia to Fichte's *Die Bestimmung des Menschen*, Coleridge takes aim at what he takes to be Fichte's claim that perception does not correspond to an outer reality but exists merely as a "consciousness of self-modification." Coleridge announces that "here I make a stand: not so much as a philosopher, doubting the truth, as a logician dissatisfied with the reasoning." Since Fichte's claim is a "gratuitous Assumption," "assuredly not the suggestion of the common sense of Mankind" and in fact contradicted by "an intuitive persuasion of the contrary," it "ought therefore to be proved" and not merely stated as fact (*CM2* 603). A similar criticism appears in the marginalia to Schelling's *System des transzendentalen Idealismus,* where Coleridge accuses Fichte of selectively applied skepticism. "Add to this one scruple which always attacks my mind when I read Schelling or Fichte," the entry begins, "Does Perception imply a greater mystery, or less justify a Postulate, than the Act of Self-consciousness – i.e. Self-Perception?" (*CM2* 453).

In other words, since the epistemological uncertainty surrounding the experience of perception is not greater than that which surrounds the experience of self-consciousness, why treat the latter as a basic, irreducible function of the mind and not the former? Coleridge concludes: "Let Perception be [?demanded] as an Act specified of the mind, & how many of the grounds of Idealism become 0 = 0" (453). He then goes on to temper this particular claim by admitting the difficulty of treating perception as a basic function of the mind without also accounting for what is being perceived. However, the fact that Coleridge refers to this as a "scruple which always attacks my mind" indicates, once again, a clear interest in placing the correspondence between perception and object on an unassailable, objective and *intuitive* foundation.

Finally, Coleridge's most severe objection appears in the marginalia to Fichte's *Grundlage der Wissenschaftslehre*, where Coleridge accuses the work of failing to explain how perception defined according to Fichte's premises is different from hallucination, and consequently, how such a theory is compatible with the existence of sleep. In fact, he argues, dreams offer such a perfect example of Fichtean perception in action that it often seems as though the author were inadvertently articulating a "Theory of Dreams," which would be true only during sleep (*CM2* 623-624). Once again, Coleridge rejects a philosophical system because of its inability to account for independently existing objects, and for thereby failing to establish a metaphysical footing for the reality of perception.

Of all the philosophers read by Coleridge, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling's (1775-1854) influence has been the most well-examined by scholars, primarily because of Coleridge's extensive borrowings from Schelling in *Biographia Literaria* and the accusations of plagiarism which have hung like a dark cloud over his legacy ever since. While this thesis will not investigate Schelling's influence on Coleridge per se, some of Schelling's ideas are discussed in connection with *Biographia Literaria* in chapter 5.[66] Schelling's *System des transcendentalen Idealismus* (1800) was the central work of his philosophical middle phase, that of his so-called *Identitätsphilosophie*, as well as the work that Coleridge appears to have engaged with in most detail. In this work, Schelling attempts to reconcile Fichte's self-positing Ego with Spinoza's monist conception of the universe (with the subject and object as different modifications of a single cosmic substance). In order to do this, Schelling proposes that (subjective) phenomena do, in fact, correspond to (objective) noumena. This becomes possible because Schelling proposes self-consciousness (i.e. the subject's intuition of itself) as the basis of reality. In self-consciousness, mind operates simultaneously as subject and object – subject by virtue of being the 'intuitant,' object by virtue of being the object of the intuition – and so it serves as the 'ground' of the existence of both the subjective (phenomenal) and objective (noumenal) aspects of reality, prior to their division (Schelling, *System* 23-30).

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[66] See discussion on pages 218-221.

This process of self-consciousness is divided by Schelling into different degrees of consciousness and non-consciousness, with the world of "will" placed at the farthest conscious end and the world of "real" objects placed at the farthest non-conscious end of the spectrum (Schelling 12). This fundamental identity of the subjective and the objective explains why a thought can be the exact correlate of an object: to the undivided self-consciousness, they are merely aspects of the same whole.

Following Fichte, Schelling defines objectivity as a limitation of subjective freedom; thus, to perceive an object is to become aware of a particular check on the subject's free mental activity, or a region of "non-self" within which the freedom of the self is suspended. Thus, to perceive a cube-shaped object is, Schelling argues, merely to become aware of a portion of space in which "my intuition can be active only in the form of a cube" (Schelling 57-58). The entire world of objects is produced through three 'orders' of intuition. The first order is that which posits objects as sensory forms (Kant's phenomena). The second order is that which posits the actual substances (Kant's noumena) through an unconscious mental activity that Schelling calls "productive intuition." Finally, the third order encompasses a set of representational "categories" necessary for producing the objects, which are posited by the productive intuition at an even lower unconscious level (125-126). By defining objects fundamentally as negatives of mental activity, Schelling can be said to follow the hard idealist line that reality emanates from the mind; however, he avoids falling into solipsism by making clear that he defines reality as *knowledge* and not as *being*. Thus, when Schelling defines objectivity as suspended freedom, he means the type of objective 'being' that is accessible to the mind (i.e. the most unconscious form of knowledge), and not being in the ontological sense. Thus, Schelling argues, the mission of the transcendental philosopher is to find an "absolute principle of knowing," not an "absolute principle of being," of which we cannot know anything (16).

In Coleridge's marginalia to Schelling's *System*, he can be seen to object to Schelling's division of reality into such ontologically opposite poles as "real" and "ideal." Coleridge argues that this is an error that stems from Schelling's "difficulty of comprehending the co-existence of attributes." Instead of a rigid subject-object polarity, Coleridge suggests that it would be better to imagine a type of "plurality," under which "Object and Subject become mere relative terms," so that there would be "no reason why any given existent should not be both Object and Subject" (*CM4* 451). This way, subject and object can be envisioned as entities of equal power, "as in the instance of a Lover & his Mistress gazing at each other," each a subject relative to the other, a simile that suggests (as with Coleridge's criticism of Spinoza) an instinctive need for a personalized universal object, one capable not only of responding to, but also of reciprocating, the actions of the subject (*CM4* 451).

By arguing against a rigidly-defined polarity in favor of a merely relative one, Coleridge proposes what he takes to be a better answer to Schelling's overarching question: "how can we think both of presentations as conforming to objects, and objects as conforming to presentations?" (Schelling, 11). The crux of Schelling's question is the apparent impossibility of there being both a tendency in mental representations to accommodate objects and one in objects that accommodates our mental representations, a fact that suggests a mysterious pre-established harmony between the reality of the mind and the reality of the world. Coleridge, however, claims that this mystery is predicated on a misunderstanding, which he flippantly likens to the suggestion that "a mail coach standing on the road contradicts the fact of the same standing in a coach house the next night." Instead, Coleridge proposes, the mind may be capable of exercising different powers at different times: at one time constituting a "*directive* power" (thought), while at another functioning as a "Re- or Percipient" in relation to the objects around it (perceiver) (Coleridge, *CM4* 449-450). In short, it appears to be the rigidity of Schelling's subject-object polarity that Coleridge takes issue with, the absoluteness of the designators 'subject' and 'object,' which Coleridge seeks to replace with a more relative model, one which changes properties depending on context and vantage point.

In this section, I have argued that Coleridge's objections to his five major philosophical influences can be seen to a follow a fairly consistent and revealing pattern. In the cases of Berkeley and Spinoza, Coleridge criticized their philosophies for failing to account for the objects of perception, in Berkeley's case by reducing all perception to (subjective) sensation, and in Spinoza's case through the difficulties posed by the existence of matter in a monist system. In Kant's case, Coleridge can be seen to struggle with the loss of access to real objects incurred by the absolute gulf between phenomena and noumena, and in Fichte's case, to what he perceived to be Fichte's lack of belief in independently existing objects altogether. Finally, his objections to Schelling differ somewhat, given how closely Schelling's *Identitätsphilosophie* appears to align, at least in its aims, with the solution he is looking for, and given how a fixed subject-object polarity, in contrast to Kant's and Fichte's solutions, offers direct access to the noumena. Here, however, his objections can be seen to focus on the rigid polarization of Schelling's solution, which seems to preclude the existence of an object that fits Coleridge's specifications. In other words, what is missing is an object that is in some sense a 'counterpart' of the subject in that it is alive, thinking and responsive to the mind reaching out to it – that is to say, an object fit for the type of 'communion' which Wordsworth appears to achieve directly through his senses.

The “mind’s eye,” or perception displaced

It would not be completely inaccurate to call Coleridge’s late-career pivot toward a new faculty that he termed “Reason” a ‘Platonic turn.’ However, there are some problems with thinking of it that way: for example, Platonic ideas appears in Coleridge’s writing at all stages of his life (for example, they permeate his 1794 poem “Religious Sentiments”), whereas his later preoccupation with Reason represents a clear departure from his earlier habits of thought. For this reason, this section will consider Coleridge’s writings on Reason mostly in isolation from the question of his Platonism, and instead focus on the way in which this new faculty, described by Coleridge as the “mind’s eye,” can be seen to more specifically resolve some of his problems with perception.

In comparison to his later writings, Coleridge’s early-career treatments of Reason (that is to say, before he had reinterpreted this faculty in more mystical terms) stand out as somewhat ambivalent. In the introductory letter affixed to “A Mathematical Problem” (1791), mathematics is described as having “few admirers” by virtue of its prioritizing of Reason over Imagination: “while Reason is luxuriating in its proper paradise, Imagination is wearily traveling on a dreary desert” (Coleridge, “A Mathematical Problem”). Similarly, one of Coleridge’s earliest notebook entries makes a blunt pronouncement about the possibility of objective thought: “Unbiased mind – an absurdity” (*CN1* 59). Over the years, however, Reason gradually came to establish itself as a solution to a number of Coleridge’s problems, both with regards to his weakened powers of perception and the growing threat of excessive inwardness. However, defining the proper province of Reason involved toeing a narrow line: Coleridge needed to situate some inward conception of truth as a reality distinct from and higher than the world of the senses, whilst simultaneously not falling prey to solipsistic idealism, which would simply trap him within the prison of his own mind.

In Coleridge’s early writings, inwardness and subjectivity lack the negative coding that they were to acquire later in his career. His deteriorating health and crippling opium addiction, both of which continued to deteriorate until he found a safe harbor in the home of Dr. James Gillman in 1816, clearly contributed to making him turn against his own inner world. Furthermore, both his illnesses and addiction can be seen to intersect with his thoughts about inwardness and perception in a number of striking ways. In a notebook entry from 1804, Coleridge makes a passing reference, in terms that suggest intimate familiarity with the subject, to “diseases which proceed from or produce, in one word, which *imply* an overbalance of the vital Feelings to the Organic Perceptions, of those Parts which assimilate or transform the external into the personal, or combine them thus assimilated (stomach, lungs, Liver, Bowels, & many others, no doubt, the use of which is not yet known) over the Eyes, Ears, Olfactories, Gustatories, & the organ of the Skin.” Such conditions, he speculates, may distort feelings of love, giving it for instance too much vital feeling and too little organic (Coleridge, *CN2* 1822). If one assumes that this is a description of Coleridge's own ailments – which, given the tone of authority and level of detail, seems likely – it paints an illuminating picture of a mind divided between the "vital," an inner world buried deep within a chronically sick digestive system, and the "organic," the portion that receives and processes sensory stimuli from without.[67]

Neil Vickers has shown that Coleridge used the distinction between the vital and the organic to categorize personality types: while he deemed his own thinking to be characterized by vital feeling, he aligned his wife Sara and Wordsworth more with the organic category (Vickers, *Doctors* 110-133). Vickers's study highlights a number of ways in which Coleridge conceived of the vital as being connected to various advantages, such as operating in close contact with the "essentially *vital*" secondary imagination. What I want to focus on here, in contrast, are the places where Coleridge's identification with the vital is also fraught with feelings of helplessness and entrapment: of being sucked into an intensely physical form of inwardness. The connection with his stomach, lungs, liver and bowels entailed a permanent risk of sinking deeper into an incommunicable, painfully tactile "vital" self, and losing sight of the outward-oriented "organic" self, which at least stood in some relation to the external world through its mediation between mind and its perceptions.

Another reason for turning against inwardness may have been the weakening power of Coleridge's fantastic imagination, including his dreams, to feed his creativity – indeed, their increasing tendency to actually impair it. This is a stark departure from the early poems, where dreams and fantasy were frequently described as pleasant, benevolent and conducive to creativity. In "Inside the Coach" (1791), dreaming is described as a welcome diversion from the monotony of traveling over a dreary heath; the dullness of the waking world is contrasted with the rich multiplicity of the dream-state, a place of "various-painted pinions," "splendid visions" and "fairy reign" ("Coach," lines 20-27). Likewise, in "Songs of the Pixies" (1793), the enchanted inhabitants of a nook called Pixie Parlour weave "gay dreams of sunny-tinctured hue" before the eyes of the young poet, laying the foundation for his future poetic inspiration ("Pixies," lines 33-46). In a notebook entry from 1796, Coleridge even goes so far as to suggest that dreams may be a remnant of a type of divine communion enjoyed in the world before the Fall. "In the paradisiacal World," he writes, "Sleep was voluntary and holy – a spiritual before God, in which the mind elevated by contemplation retired into pure intellect suspending all commerce with sensible objects & perceiving the present deity" (*CN1* 191).

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[67] Moreover, there is another entry where Coleridge describes the breakdown of his willpower as severing the connection between his incommunicable vital self and an organic 'persona' which allows the former to communicate with the external world. "The exceeding pain […] and the fearful distresses of my sleep," he writes, "had taken away from me the connecting link of voluntary power, which continually combines that part of us by which we know ourselves to be, with that outward picture or hieroglyphic, by which we hold communion with our like – between the vital and the organic – or which Berkeley, I suppose, would call mind and its sensuous language" (*CL2* 447).

However, by 1802, a different tone had begun to predominate. In the marginalia to Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici*, Coleridge quotes Browne's assertion that there is greater delight in dreams than in waking life, and responds that for him it is the precise opposite: all his most painful thoughts exist in dreams and nowhere else, to the point where unpleasant experiences instinctively puts him in a dream-like state of mind (*CM1* 755). Similarly, "The Pains of Sleep" (1803) depicts sleep as a torturous state in which "desire" and "loathing" are "strangely mixed," where "all seemed guilt, remorse or woe" – in short, a voyage to an "unfathomable hell within" ("Pains," lines 16-46). Furthermore, the increasingly private and uncommunicable horrors of his life appears to have made it increasingly difficult for Coleridge to draw from his own unconscious in his creative work. For example, a notebook entry accompanying an early draft of the poem "Limbo" (1811/1834), one of the rare post-"Dejection" poems that attempt to represent a dream-state, dismisses the work as "a Specimen of the Sublime dashed to pieces by cutting too close with her fiery Four in Hand round the corner of Nonsense" (*CN3* 4073).

Another factor appears to have been Coleridge's increasingly disciplined adherence to Christian orthodoxy, which increasingly led him to reject the pursuit of self-knowledge – that is to say, self-knowledge as pursued for its own sake as opposed to for the purpose of obtaining spiritual knowledge – as fundamentally vain. A habit of psychological self-analysis, he writes in a notebook entry from 1808, makes the act of "true Prayer" more difficult, implying that his excessive attention to the workings of his own mind are interfering with his duties as a Christian (*CN3* 3355). Moreover, some of Coleridge's post-"Dejection" observations suggest an active attempt to downplay the powers of the mind as a means toward humbling himself. In an 1804 letter, for instance, he states that "we know nothing even of ourselves, till we know ourselves to be as nothing" (*CL2* 627). Similar sentiments also form a significant portion of Coleridge's last major work, the *Aids to Reflection* (1825), as is discussed near the end of this chapter.

However, at the same time as Coleridge's writing begins to register increasingly negative perspectives on self-knowledge, there is a parallel tendency to advocate a retreat from the transitory world of outward appearances toward something more permanent and ideal. As early as 1798, Coleridge writes in a letter to his brother George that he has "for some time past withdrawn myself totally from the consideration of *immediate* causes, which are infinitely complex and uncertain, to muse on fundamental and general causes, the 'causae causarum'" (*CL1* 243). Similarly, in late 1799 – a period marked by grief over the passing of his son Berkeley – Coleridge describes how the sight of a painting in the Hutchinson family home had prompted him to realize "how perishable Things, how imperishable Ideas seem to be!" (*CN1* 576). As this sentiment indicates, there is a close connection between grief and reassurances about the existence of something permanent in Coleridge's writing from this period. When he receives news in 1801 about the passing of his friend Thomas Poole's mother, Coleridge sends Poole a letter of consolation, the wording of which suggests that he is drawing on his own recent experience of mourning:

> …the frail and the too painful will gradually pass away from you […] as all things pass away, and those habits broken up which constituted our own and particular Self, our nature by a moral instinct cherishes the desire of an unchangeable Something, and thereby awakens or stirs up anew the passion to promote *permanent* good, and facilitates that grand business of our existence – still further, and further still, to generalize our affections, till Existence itself is swallowed up in *Being*, and we are in Christ as He is in the Father. (*CL1* 364)

The experience of grief, as Coleridge describes it, ultimately proves salutary in that it breaks up the transient "habits" that attach us to "our own and particular Self," and instead awakens a desire for an "unchangeable Something," to "generalize our affections" and to promote "*permanent* good."

This renewed interest in the permanent has a subtle parallel in his poetry from this period. Whereas in 1798 and 1799, Coleridge had written major poems explicitly championing the first-hand experience of nature over its second-hand mediation in the form of art ("The Nightingale: A Conversation Poem" and "Lines Written in a Concert-Hall"), the next year sees the publication of a poem in which the transient forms of nature come up short against the reassuring permanence of an embroidered flower:

> The tedded hay, the first-fruits of the soil,
> The tedded hay and corn-sheaves in one field,
> Show summer gone, ere come. The foxglove tall
> Sheds its loose purple bells, or in the gust,
> Or when it bends beneath the up-springing lark,
> Or mountain-finch alighting. And the rose
> (In vain the darling of successful love)
> Stands, like some boasted beauty of past years,
> The thorns remaining, and the flowers all gone.
> Nor can I find, amid my lonely walk
> By rivulet, or spring, or wet road-side,
> That blue and bright-eyed flowered of the brook,
> Hope's gentle gem, the sweet Forget-me-not!
> So will not fade the flowers which Emmeline
> With delicate fingers on the snow-white silk
> Has worked, (the flowers most she knew I loved,)
> And, more beloved than they, her auburn hair.
> ("The Keep Sake," lines 1-17)

Embroidered flowers, like Plato's ideas, will outlast all the denuded roses and forget-me-nots of transient nature: a fitting portent of things to come.

During Coleridge's post-'Dejection' period, this strain of writing tends to elevate Reason and ideas as an example of the "good" inward, as opposed to the "bad" inward of imagination and subjectivity. In the marginalia to Hartley's *Observations on Man*, Coleridge reflects on the associationist notion that "intellectual pleasures" may become greater than sensory ones if they involve a greater number of "vivid or languid miniature vibrations." This, Coleridge speculates, could lead to ideas eventually becoming more vivid than sensory impressions, and eventually to man becoming independent of senses, which he goes so far as to speculate may be the ultimate purpose of poetry (*CM2* 959). However, the intellectual pleasures in question were unlikely to be the pleasures of the imagination, but rather a newfound appreciation for timeless ideas in need of being rediscovered. "To contemplate the Ancient of Days with Feelings new as if they then sprang forth from his own Fiat," a notebook entry from 1803 reads, "this marks the mind that feels the Riddle of the World, & may help to unravel it" (*CN1* 1622). In another entry, Coleridge states that it is to be lamented that "universally acknowledged truths," precisely by being universally acknowledged, often lose the privileges of truths and become trite truisms, corresponding in inefficiency to actual falsehoods (*CN2* 2535). Thus, the purpose of genius, Coleridge later concludes in *The Friend* (1809), is to render familiar objects new – to make old and familiar truths appears strange and new, thus reasserting their eternal truth (*Fr1* 109-110).

In *The Friend,* the first major work by Coleridge in which the faculty of Reason is exalted as the highest function of the mind, Reason is established as the primary expression of the "good" inward. However, for a faculty that is positioned as equidistant from the material world of the senses and the negative inwardness of imagination, it is striking how consistently Coleridge uses visual language to describe its functioning. In *The Friend*, it is stated that "the human understanding possesses two distinct organs, the outward sense, and 'the mind's eye' […] which is reason," with the latter bearing the same relationship to "spiritual objects" as the former does to the world of the senses (Coleridge, *Fr1* 156-157). Furthermore, this conceptual similarity between the 'outward' and the 'mind's' eyes extends far beyond the merely metaphorical. In fact, the analogy between reason and sense-perception is treated by Coleridge as sufficiently close to resolve ambiguities in the Bible surrounding the word "seeing": by de-synonymizing this term into 'inward' and 'outward' perception, he states, "we reconcile the promise of Revelation, that the blessed will see God, with the declaration of St. John, God hath no one seen at any time" (156-157). As this passage indicates, transferring powers from the 'outward' to the 'mind's' eye offers new and creative possibilities for Coleridge to approach the contradiction of how to "see" that which simultaneously must not be seen.

By the time of the writing of *The Friend*, it is clear that Coleridge does not conceive of "Reason" as merely a faculty of logical reasoning. As Judson S. Lyon and others have shown, Coleridge's definition also draws from the German theologian F. H. Jacobi, who described "Vernunft" as a faculty of direct intuition, which he – like Coleridge – had understood in quasi-visual terms (Lyon 256). Thus, in *The Friend*, Coleridge defines Reason as encompassing both quasi-visual intuition and logical reasoning: in its 'pure' aspect, Reason is the 'mind's eye' that offers an intuition of spiritual reality, whereas in its 'mixed' aspect, it blends with the language-oriented understanding to give rise to the scientific faculty, or "the faculty that intellects the possibility or essential properties of things by means of the Laws that constitute them" (158). In this second 'mixed' capacity, Reason becomes the language by which the mind can "read" nature in the Berkeleyan sense:

> Deprive us of the Faculty by which we interpret them, they become but as characters on the Walls of Palmyra, or as the Lichens and Weather-stains on a Rock. Let our Senses remain in their keenness, and the Understanding too in all its vigor, as far as by the Understanding we imply only the adaptation of means to ends; -- if yet the higher faculty of Reason and Conscience be suspended, that faculty which gives <to> outward forms their appropriate inner Being, and to each its specific correspondent Claims, it becomes indifferent whether it be a Man or the Shadow of a man which we stab at, even as to a Tiger the presence of Life is but a warmth which makes his prey more palatable. (Coleridge, *Fr1* 172n)

In *The Friend*, all the concerns that have so far governed Coleridge's thinking about perception now appear to be transferred to the 'mind's eye' of Reason. Reason can access the unperceivable, since it functions analogously to perception without being subject to the limitations of the physical senses. Reason provides the correct language for reading nature. Reason, by being a non-linguistic faculty, transcends the reductive prism of language. However, it also has the added virtue of providing the permanence that Coleridge appears to have sought in his intellectual pursuits: this "mysterious faculty, the mother of conscience, of language, of tears, and of smiles" is now stated to be a "sole principle of permanence amid endless change" (*Fr1* 190).

In order to promote Reason as a legitimate alternative to both "outward" perception and "inward" subjectivity, Coleridge needs to establish it as fundamentally different from both. Having already established its independence from ordinary perception in *The Friend*, the next task – that of establishing the "objectivity" of Reason – becomes more of a preoccupation in his late career. A significant portion of his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (1818-1819) concerns itself with establishing a definition of objectivity that encompasses mental phenomena in addition to physical facts. In the latter half of the lectures, Coleridge can be seen to contend against the skeptical position that the human experience is an "individuality in nature," which distorts everything according to its own perspective, exemplified by David Hume's pronouncement that "if we were spiders, we would assume that the world had been spun" (*CPL2* 559-560). Coleridge's counterargument is to ask rhetorically whether there must not be a faculty that prompted skeptical inquiry in the first place, a faculty "that allows us to call into question our innate biases, call it Bacon's *lumen siccum*, Lord Herbert's reason or

Kant's faith of reason?" This power would have to stand in some "union" between the external and universal, since it could prompt the first skeptics to question the fact that the sun rises, even though this phenomenon was confirmed by appearance and common sense. To prove that such a faculty not only exists, but is in fact taken for granted even by the skeptics, Coleridge desynonymizes the term "objective," which he says can be used in two different senses of the word: 1) the reality of anything external to the mind (i.e. the grass being green), 2) the universality of a certain perception arising out of inherent laws of human nature as opposed to individual accidents (*CPL2* 559-560). This notion of a "mental objective" mode, then, allows Coleridge to maintain the position that ideas in the Reason can be classified as objective, despite being fundamentally mental phenomena.

However, despite the various problems that are solved by conceptualizing Reason as a process of 'inward' seeing, there are indicators that Coleridge did not find it to be a wholly adequate solution. One source of uncertainty seems to have been the question of whether Reason can 'perceive' its ideas directly, or just negatively. This question is raised in Coleridge's marginalia to Tenemann's *History of Philosophy*, where Coleridge discusses what he perceives to be a difference between Plato and his successor Plotinus with regards to the apprehension of ideas. Whereas Plato "gave little more than their *negative* character – i.e. what they were *not*. – Plotinus proposed to discover their *positive* Being" (*CM5* 751-752). As elsewhere in Coleridge's writings, the identification of a philosophical disagreement seems to double as a description of a schism in his own thinking: the position that he attributes to Plotinus strongly resembles the "visual" mode of Reason that was presented in *The Friend*, whereas Plato's position resembles his own parallel tendency to describe ideas in negative terms, as that which can only be "seen" indirectly.

As late as 1825, Coleridge does not seem to have settled the matter of which of the two best described the functioning of the "mind's eye." In a notebook entry, he refers to "negative knowledge" as constituting "great moral knowledge," and a means toward "unsensualizing the Soul and purifying the temple of the mind from Idols in order to prepare for the Epiphany of the Ideas." However, negative knowledge may ultimately just represent the highest knowledge that can be *taught*, whereas the direct intuition of the ideas described by Plotinus is something that one must learn by oneself:

> Generally speaking, the Negative, the insight into the not-truth, the not-possible of A. B. C. D. and so on S.T.W is all that the ablest and most gifted Reasoners can help others to do. The Positive, the X Y Z they must find for themselves, or meet in themselves. All Ideas are *Felicities*. The most that can be done by Volition of Thinking, is but *bringing the Stars from* the blue sky or in the rifts between the sombring Clouds, on a Summer Evening. (*CN4* 5215)[68]

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[68] If this passage would appear to resolve the argument somewhat in Plotinus' favor, Coleridge seems to have dissociated this position from its originator, whom he had long since rejected along

The “Positive” intuition of the truth, then, is an experience that cannot be learned or shared, only privately received, and the precise mechanics of its reception remain a mystery.

By the time of the writing of the *Aids to Reflection* (1825), Coleridge’s attitude appears to have hardened around an unconditional commitment to Reason and Conscience, the latter defined as Reason’s correlative moral faculty. In contrast to earlier writings, “self-knowledge” is now stated to be essential, but only as means for the mind to realize its own fundamental inadequacy. Therefore, the fear that keeps the average person from acquiring this necessary knowledge, the intuition of “an aching hollowness, a dark cold speck at the heart, an obscure and boding sense of somewhat, that must be kept out of sight of the conscience; some secret lodger, whom they can neither resolve to eject or retain,” is stated to be essentially correct (*AR* 64-75). However, just as the mind does not contain the power to solve its own problems, neither does the world of externals bring wisdom, since externals “do nothing but mock and deceive those who trust most in them” (141-142). Nonetheless, the mind requires “some other strength than its own, to fortify and fix it,” and this strength is stated to come from Conscience, which is now positioned as the point where human consciousness interacts with the divine will. As such, Conscience is not a mere “modification of consciousness,” but in fact its “antecedent condition and ground” (108-110). Because of the function of Conscience as a mediator between the human will and the divine spirit, it offers a way for the human mind to work toward its own salvation, a task which it would have been incapable of performing on its own.

Whereas Coleridge’s previous writings had left the province of ideas fundamentally mysterious, *Aids to Reflection* establishes it explicitly as a moral realm. Furthermore, the work culminates in the radical conclusion that “beyond the precincts of sensible experience, there is no reality attributable to any notion, but what is given to it by Revelation, or the law of conscience, or the necessary interests of morality.” Any spiritual reality that is not compatible with the mind’s moral intuitions, such as “a stoical Fate, or the super-essential One of Plotinus […] or the indivisible one and only substance of Spinoza,” therefore must be ruled out, since it is “repugnant” to the dictates of Conscience (174-177). The true supersensory reality is stated to be inaccessible to the logical Understanding, which is stated to be exclusively a “faculty of judging according to sense” (222). However, it can be apprehended by Reason, which is once again described as analogous to vision: “an intuitive or immediate beholding, accompanied by a conviction of the necessity and universality of the truth so beholden not derived from the senses” (224n). Thus, since the only true reality is that which can be only “spiritually discerned,” humanity

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with so many of his other early influences. Already ten years earlier, he had excoriated the Neoplatonist as “a vulgar Conjurer, Cunning Man, White witch,” and summarized his effort, along with those of Proclus and Porphyry, as “contemptible spirit-raising” and “wizardry” (*CM4* 143).

must be awakened from its “debasing slavery to the outward senses,” so that they can learn to apprehend the true world through the faculties of Reason and Conscience (348-349).

However, despite the resounding affirmation of the existence of an ideal reality outlined in *Aids to Reflection*, other texts from the same period register a far more conflicted tone. In stark contrast to the former, the poem “Constancy to an Ideal Object,” written in 1828, can be seen to present the relationship between the mind and the idea as a fundamentally tragic predicament:

> Since all that beat about in Nature’s range,
> Or veer or vanish; why should’st thou remain
> The only constant in a world of change,
> O yearning Thought! that liv’st but in the brain?
> […] And art thou nothing? Such thou art, as when
> The woodman winding westward up the glen
> At wintry dawn, where o’er the sheep-track’s maze
> The viewless snow-mist weaves a glist’ning haze,
> Sees full before him, gliding without tread,
> An image with a glory round its head;
> The enamoured rustic worships its fair hues,
> Nor knows he makes the shadow, he pursues!
> (“Constancy,” 1-4, 25-32)

As in earlier writings, the “ideal object” is once again conceptualized as “the only constant in a world of change,” yet this fact is stated to be of little comfort since it is also an insubstantial thing that, after all, “liv’st but in the brain.” Worse yet, the speaker then suggests the possibility that the ideal object may in fact be “nothing”: the philosophical equivalent of an optical illusion, an “image with a glory round its head” that “the enamoured rustic” might pursue, blind to the fact that it is in fact merely his own shadow. If Coleridge’s hope for the “mind’s eye” was that it was going to deliver on the promises that ‘outward’ perception had fallen short of, then “Constancy to an Ideal Object” suggests that, at the very least, it was not an unqualified success.

Summary

In these two chapters, I have argued that Coleridge’s treatment of perception, while heterogeneous on the level of argument and form, can be seen to cohere around certain fixed intuitive ‘interests’. One such interest is a paradoxical desire to, on the one hand, erect a strict boundary between that which can be seen and that which must remain unseen, and on the other, to discover a means of transcending this boundary. In the early poems, this paradox is not particularly pervasive, due to

Coleridge's largely unconflicted acceptance of the doctrines of associationism and necessitarianism, which seem to offer little room for unorthodox speculation. Around 1797, however, it becomes more pronounced when Coleridge begins to experiment with the idea of "developed" perception, which allows for the possibility of training the powers of perception to penetrate deeper into the domain of the normally invisible. When Coleridge begins to acknowledge that this theory has troubling implications, namely that it seems to relativize the value of the unseen, he can be seen to gravitate toward a different solution: that perception might be akin to a language, as Berkeley had suggested. If so, the proper way to "perceive" the unseen must be to read it symbolically in the forms of nature. During his extended crisis of 1799-1803, however, Coleridge begins to attribute his inability to solve this contradiction to personal psychological shortcomings: depression, grief, ebbing creativity, and temperamental differences with posited 'ideal perceivers' like Wordsworth.

In his later career as predominantly a prose writer, the project to reclaim perception continues through more indirect means, paralleling the observation in "Dejection: An Ode" that overdeveloping the intellect may be the only option for a person in a chronic state of unhappiness to "steal from [one's] own nature all the natural man" ("D:O," line 90). This plan, I have argued, involves trying to recreate the conditions for transcendent perception in various linguistic domains, which proves to be a laborious and ultimately impossible goal. In Coleridge's writings on the mechanics of sense perception, there is a recurring emphasis on ideas that heighten the active role of the perceiver's mind as a co-creator in its perceptions, on ideas that perceptions have innate characteristics that are distinct from the mind's subjective investment in them, and on ideas that augment normal perception with indirect access to 'unperceivable' dimensions. In the marginalia to five of his primary philosophical influences, he seems to be searching for a system that will enable direct access to the world of objects through reasoning, but finds none of the systems in question adequate for this task. Finally, his late career sees him formulate a doctrine of Reason, in which the properties of normal perception are transferred to a hypothetical 'mind's eye', analogous to normal vision but not subject to its physical limitations, providing a resolution of sorts to the perceptual paradox.

At the end of Coleridge's career, this central contradiction, for all the philosophical anxiety that it appears to have caused him, appears to have also served as a type of creative battery, powering his writing into distant reaches of abstract and poetic experimentation that might otherwise have been left unexplored. In the *Table Talk*, Coleridge is recorded as saying that "a truth of the reason" is always fundamentally inconceivable, so that the only way that it can be grasped by the mind is in the form of two contradictory expressions, each of which is nonetheless partially true (*Table Talk*, 56n). If that is the case, it seems safe to say that Coleridge peered deeper into the well of truth than most.

Chapter 3: Sensory gaps and poetic personae in the poems of William Wordsworth

Overview

In the two preceding chapters, I have argued that Coleridge's various attempts to solve the problem that he deems to be inherent in perception are inextricably linked to his attempts to understand Wordsworth, and more specifically Wordsworth's seeming ability to commune directly with objects in nature. Whereas Coleridge finds himself unable to close the gap between perception and transcendent meaning through any means other than the intellectual, Wordsworth seems to possess the innate ability to leap effortlessly across the divide and simply, in his own words, "see into the life of things." One may easily conclude that Coleridge is simply responding to an idealized version of Wordsworth here, a form of agonistic construct that stems from Coleridge's readings of his poems as direct and reliable accounts of the workings of their author's mind, which, of course, they may not ultimately be. Similarly, Coleridge at his lowest points seems to have positioned Wordsworth as a kindred poetic talent who represents what Coleridge *could* have been had he not been derailed by a sense-depriving upbringing and illness later in life, a portrait which Wordsworth seizes upon in *The Prelude*. Thus, Coleridge sometimes errs on assuming that Wordsworth must succeed in the various domains where he feels himself psychosomatically to be impeded. While the portrait here sketched conforms in broad strokes to how Wordsworth chooses to present himself in the conversation with Coleridge, in this chapter I argue that it masks a far more complex and uncertain engagement with perception in Wordsworth's body of work as a whole.

The question of Wordsworth's 'eye-mindedness' – that is, whether his mind deferred to his senses, or whether his senses deferred to his mind – has been the source of some critical dispute over the years. On the one hand, his nineteenth-century biographer Emile Legouis claimed that "[Wordsworth's] poems contain practically nothing that did not come to him either through hearing or through sight" (Legouis 461). This judgment has been echoed my twentieth-century critics like Richard Fadem, who claims that "unlike other Romantics, [Wordsworth] does not look behind or above things for a consummate reality, but within and among them […] in other words, he does not see metaphorically but literally" (Fadem 24).

On the other hand, numerous critics have asserted something close to the opposite. Geoffrey Hartman famously read the trajectory of Wordsworth's poetic development as his mind's gradually gaining independence from his senses, a movement of mind transcending matter which he called the *via naturaliter negativa* (Hartman, "Via" 175-176).[69] Similarly, Marian Mead argued that Wordsworth's intense focus on the world in its sensory aspects is only a means for discovering "inward meaning." Thus, while the "life-giving power" of his poetry is derived "in remarkable measure from the faculty of the eye," these descriptions only become visionary when "material forms" are viewed as exponents of "moral life" and "inward meaning" (Mead 202-203, 222-223). Going further still, Stephen Prickett places the ultimate locus of meaning entirely in the "invisible realm of absolutes," and argues that the absence of connections to this domain, manifested in symbolic form in the phenomena themselves, would render the visible world in Wordsworth's poetry "meaningless" (Prickett, *Romanticism and Religion* 81).

Critics have differed in whether they have located this "invisible" area of interest in human psychology or within a framework of religious beliefs, and the elusive nature of the topic has led many to opt for a kind of hazy middle ground. W. J. Harvey, for example, proposed simply that "Wordsworth characteristically works in an area which points both ways, a shadowy region where psychological and metaphysical meet" (Harvey 209).

In short, it seems clear to say that the correlation between sense-input and philosophical meaning has long been central to the study of Wordsworth's poems. Less studied, although by no means neglected, has been his treatment of sensory gaps. Walter Pater was probably one of the earliest to note Wordsworth's talent for utilizing the suggestive power of the gap, something that Pater lists alongside his skill in representing sights and sounds as among his many poetic gifts. Wordsworth, Pater writes, possessed the "power likewise of realizing, and conveying to the consciousness of the reader, abstract and elementary impressions – silence, darkness, absolute motionlessness" (Pater 43-44). Modern critics who have commented on this aspect include Jonathan Wordsworth (indeed, a distant relative of the poet), who noted an apparent relationship between passivity and otherworldliness in Wordsworth's poems, that objects that are described as "extremely passive" are often represented as "in their peacefulness, approach[ing] another world" (J. Wordsworth 4). Finally, as previously noted, sensory gaps feature prominently in famous studies of Wordsworth's poems by Colin Clarke and Geoffrey Hartman.[70] However, a study of the ways in which Wordsworth's preoccupation with sensory gaps follows, and continually interacts with, the parallel development of Coleridge's engagement with perception has not, as far as I know, been undertaken.

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[69] Although Hartman borrows the concept of transcendence from the mystical-philosophical tradition, he uses it in a secular context as a synonym for mental 'autonomy' (i.e. independence from the external world).

[70] See background chapter, pages 46-48.

With regard to Wordsworth's own method, this chapter retains, and expands upon, the idea that Wordsworth's poetic investigations of sense perception are primarily analyses of whether gaps in sense perception can or cannot enable a poetically receptive mind to attain transcendence. In poems that are written in Wordsworth's 'solitary' voice, this interest expresses itself predominantly in two ways. At the lower level, it manifests itself as the device of 'puncturing' everyday scenes with incongruous perceptions that connote distance and obscurity; these sights and sounds, often pitched somewhere between perception and sub-perception, are given a mystical character and serve to anchor otherwise mundane settings in an awareness of something otherworldly that is always present. At the upper level, it becomes a preoccupation with that which is obstructed or hidden from view – secret retreats and unvisited parts of the world – which leads to the positing of "secret Powers" that are suggested to be more present in such places than in others. This two-tiered interest, I argue, constitutes Wordsworth's 'default' perspective of the unseen, in the sense that it is the perspective to which he defaults when he is not inhabiting a shared poetic reality with someone else.

However, the 1797-1798 period sees Wordsworth's interest in perceptions diverge into two new tracks, following his close working relationships with his sister Dorothy and Coleridge, respectively. In Wordsworth's 'Dorothy mode', the interest in gaps and the unseen begins to shift into its opposite: a precise and minute attention to *things*. Meanwhile, in his 'Coleridge mode', his interest in the unseen begins to evolve in conjunction with Coleridge's philosophical interests and growing expectations on Wordsworth to solve philosophical problems through poetic means. This development, beginning with the assimilation of associationist ideas, then problem formulations inspired by Coleridge's conversation poems, and finally new ways to experiment with negative language, gives rise to a new mode of apprehending the unseen: the idea that the *intensity* of a particularly rare experience could be sufficient to transcend the limitations of perception. From 1802 and onwards, Wordsworth's 'Coleridge mode' begins to shift to a more remote and unreachable conception of the transcendent, which can be seen as an attempt to keep up with, yet at the same time correct, Coleridge's changing ideas of perception during his 'Dejection' crisis. Finally, from 1807 and onwards, with Coleridge's input no longer a regular and reliable factor, Wordsworth's treatments of perception become increasingly de-metaphysicized, opting instead to explore more conventional dimensions of the unseen (such as gaps between expectation and reality).

Due to the large number of Wordsworth poems that are relevant to this particular topic, the focus of this chapter has been restricted to his shorter poems. Although the chapter traces the poet's engagement with perception throughout his whole career, it maintains a particular focus on the period of 1795-1807, being both the core period of Wordsworth and Coleridge's 'dialogue' over perception and the period in which Wordsworth's treatment of sense perception is the most varied and ambitious. The next chapter will focus on Wordsworth's unfinished magnum opus, the three-poem cycle *The Recluse* (of which only The *Prelude* and *The Excursion* were completed), as well as bring the argument of both chapters to a tentative conclusion.

1787-1802: Early experiments and competing poetic voices

Given the extent to which Wordsworth's canonical work deals with perceptual decline and nostalgia for childhood, it might be tempting to impose a "fall" narrative on his career, according to which a youthful period of innocent joy eventually gives way to cooler emotions and more measured reflection. However, any such project would be complicated by the fact that many of Wordsworth's earliest poems are also tinged with strong feelings of resignation and melancholy, to the point where they sometimes feel like the products of a prematurely aged mind. In part, this may be due to the influence of the late eighteenth-century elegiac mode, which would have offered an artificially mature voice as the primary model of inspiration for young poets of Wordsworth's generation. However, the undercurrent of lost innocence in these poems arguably runs deeper than poetic convention; from these texts alone, it would appear that the hour of "splendour in the grass" is a distant memory already from the moment that he first puts pen to paper.

Thus, much as with Coleridge's juvenilia, there is in Wordsworth's early poems a tendency to treat present happiness as merely a prelude to more troubled times to come, and powerful experiences as mere sources of memories to store up for more important hours of sickness and impending death. In "The Vale of Esthwaite" (1787?), the sight of the titular vale leads automatically to thoughts about "the hour when these sad orbs shall close," and the hope that "Nature's page" will remain before the speaker "till dim seen by the eyes of age" (Wordsworth, "Vale," lines 478-484). A similar elegiac mood prevails in "Lines written while Sailing in a Boat at Evening" (1789), where the experience of sitting in a boat whose forward course "glows richly" in the evening light, but whose backward stream is cloaked in darkness, is compared to the life prospects of the "youthful Bard," who "heedless of the following gloom," deludes himself into thinking that "their colours shall endure / Till peace go with him to the tomb" (Wordsworth, "Sailing," lines 1-16). In this hushed world of evening colors, joys are muted and fleeting, while the consciousness of one's approaching decline and death is heightened, rather than forgotten, in the contact with natural beauty.[71]

If the melancholy of the above poems may be at least partially attributable to the conventions of the elegiac mode, a more deeply-rooted sadness seems to permeate a poem like "Written in very Early Youth." Here, the speaker goes into nature not in search of beautiful forms or to think solemn thoughts, but precisely to get away from those things; in this poem, nature is a featureless blankness whose primary effect on the mind is its ability to block out traumatic memories. The speaker, suffering from a "grief" which sights and sounds with their various associations only make worse ("that grief for which the senses still supply fresh food"), instead takes comfort in "this blank of things," where senses and memories are both muted (Wordsworth, "Early Youth" lines 7-10). Here, where "calm is all nature as a resting wheel," and where "a slumber seems to steal / O'er vale, and mountain, and the starless sky," he experiences a "harmony, home-felt and home-created" which has the power to "heal" his pains, for it is only "when memory is hushed" that "I am at rest" (lines 1-11). In these lines, nature is represented less as a panorama of things than as a therapeutic void, canceling out external and internal sensations alike, and the harmony that appears is not the ministrations of some mysterious power but, far more modestly, "home-felt and home-created."[72] The fact that few poems in Wordsworth's oeuvre present as impotent a view of human experience as the poem that, judging from the title and the lack of a precise date, may well be his first, further indicates that the feeling of exclusion from the normal life of the senses was hardly unique to his middle years, but a feeling that appears to have dogged him also in his youth.

As these examples illustrate, several of the qualities that will later characterize Wordsworth's canonical "maturity" – the elevated solemnity, the preoccupation with aging and decline, the philosophy of the "spots of time" (i.e. the idea that powerful formative sense-memories are essential for maintaining a healthy imagination in adulthood) – appear to be either present or presaged already in his early poems. For this reason, it seems reasonable to conclude that these represent not so much the wisdom of experience as merely the hallmarks of a lifelong poetic voice, forged already in adolescence through the marrying of a natural temperament to formative influences from the eighteenth-century elegy. In short, even while they are laying down their "spots of time," Wordsworth's speakers are treating their experiences as such, and even before they have presumably lost all the pleasures of youth, these speakers seem to have comfortably resigned themselves to the fact that they soon will.

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[71] Similar moods also predominate in "Extract, from the Conclusion of a Poem, Composed in Anticipation of Leaving School" (1787/1815) and "Remembrance of Collins, Composed upon the Thames near Richmond" (1789).

[72] Here, perhaps more than anywhere else in his oeuvre, a Wordsworthian speaker makes himself vulnerable to the caricature presented by Coleridge in "The Picture, or The Lover's Resolution" (1802) of the "love-lorn youth," "sick in soul," who has retreated into nature to disappear into unconsciousness, the coward's alternative to death (Coleridge, "The Picture" lines 18-25).

Another, more subtle, characteristic of his early poems is a recurring fascination with objects that are either half-seen or hidden. In Wordsworth's first long poem, "An Evening Walk" (1793), this interest seems to grow almost organically out of the familiar elegiac sunset mood; in this landscape where night is slowly approaching, natural features are gradually blotted out until the visible world lies suspended in a liminal half-light. Throughout the poem, the speaker's attention is repeatedly arrested by hidden places: the "obscure retreat" above a mountain rill, suspended in its "own twilight" (lines 53-71), "coves and secret hollows" that betray a "purple gleam" in the evening sunlight (lines 159-160), and an intricately-described swan's nest that the speaker does not actually see but imagines must be hidden in a nearby isle in the river (lines 212-248). The singling out of these places feels almost superfluous, given that the approach of darkness is in the process of hiding the whole world, yet the awareness of these spots in the dusky half-light seems instead to heighten their hiddenness, or else to add some extra dimension of significance to it. On this borderland between the seen and the unseen, the boundary between natural and supernatural also becomes more tenuous: in one extended passage, a train of "strange apparitions" passes by (lines 177-190). Soon, only a few shapes remain – most notably the "mountain-steeps" – and the prevailing mood of the final section of the poem is a wish to hold on to these "sadly-pleasing" visions, which is gradually overpowered by the resigned acceptance that they must disappear. If this metaphorical alignment of approaching darkness with the bittersweet decline and end of all things brings the poem in line with traditional elegiac conventions, it also masks the more adventurous poem that constantly threatens to emerge, in which the unseen is not merely the negative and erasure of the seen, but instead something real that is to be pursued for its own sake.

This potential is partially realized in "Descriptive Sketches" (1793), where the elegiac mood is largely missing, and the interest in the unseen manifests itself through extended meditations on the hidden places that lie all around the speaker as he treks through an Alpine landscape:

> […] vacant worlds where Nature never gave
> A brook to murmur or a bough to wave,
> Which unsubstantial Phantoms sacred keep;
> Thro' worlds where Life, and Voice, and Motion sleep;
> Where silent Hours their death-like sway extend,
> Save when the avalanche breaks loose, to rend
> Its way with uproar, till the ruin, drowned
> In some dense wood or gulf of snow profound,
> Mocks the dull ear of Time with deaf abortive sound.
> (Wordsworth, "Descriptive Sketches" lines 308-315)

In this description, the fact that these areas remain unseen, along with the featurelessness that the speaker imagines must be their primary characteristic, seems to situate them upon some hypothetical border where the material world dissolves into something ghostlier and more immaterial. Hiddenness becomes a gateway into other "unsubstantial" modes of existence: the absence of discernible stimuli (these worlds are "vacant," "Life, and Voice, and Motion sleep," "Hours" are "silent" and possess a "death-like sway," and even the sounds of avalanches are "deaf" and "abortive" as snow is muffled by snow) appears to be specifically what classifies such places as "sacred" domains presided over by "unsubstantial Phantoms."[73] This connection is repeated later in the poem, once again along with language that connotes sacredness, when the speaker remarks that "there is a secret Power that reigns / Here, where no trace of man the spot profanes," and where no "irreligious sound or sight / Rouses the soul from her severe delight." In this "sabbath region," there are sounds that seem to emerge from the hidden deeps themselves, and which are given an additional metaphysical quality on account of their non-specificity: "an idle voice […] Of Deep that calls to Deep across the hills" (lines 346-365). Finally, among these "sainted Rocks" there are images of "other worlds," which cause the speaker's spirit to "tower" to "viewless realms" "beyond the senses and their little reign" (lines 542-549). As can be seen from these passages, even Wordsworth's early poems evince a persistent urge, shared with Coleridge, to find ways of crossing the utmost boundaries of perception, and a conviction that the "viewless realms" that lie beyond will dwarf the "senses and their little reign."

Wordsworth's reunion with his sister Dorothy in 1795 marks an important milestone in his life, and appears to have inaugurated a shift in his poetic interests, a fact noted by Wordsworth himself. Addressing his sister in Book XIII of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth compares his own "countenance severe, / A rock with torrents roaring, with the clouds / Familiar, and a favourite of the Stars" to his sister's tendency to "plant its crevices with flowers, / Hang it with shrubs that twinkle in the breeze, / And teach the little birds to build their nest, / And warble in its chambers" (Wordsworth, *P* XIII, lines 220-229). The two siblings' shared memories of childhood seem to have enabled them to take on some aspects of their childhood selves; however, others in their circle read this influence in more gender-stereotypical ways, as Dorothy having a 'feminine' effect on her brother. Thomas De Quincey argued that Wordsworth's "intellect" in "its original tendency" was "too stern, too austere, too much enamoured of an ascetic harsh sublimity," and that Dorothy "*couched* his eye to the sense of beauty, humanized him by the gentler charities, and engrafted, with her delicate female touch, those graces upon the ruder growths of his nature with foliage corresponding in loveliness and beauty to the strength of its boughs and the messiness of its trunks" (De Quincey 115). There is probably a grain of truth to De Quincey's description, which is, after all, very similar to Wordsworth's version in *The Prelude*. However, there is another way to look at it, which does not require gender as an explanation: namely, William very likely became more satisfied and preoccupied with the here and now when he could relax in his sister's presence. Margaret Drabble, in her biography of Wordsworth, attributes the poet's gradual attunement to minute details in nature, such as imperceptible changes in flowers and plants, to Dorothy's influence, whereas his interest prior to 1795 lay predominantly in the wild and the grand, "the craggy austere scenery of the Lakes and the Alps" (Drabble 109-110).[74] Similarly, Richard Fadem positions Dorothy as a counterpoint to William's tendency to put "thinking" over "seeing and feeling," thereby giving her significant credit for her brother's return "to an 'exquisite regard for common things'" (Fadem 24). If this was indeed the dynamic of their relationship, it seems reasonable to expect Wordsworth's interest in the unseen to have receded during this period, and, indeed, during his time with Dorothy, his epiphanies are very often located in small, everyday sights, and not in dim longings for the remote and obscure.

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[73] Sounds, in particular, frequently seem to be suspended somewhere between being audible and silent in this poem; Jonathan R. Ramsey has pointed to the way in which it pays particular attention to "sounds existing almost below the threshold of hearing (as though silence were the procreative medium of sound)," and how these half-sounds "aspire to the condition of music or to a state approaching the expressiveness of language" (Ramsey 41).

Dorothy Wordsworth's contributions to her brother's poetry, which include her descriptions of poetic 'source' experiences in her journals, her work as editor and her constant presence as a conversational partner, are today recognized to have been vast.[75] However, one characteristic that she does not appear to have shared with her brother was his tendency to associate between obscure or distant perceptions and brooding, mystical feeling. When Dorothy describes scenes of this nature in her journals, her descriptions tend to be brief and attuned to material causes; thus she will note that "the tops of G[ras]mere mountains cut off," or that "[t]he mist sailed along the mountains, and rested upon them, enclosing the whole vale," or simply that "[t]he mountains not very distinct" (*DWJ*, 62, 65, 68). When encountering a confluence of waterfalls hidden in darkness, she remarks that "[w]e could hear the sound of those lesser falls, but we could not see them […] We walked backwards and forwards till all distant objects, except the white shape of the waterfall and the lines of the mountains, were gone" (89).

Dorothy's Alfoxden and Grasmere journals are, with some exceptions, characterized by a matter-of-fact tone. In Kenneth Johnston's words, "there is 'no Dorothy herself' in most of her journal entries: she almost never says 'I think' or 'I felt,' or gives any personal opinion" (Johnston, *Hidden Wordsworth* 552). Richard Fadem classifies Dorothy's voice as being "voluble without being communicative, let alone intimate; matter-of-fact, she stays with the facts alone" (Fadem 17).[76] Pamela Woolf comments on Dorothy's "accurate eye," while John F. Danby singles her out as having a greater attention to factual detail than her brother, leading him to suggest a creative relationship in which William relied on her sister to supply the exact visual detail that he himself struggled with (Woolf 136; Danby 97-98). This may be why Wordsworth's "Dorothy mode" so often seems to luxuriate in a newfound attention to sensory minutiae, as emblematized by a character from "Stanzas Written in My Pocket-Copy" (1802/1815): the "Man with large grey eyes," who goes into the fields with a set of optical instruments that allow him to observe "little things" up close. Through his mechanically-enhanced powers of observation, this man sees the miraculous not in the indefinite and transcendent, but in the particular and mundane: a "beetle panoplied in gems and gold, / A mailed angel on a battle-day; / The mysteries that cups of flowers enfold, / And all the gorgeous sights which fairies do behold" ("Stanzas," lines 59-63). Such observations, in their blissful particularism, are far removed from the dim communion with "sabbath regions" and "viewless realms" that occurs in a poem like "Descriptive Sketches."

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[74] Geoffrey H. Hartman is the exception here, arguing that the "first real change of style" that coincides with William's reunion with his sister is that is becomes "less aggressively mimetic, less under the oppression of sight and rich externals." Hartman agrees, however, with the above critics in describing the change as the poetry becoming "more relaxed" (Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry* 93n).

[75] See, for instance, Johnston, *Hidden Wordsworth* 551-553.

One consequence of this shift in interests is that objects in "Dorothy mode" are celebrated not for their mediative power, but for their status as complete and self-sustaining 'things' in a rich material universe. In this state, there is no desire to posit natural sights as gateways into larger unknowns; instead, a minute object like the small celandine is celebrated for being "in close self-shelter, like a thing at rest" ("The Small Celandine" line 8). As John F. Danby has observed, Wordsworth's "bird and flower poems" often seem to situate their objects as isolated and happy in their aloneness (Danby 117-118). Poems in this category avoid the topic of transcendence, and when references to mystical powers or energies appear, they are described as perfected through particulars, rather than elusive of them; for instance, in "XIV [Who fancied what a pretty sight…]," the "Spirit of Paradise" has become a gentle, softening force that leaves its characteristic imprint wherever "life is wise and innocent," for instance by leaving coronets of snow-drops upon the heads of little rocks (lines 1-18). Here, the signature of the otherworldly, if it can be discerned at all, discloses itself above all in the small and definite.

That said, there is, of course, not a clean divide between the "bird and flower poems" and the interests of the solitary Wordsworth. Likewise, there are occasional passages in Dorothy's journals that remark upon the suggestive power of hiddenness in experiences shared with her brother, such as the following description of a croaking raven, hidden from view:

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[76] It is interesting that Dorothy's journals should be so coolly reserved, given the many descriptions of her as a "wild" woman, making it possible that this unflinching commitment to factual objectivity may have been a deliberate choice. In fact, Fadem also suggests that Dorothy's habit of writing a "journal of things" rather than of "thoughts" may have been a way to anchor an inner life already showing signs of mental strain – a "bulwark between her and insanity" (Fadem 29-30). If so, we may want to think of the journal voice as her "William mode," a constructed alternate self that offered her a similar escape from a tormented inner world.

> We heard a strange sound in the Bainriggs wood, as we were floating on the water; it seemed in the wood, but it must have been above it, for presently we saw a raven very high above us. It called out, and the Dome of the sky seemed to echo the sound. It called again and again as it flew onwards, and the mountains gave back the sound, seeming as if from their center; a musical bell-like answering to the bird's hoarse voice. We heard both the call of the bird, and the echo, after we could see him no longer. (D. Wordsworth, *DWJ* 43)

In this description, Dorothy concerns herself predominantly with the mechanics of how the sound was produced, avoiding metaphysical flights of fancy. However, Dorothy is clearly fascinated by the eerie contrast between where the sound seems to originate and where it actually comes from, as well as the additional echoes provided by the sky and the mountains, through which the original sound is transformed into a "musical bell-like answering."

However, Wordsworth's interest in the unseen seems to have not only been reenergized, but taken on new forms, through influences from Coleridge, with whom he began to collaborate in 1797 (although they met for the first time already in 1795). In the companion poems "Expostulation and Reply" (1798) and "The Tables Turned" (1798), ideas about perception are presented that are remarkably similar to the Hartleian perspective evinced in Coleridge poems like "The Eolian Harp" (1795) and "Lines on observing a Blossom on the First of February, 1796" (1796).[77] "Expostulation and Reply" begins with an interlocutor (eventually identified as Wordsworth's recurring character "Matthew") upbraiding the speaker for dreaming his time away outdoors instead of devoting his time to more constructive things like intellectual study.[78] To merely enjoy nature, he argues, is a dereliction of duty; man's true purpose on Earth is to establish a connection to history and the intellectual legacy of one's forefathers, "the spirit breathed / From dead men to their kind" (lines 1-12).

The speaker, however, rejects this argument; the world speaks to us not merely through books but also through nature, with the difference that in the latter case nature is the agent and the mind the passive beneficiary of external influences: "The eye – it cannot choose but see; / We cannot bid the ear be still; / Our bodies feel, where'er they be, / Against or with our will" (lines 16-20). Furthermore, it is the "Powers" inherent in nature "[w]hich of themselves our minds impress," and which thus "feed this mind of ours / In a wise passiveness" (lines 17-20). Given that the world works on us when we are doing nothing, there is no need to always go "seeking" "mid all this mighty sum / Of things for ever speaking" – valuable influences will come to the receptive mind on their own accord (lines 25-28). This picture of the wholly passive mind shaped and conditioned by animating influences from without is strikingly similar to the associationist conception of the mind outlined in Coleridge's "The Eolian Harp," with its world of "organic harps diversely framed" that "tremble into thought" at the touch of the "one intellectual breeze" that enters them from without (Coleridge, "The Eolian Harp," lines 44-48).[79] Such correspondences seem to indicate that Wordsworth, in the light of Coleridge's well-publicized devotion to David Hartley, would already in 1798 have begun to write with Coleridge as his primary intended reader, something that would alter the internal dynamics of his engagement with perception for the rest of his career.[80]

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[77] For my analysis of these poems, see chapter 1, pages 53-56.

[78] "Matthew" is a composite character who serves as a recurring, all-purpose conversational partner in Wordsworth's poetic universe; in this case, as Jonathan Bate has pointed out, he stands in for William Hazlitt, with whom Wordsworth had recently had a philosophical argument about the limitations of rationalism (Bate 200-201).

In the companion poem, "The Tables Turned" (1798), this philosophy receives an important corollary: the raw sense-data that we receive through such influences is holy in itself and must be received as it is, without the modifying influence of the intellect. "Sweet is the lore which Nature brings," the speaker argues, while "[o]ur meddling intellect / Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:— / We murder to dissect" (lines 25-28). Taken in conjunction, then, these two poems present a philosophy radically committed to an entirely passive perceiver: influences from without are complete, and the meddling of the intellect can only degrade them with its feeble projections and distortions. Wordsworth's speculations on this topic lag a little bit behind Coleridge's (who in 1798 had moved on from Hartley to Berkeley), but in both cases this intellectual phase was short-lived. Most likely, the negative value assigned to the active participation of the mind in sense perception was part of a wider defensive posture toward the overreach of the 'cult of reason' rather than against the active powers of the mind in theory (after all, both Coleridge and Wordsworth would soon go on to become ardent champions of the role of imagination in sense perception).[81]

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[79] Other philosophical influences have also been proposed. Beach, for example, argues that the message draws from Rousseau, particularly ideas in *Emile* about the need for children learn about the world through first-hand experience and the movements of their bodies before acquiring book-learning (a lesson which Wordsworth here applies to adults; Beach 192-193).

[80] John F. Danby argues that ”Expostulation and Reply" is a "reckless short-hand" for a short-lived doctrine of "wise passiveness," which represented what was on Wordsworth's mind in 1798, but which he later dropped because it "weight[ed] the matter too excessively on one side" (i.e. in favor of the world over the mind; Danby 107). If so, this phase appears to have lasted longer with Wordsworth than with Coleridge, who in 1798 would have already moved on to a Berkeleian language-model of perception.

[81] In Wordsworth's case, the idea of the passive mind may have attracted him because it could be seen the natural opposite of an excessively 'rational' mind, being receptive to feeling and disinclined to evil where the latter is unemotional and fundamentally amoral. A criticism of excessive rationality was a common theme in Wordsworth's writings around this time, as it had been before he met Coleridge. Wordsworth's only play, *The Borderers* (1796), is in essence a long condemnation of Godwinian rationalism, in which the application of inhuman reason – "the spiritless shape of Fact" – over the proof of the heart leads to disastrous consequences. See also "To My Sister" (1798) with its line about "one moment" in the "hour of feeling" being worth more than "years of toiling reason" (lines 24-25).

In 1798, Wordsworth can be seen to return to the topic of the unseen in ways that combine his old 'solitary' attraction to sensory gaps with new Coleridgean philosophical resonances, as well as a newfound conviction in the power of poetic vision to successfully transcend the limitations of physical perception. In "There was a Boy" (1798), Wordsworthian nature-communion is represented for the first time as literal communication: it describes a young boy who habitually visits a lake at evening time, where he blows "mimic hootings" to the "silent owls" in the hope of prompting a response from them (lines 1-11).[82] The fact that this occurs in the same year (1798) that Coleridge speculates on the symbolic value of singing, unseen birds in "Fears in Solitude" and "The Nightingale" seems not to be a coincidence: in my view, this indicates that they are clearly working in the same groove. As in "An Evening Walk," the elegiac trope of the evening mood, in which trivial thoughts fall away and leave room for somber reflection, has been subtly reworked into a more mystically-inclined 'transitional' mood, in which the mind becomes more receptive to things that dwell on the margins of reality. Once again, hiddenness and remoteness are both central to the effect of the poem: the boy is separated from the owls, which in their silence are hidden from inquisitive eyes and ears, by a "watery vale," so that communication can only occur at a distance. Most often, the owls respond: they "would shout / Across the watery vale, and shout again, / Responsive to his call," bursting the silence with a cacophony of "quivering peals, / And long halloos, and screams, and echoes loud / Redoubled and redoubled; concourse wild / Of jocund din!" (lines 11-16).

However, a different type of communion emerges when the response stops, "when there came a pause / Of silence such as baffled his best skill":

> Then, sometimes, in that silence, while he hung
> Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise
> Has carried far into his heart the voice
> Of mountain-torrents; or the visible scene
> Would enter unawares into his mind
> With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
> Its woods, and that uncertain heaven received
> Into the bosom of the steady lake.
> (Wordsworth, "There was a Boy," lines 18-25)

It appears to be a combination of the suddenness of that silence, made all the more dramatic by the preceding explosion of sound, and the "gentle shock" of not receiving a response, that causes the boy to suddenly become receptive to influences that has lain hidden in the setting all along. In this enigmatic pause, it is prototypical Wordsworthian distance-perceptions (the "voice / Of mountain-torrents") and unconscious influences from the surrounding nature ("solemn imagery" that would "enter unawares into his mind") that constitute the response to his call. In the latter case, the wording places the influences from nature somewhere between perception and sub-perception. On the one hand, we are presented with a catalogue of sights that constitute a distinctly "visible scene," while on the other we are told that certain qualities of these perceptions "enter unawares," indicating that the boy does not focus on, or perhaps even take notice of them. In other words, a number of unperceived factors work in conjunction to establish the desired experience of communion with nature: 1) the sudden silence and the expectation of a response that never comes, which sharpen the sensory attention of the boy's mind, 2) the prototypical 'distance-perception' of the mountain-torrents, which acclimatizes his mind to remoteness, and 3) the presence of unconscious influences from visible nature that the mind has now been made receptive to.[83]

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[82] "There was a Boy" was later incorporated into Book V of *The Prelude* (lines 389-449). This is the only previously-published fragment of *The Prelude* and *The Excursion* that I study in isolation as opposed to as part of the longer poems, and this is done consciously to call attention to the development of Wordsworth's interests in 1798. Furthermore, since the corresponding episode in *The Prelude* functions rather like a self-contained fragment within the text, leaving it out of my analysis of *The Prelude* in chapter 5 does not impact my larger reading of that poem.

As can be seen in the quoted passage, communion with nature is depicted in the form of a list of rapidly described perceptions, ending with a symbolically precise image that seemingly establishes a link to the transcendent. This technique, for which I will use the shorthand 'communion coda', recurs in several later Wordsworth poems as a description of 'successful' transcendence (most famously in two sections of "Tintern Abbey"). In "There was a Boy," the concluding image is that of the "uncertain heaven received / Into the bosom of the steady lake," a symbolic representation that suggests a transcendent 'sender' at the other end of the process of sensory reception, while simultaneously paralleling the process of perception by showing this divine message being "received" into the passive receiver of a reflective surface. This is the first of several instances in Wordsworth's poems where the act of nature-communion is implied to be successful, and where the key factor for facilitating this exchange is, specifically, a series of gaps in normal perception, united by a fast, restless flow of psychological movement.

"There was a Boy" ends on a tragic note: in a jarring time-skip, the communion coda is followed by the information that the "boy was taken from his mates, and died / In childhood, ere he was full twelve years old" (lines 26-27). However, this blunt elision of time removes the focus on the human tragedy, and instead heightens the mystical dimension of the preceding section by positioning the vision of the "uncertain heaven" in close connection with the passage from life to death. Thus, the sound of mountain-torrents and the unconscious visitations of natural influences are reconfigured as psychopomps, marking the edge of reality in two different senses: the sensory boundary between perception and beyond, and the textual boundary between life and death. This has the effect of marking the boy as straddling two worlds: both through his receptivity to unseen things in nature and through the brevity of his quiet, lonely life, he is implied to be somewhat of a stranger in this world; a characterization that anticipates “Ode: Intimations of Immortality” and its controversial idea of children as nostalgic metaphysical castaways.

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[83] Clarke has pointed to the ways in which the language in this passage "effectively cancels sharp disjunctions between spatial and mental dimensions […] or mind and the things it perceives, or imagery and things imaged." Through apposition, a contradictory equivalence between imagery and outward objects is established which has the effect of "suggest[ing] that if is not quite the rocks and woods themselves that enter the mind neither is it a mere picture of representation of them" (Clarke 7).

If “There was a Boy” opened up the possibility that gaps in everyday perception allow for the possibility of transcending the senses altogether, “Lines written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey” (1798) represents an attempt to articulate the mechanics of this process more precisely. In the opening lines, two perceptions that connote distance (the sound of “waters, rolling from their mountain-springs / With a soft murmur” and the sight of “steep and lofty cliffs”) join together to impress “on a wild secluded scene” “thoughts of a more deep seclusion” (lines 6-7). The precise nature of this “deep seclusion” is never made clear, but is hinted at in the paired statement that the mountains “connect / The landscape with the quiet of the sky,” so that the physical positioning of the cliffs in the borderland between earth and sky imbues them with a symbolic function as an intermediary between the material world and, assumedly, heaven (represented here not through the visual sensation of the sky but through an abstract quality: its state of repose, or “quiet”; lines 7-8).[84] The memory of these “beauteous forms,” the speaker says, have offered “tranquil restoration” in times of trouble, but they have also brought him a more important gift:

> […] that blessed mood,
> In which the burthen of the mystery,
> In which the heavy and the weary weight
> Of all this unintelligible world,
> Is lightened:--that serene and blessed mood,
> In which the affections gently lead us on,--
> Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
> And even the motion of our human blood
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
> In body, and become a living soul:
> While with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
> We see into the life of things.
> (Wordsworth, “TA,” lines 37-49)

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[84] James Benziger reads “the quiet of the sky” as “perhaps the most significant phrase in the poem,” in that it establishes two things about the speaker’s attitude to the divine: that Heaven is to be defined negatively, in this case by the negation of sound, and that the psychological state through which it is to be apprehended on earth is “not by effort and struggle, not by conquest of self, not by Milton’s ‘dust and heat’, but by way of a ‘wise passiveness’ (Benziger 157).

In these famous lines, the rudiments of the poet's philosophy of perception are outlined so clearly that it is not surprising that it has frequently been cited as evidence of his "eye-mindedness," nor that Coleridge returned to it in his notebooks numerous times as an example of a quality in Wordsworth's mind that he felt himself to lack. However, the process described here is not a celebration of the visibility of the universe, but rather a rejection of it: it is structured around three different suspensions of the properties of the material and visible world. First, there is a suspension of mass as the "burthen" and the "weary weight" of the world are lightened, creating the impression of being unfettered from the world's grounding in the material. Next, it suspends the physicality of the human body, as the "breath" of this "corporeal frame" and the "motion of our human blood" are stilled, we are "laid asleep / In body" and "become a living soul." Finally, it circumvents the mechanics of perception itself, by first suspending the eye's activity ("an eye made quiet") and then allowing perception to penetrate the surfaces of material things and reach the mysterious "life" that is taken to dwell inside them. Thus, this seeming celebration of prodigious powers of sight actually constitutes a miniature poem of negatives: negating first weight, then body, then eye and finally the surfaces of material objects.[85]

The poem then transitions over into a mournful meditation of the loss of childhood perception, which has gradually given way to a different joy: one that derives its meaning from things that are distant rather than present. As a child, the speaker says, "Nature" was "all in all," a "feeling and a love" that "had no need of a remoter charm, / By thought supplied, nor any interest / Unborrowed from the eye"; however, "that time is past," and all its "aching joys" and "dizzy raptures" are now no more (lines 58-85). By implication, then, his present state necessitates the "remoter charm, / By thought supplied" and the interests "[u]nborrowed from the eye" – a conclusion that is confirmed by the following description of the "other gifts" that have followed, new ways of apprehending the world that have offered "abundant recompense" for what has been lost:

> —And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:

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[85] That "Tintern Abbey" essentially hinges on suspending, rather than facilitating, physical perception has also been argued by Robert Pack, who argues that the "vision" described is "not vision in the perceptual sense of the word, rather it is sensations and affections felt in bodily repose" (Pack 182). Likewise, Geoffrey Hartman reads the poem as predicated on a "continuous purging of fixities" that is "verbal as well as visual; fixities are converted into "incremental contrasts or blending" until a sense is created of sight transcending even itself and becoming something more akin to hearing (Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry* 176).

> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
> A lover of the meadows and the woods
> And mountains; and of all that we behold
> Of this green earth; of all the mighty world
> Of eye, and ear, —both what they half create,
> And what perceive…
> (Wordsworth, "TA," lines 93-107)

As in the previous passage, perception here gains the power to make contact with something unseen at the heart of "all things," yet there are a few differences this time around. While the "blessed mood" was described as the reward of having absorbed the "beauteous forms" of his native landscape during childhood, the "sense sublime" is a later gift that forms part of the "abundant recompense" received in mature age. Furthermore, the entity intuited beyond perception is described as more dynamic in the second passage: while the "blessed mood" entailed a perceptual movement toward a fixed destination ("see[ing] *into* the life of things"), what is intuited here is a "motion and a spirit" that does not inhere everywhere as much as restlessly course through it ("rolls through all things").[86] It is due to his possession of this "sense sublime" that the speaker can still be a "lover of the meadows and the woods" in adulthood, as well as of the "mighty world" that he now intuits contains aspects that we "half create" in addition to those that we "perceive." It appears, then, that the "remoter charm" necessary for his new appreciation of the world is precisely this anchoring of the natural world in some unseen, transcendent foundation, accessible only through a mysterious interplay between perception and creative "thought." The question of whether that foundation lies in the mind or in some other metaphysical reality, however, is left unanswered.

If Coleridge's influence can be indirectly discerned in poems like "Expostulation and Reply," "The Tables Turned" and, to a lesser extent, "There was a Boy," then "Tintern Abbey" represents a case where Wordsworth embraces his 'Coleridge voice' almost completely. The clear similarities between the style of "Tintern Abbey" and that which Coleridge innovated in his conversation poems have been noted by critics, most famously by M. H. Abrams. Abrams claims that the straight line of influence that runs from Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight" to Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" was a crucial part in the development of a genre which Abrams calls the 'greater romantic lyric,' which had a great impact on the evolution of poetry throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Among the similarities between the two poems, Abrams lists the "dramatic mode of address to an unanswering listener in flexible blank verse," the "opening description which evolves into a sustained meditation assimilating perceptual, personal, and philosophical elements" and "the free movement of thought from the present scene to recollection in tranquillity, to prayer-like prediction, and back to the scene" as especially significant (Abrams, "Lyric" 82). Other similarities between Coleridge's conversation poems and "Tintern Abbey" have been noted by Lucy Newlyn, Morris Dickstein, Adam Sisman, Kenneth Johnston, John F. Danby, among others.[87]

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[86] The relationship between the two passages to each other has been the source of some critical discussion. Albert Gérard views the two passages as steps in a progression toward cosmic unity: the first passage is rejected as too uncertain in that the poet sees merely "into the life of things," whereas in the second, "man is included in his vision and the life of things is seen to reside in all-pervading presence." Gérard argues that these two lines of approach are not contradictory but convergent: they express the rejection of a "static-analytical" approach in favor of a "dynamic-biographical" understanding, creating a main movement that "carries the poet from the sensory to the emotional and mystical" (Gérard 17). Kenneth Johnston reads the pure idealism of the former passage as 'checked' by the more socially-grounded perception of the latter; with the "sense sublime"-coda adding "thought to aesthetic pleasure, of a specifically moral, humanistic kind," so that the "still, sad music of humanity" is placed in opposition to the hour of "thoughtless youth" (Johnston, *Hidden Wordsworth* 593).

Most pertinently to this thesis, however, Wordsworth's description of transcendent perception makes a bold lunge for a more abstract and philosophical unseen than in his previous poems, one that more resembles Coleridge's conception of the unseen than his own. Moreover, "Tintern Abbey" grounds this movement toward the unseen in a feeling of complexity, of intractable difficulties which must somehow be overcome, heightening the impression that Wordsworth has tuned into a Coleridgean view of the problems that surround perception. Kenneth Johnston has pointed out that the poem uses negatives in a way that creates a sense of constant impediment, of problems that must be solved before further progress is possible. "If one reads the poem emphasizing its negatives rather than its positives," he argues, "it sounds like the Lord's Prayer uttered by Thomas the Doubter, urging itself along to affirmation by constantly raising objections that it must then overcome, inducing a kind of philosophical stuttering" (Johnston, *Hidden Wordsworth* 595). This is a very different style from that of Wordsworth's earlier poems, and, in my view, it reads as though Wordsworth had, at this point, become swayed by Coleridge's view of the mind as tragically aspiring to a sensory transcendence that always eludes it. Moreover, Wordsworth may have started to become convinced that his own sensory approach, his own ability to find solace in the sensory 'gap,' offered a solution to the problem which so preoccupied Coleridge. In other words, this appears to be Wordsworth entering a universe of Coleridgean thought and feeling, bringing along his own powers of perception in order to 'fix' it.

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[87] Newlyn points to an echo between "How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee! / O sylvan Wye!" (lines 56-57) and Frost's "But O! how oft / How oft, at school, with most believing mind, / Presageful, have I gazed upon the bars, / To watch that fluttering *stranger*!" (lines 23-26); (Newlyn, "In City Pent" 414). Dickstein reads the "life of things"-passage in conjunction with Lime-Tree Bower's "Struck with deep joy may stand, as I have stood, / Silent with swimming sense; yea, gazing round / On the wide landscape, gaze till all doth seem / Less gross than bodily; and of such hues / As veil the Almighty Spirit, when yet he makes / Spirits perceive his presence" (lines 39-44, Dickstein 372). Adam Sisman claims that in "Tintern Abbey," "Wordsworth developed ideas about the enriching and healing powers of Nature expressed in Coleridge's 'Frost at Midnight'" (Sisman 248). Finally, Johnston also notes an echo between "Nature never did betray the heart that loved her" and "Nature ne'er deserts the wise and pure" from C's "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" (Johnston, *Hidden Wordsworth* 596). For Danby's comments, see the discussion of the "sister"-motif on pages 134-135.

There is another factor that I would like to consider before proceeding. Seamus Perry has compiled a large number of first-hand accounts of Coleridge's famous speaking voice, which attest to its fluid, river-like rhythm: "his words followed each other in an unbroken flow," "he was like a cataract filling and rushing over my penny-phial capacity," "his ever-varying yet continuous flow of transcendent eloquence," an "inexhaustible flow of undulating speech" (Perry, "Talker" 106-112).[88] At the same time, many listeners were seduced by the words without necessarily understanding their meaning. For example, fellow poet Samuel Rogers described an incident where Coleridge "talked uninterruptedly for about two hours, during which Wordsworth listened to him with profound attention," but when a confused Rogers asked Wordsworth if he understood any of it, Wordsworth allegedly replied: "Not one syllable of it" (quoted in Perry 108).[89] Wordsworth and Coleridge were in constant contact with each other around this time, so it does not seem farfetched to imagine Coleridge's voice playing on constant loop in Wordsworth's mind. Could there be a link between what we know of the impression of hearing Coleridge speak and the restless, fluid syntax that appears in Wordsworth's communion codas, its phrases stumbling over each other in a restless flow toward some elusive, yet all-unifying goal? In other words, does "Tintern Abbey" arrive at its description of transcendence by infusing Wordsworth's 'gap vision' with the energy, flow and always-receding endpoint of a Coleridge monologue?

The phrase "the life of things," whose meaning appears, perhaps by design, almost infinitely elastic, has long divided scholars. Some, like Lucy Newlyn, have read it as a "full pantheist claim" (Newlyn, "In City Pent" 413). Others, like Colin Clarke, have sought a psychological explanation for its ambiguity. Clarke suggests that the intuition of "life" is a consequence of Wordsworth's transition from apprehending the world as full of things to viewing it as full of images (i.e. existing half in the mind, half in the world). Thus, the impression that perceptions "live" is essentially the feeling of affinity with images, which are preferred to the things themselves in that images, by being partially mentally constructed, are "not alien to the mind" (Clarke 63).

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[88] Some of this voice survives in his notebooks, which often seem like a substitute listener for whenever Coleridge was in a talkative mood.

[89] Virginia Woolf puts it best in her essay on Coleridge: "there is one point upon which all who listened are agreed; not one of them could remember a single word he said. All, however, with astonishing unanimity are agreed that it was 'like'— the waves of the ocean, the flowing of a mighty river, the splendour of the Aurora Borealis, the radiance of the Milky Way" (Woolf 109). As for Coleridge's letter-writing voice, Woolf archly summarizes it as "the very voice […] of Micawber himself!" (106).

Other scholars, however, reject the idea of a carefully-crafted ambiguity. Joseph Beach, for example, has claimed that "Wordsworth is endeavoring to express himself, so nearly as possible, in accurate philosophical language," and that it is critical unfamiliarity with older linguistic conventions that create the impression of ambiguity (Beach 47). Beach traces a prominent strain in the English natural sciences of conceiving of the principles that hold together the material world, including gravity, as an active, divinely-sustained power or 'life' diffused across all things.[90] On this basis, Beach argues that Wordsworth was not necessarily engaging in adventurous, far-flung metaphysics when he wrote "Tintern Abbey," but writing in an established style recognizable to scientists and theologians alike.

In the same vein, these passages have occasionally been treated as evidence of Wordsworth's unconscious attraction to (atheistic) materialism. The idea proposed is that philosophy with pantheistic resonances would have been a 'gateway idea' to the forbidden fruit of materialism. While this discussion is beyond the scope of this chapter to tackle, I will say that much of the research suggesting a nod toward the radical school of atheist philosophy of thinkers like Holbach seems to view as an anachronistic tendency to read Spinozist monism as 'latent' materialism, a reading which treats the crucial distinction between the two (whether everything is divine or nothing is) as trivial.[91] Even recent scholarship tends to follow the, to me specious and overly teleological, reading that the Romantic cult of nature offered a "passage without too great emotional strain from medieval Christian faith to the scientific positivism which tends to dominate cultivated minds to-day" (Beach 6). Although it is true that atheism and pantheism were sometimes conflated, including by Coleridge when he speculated that Wordsworth seemed at one stage to have been at least a "*Semi*-atheist," this identification tended to be made by their *detractors*, as a way of equating the horror of an abstract, depersonalized pantheist deity with full-fledged atheism. The two can only be equated by treating belief as irrelevant, and opposition to conventional religious worship as paramount.

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[90] Some of Beach's examples include the eighteenth-century natural philosopher James Foster equating "the principle of gravitation" with God's "eternal omnipresence" and "immediate interposition, and influence, in supporting the frame and order of the material world," George Cheyne's conception of God as "intimately present with every single Point of its Dimensions," and even Isaac Newton's proposition that God "is everywhere present" and "constitutes duration and space." (Foster I 56; Cheyne 6; Newton 441). Besides the physical sciences, Beach argues that language like this would be well-known from the conception of a world soul in Platonism and its derivatives, from formulations like "the soul, interfused everywhere from the centre to the circumference of heaven" in Plato's *Timaeus,* to deistic reformulations like Shaftesbury's "thou who art original soul, diffusive, vital in all, inspiriting the whole," as well as Berkeley's "pellucid and shining nature […] diffused throughout the universe" in *Siris,* which Beach suggests is "where Wordsworth may very possibly have found it" (Plato, *Timaeus* 18; Shaftesbury II 370; Berkeley 95; Beach 84-87).

[91] More recently, Jonathan Bate has speculated about a "combined" influence of Spinoza and the radical atheist materialist Holbach, based mostly on Wordsworth having known an adherent of Holbach in Paris, a man named Walking Stewart (Bate 117-118). The one explicit reference to Holbach we have in Wordsworth's work is a disparaging reference in Wordsworth's 1809 *Convention of Cintra*, where Wordsworth refers to the "meagre tactics of the 'Systéme de la Nature'," which of course does not rule out that he was influenced by it in 1798, and he did have the *Systéme* in his bookshelf (Wordsworth, *Cintra* 177). Permeating arguments like this is a deeply-rooted sense that Romantic aesthetics can be "redeemed" by being recruited as a precursor movement to modern secularism.

Among the critics who view the ambiguity as a deliberate stylistic choice, critical judgments have diverged on what it ultimately means. William Empson, in *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930), may have given one of the harshest assessments when he claimed that the ambiguity functions as a form of philosophical obfuscation. "The degree of pantheism," he argues, "implied by some of Wordsworth's most famous passages depends very much on the taste of the reader, who can impose grammar without difficulty to impose his own views" (Empson 151). The three primary ambiguities, Empson argues, are the following: "It is not certain what is *more deeply interfused* than what" […] "It is not certain whether the *music of humanity* is the same as the *presence*" […] Finally, it is not certain whether the "presence" and the "something more deeply interfused" are to be seen as distinct (resulting in a Christian interpretation, where the presence leads on to something transcendent) or apposite (resulting in a pantheist/agnostic interpretation: God is either immanent or residing in the mind of man (152-154). Ultimately, Empson's criticism stems from a disappointment in not being offered a clear 'creed': "[Wordsworth] talks as if he owned a creed by which his half-statements might be reconciled, whereas, in so far as his creed was definite, he found these half-statements necessary to keep it at bay" (155). However, other critics, like Lyle Smith, have taken a different view, arguing that the 'something' is best understood not as an article of belief, but as a "datum of empirical experience," a complex mixture of sensation and feeling that becomes an empirically 'verifiable' link to the transcendent (304-307). This seems to me to be the least problematic way to read the object of the "Tintern Abbey" visions: "the life of things" and "something far more deeply interfused" defy explanation because they do not describe ideas, but intangible constellations of experience: in short, *somethings*.

If, by the end of the poem, the speaker has proven himself to have a mind oriented toward the distant and possibly unreachable, however, he has a companion close by who compels him toward other thoughts. In the passage addressed to his "dear, dear Sister!" he describes himself as drawn into a different mood, the innocent appreciation of nature that he enjoyed as a child ("in thy voice I catch / The language of my former heart, and read / My former pleasures in the shooting lights / Of thy wild eyes"; lines 112-118). This alignment of the sister with a former perceptual state of the speaker is repeated twice more, as the speaker seeks "yet a little while" to "behold in thee what I was once," and finally "to catch from thy wild eyes these gleams, / Of past existence" (lines 122-123, 151-152).

The decision to cast Dorothy as a representative of the poet's younger, wilder self, when in reality she would have been roughly the same age as her brother, has been debated by some scholars. John F. Danby, who reads the poem as Wordsworth's comment and companion piece to Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight," attributes the poetically de-aged Dorothy figure to the need to fill the role played by the young babe in Coleridge's poem, for which the sister would have been the only available candidate (Danby, 92-96).[92] While the idea that Wordsworth is using "Frost at Midnight" as a template offers a plausible explanation for the sudden perspectival shift, it fails to account for a key difference between the two figures in question. Namely, the babe in "Frost at Midnight" stands in for what the speaker never was, but feels that he ought to have been, while the sister in "Tintern Abbey" stands in for what the speaker once was, but no longer recognizes fully in himself. Thus, there is an element of conscious distancing in "Tintern Abbey" which needs to be differentiated from the idealized projection in Coleridge's poem. At the same time, the claims that "Frost at Midnight" makes for the babe are essentially the same as those that "Tintern Abbey" makes for the sister and, by extension, the speaker's past self (the speaker being a more 'mature' version of the sister). This leads to a crucial point: in "Tintern Abbey," Wordsworth is essentially laying claim to a mantle which Coleridge had more or less surrendered in "Frost at Midnight," casting himself in the role of Coleridge's 'ideal perceiver.' This marks a watershed in the relationship between the two, and the conclusive accession of Wordsworth as the 'eye' to Coleridge's thought.

Moreover, the ending of "Tintern Abbey" serves as an illustration of the two competing selves that Wordsworth was torn between at this time: his "Coleridge voice," embodied by a speaker responding directly to concerns raised in Coleridge's conversation poems, and his "Dorothy voice," externalized in the form of a sister figure with whom he can partially, but not completely, identify. Both selves rest on a fragile foundation, each of them being a kind of social fiction that is maintained through his relationship to another person. Yet, the decision to externalize the Dorothy voice suggests that, at this time, the Coleridge voice had the stronger claim on Wordsworth's poetic interests.

The inclusion of the sister's perspective in the concluding stanzas has the effect of ending the poem on a strangely stereoscopic note, with the speaker allowing himself to vicariously experience the landscape as he once did (through the sister's eyes), interposed with the way he must look at it in the present. In this state of mind, the "steep woods and lofty cliffs, / And this green pastoral landscape" now possess a double meaning, in that they are now dear to him "both for themselves and for thy sake!" (lines 160-162). For this reason, Heidi Thomson interprets the interposition of the sister's perspective as a means for Wordsworth to transcend the limitations of private experience and affirm "the continuous necessity for a web of interlocution between Wordsworth and his sister" (Thomson, 533). However, this web of interlocution can also be said to mask the emergence of a cognitive dividedness, anticipating the notion of the “double consciousness” later to be explored in *The Prelude*, hidden underneath an ostensible declaration of psychic growth. In other words, while the medium of the sister’s presence allows the speaker to alternate between his current state and an externalized past mode of perception, it also undermines the idea of perception as concentrated in a holy ‘moment’, experienced between a mind and an object in the present. Perception, in short, has become only one half of a larger process also encompassing memory, and whose final product is something greater than both, a ‘conception’ of the world that neither perceptual position can apprehend on its own.

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[92] Meanwhile, Johnston reads the Dorothy address in connection to *Paradise Lost*: "it is addressed to Dorothy as Adam addressing Eve, reassuring her that their paradise lost could yet be a paradise regained, as hand in hand they left their Edenic but precarious lives at Racedown and Alfoxden and moved, with thoughtful steps and slow, back out into the dangerous public world" (Johnston, *Hidden Wordsworth* 594).

By 1802, the year of Wordsworth’s marriage to Mary Hutchinson, we thus have three strands in his poetic career: one solitary, the other two social and conditional, the products of intimate social ties. After this year, however, the primary woman in Wordsworth’s life will no longer be Dorothy but his wife Mary, and his relationship with Coleridge will suffer a series of severe setbacks, inaugurating a new phase in his poetic dialogue with Coleridge.

1802-1807: The “Ode” and its intimations

Prior to 1802, the transcendent tends to be represented in Wordsworth’s poems as fundamentally mysterious and unknowable. The assumption that there was ‘something’ beyond this world appears to have been sufficient for his poetic purposes, so there was no need to resort to philosophical or theological speculations of the type that Coleridge busied himself with around this time. However, between the years 1802 and 1807, there is a brief period where the treatment of perception begins to overlap with a specific and unusual metaphysical claim, and one that has been the source of much critical debate.

The claim in question, taken at face value, is that the powerful emotions of childhood may be the lingering memories of a preceding, paradisiacal state of existence, which gradually dwindle over time and disappear in adulthood. This notion, which will be referred to as the ‘pre-natal afterglow’, is first hinted at in “To H. C., Six Years Old” (1802/1807), interestingly enough a poem dedicated to Hartley Coleridge, whom his father had already praised as a great miniature philosopher in “Frost at Midnight” and “The Nightingale.” Unlike in Coleridge’s poems, where Hartley came to represent the virtues of specifically a rural childhood, however, the Wordsworth poem casts him as a representative of childhood more generally. In the very first line, H. C. is addressed as “thou! whose fancies from afar are brought,” immediately establishing a correlation between the imaginative state of childhood and communication with distant things (Wordsworth, “To H. C.,” line 1). Within the context of Wordsworthian thought, this is a somewhat jarring statement, given that it seemingly contradicts the nature of childhood described in “Tintern Abbey,” where it was said to be a state in which there was no need for “remoter charm supplied by thought” or any interest “unborrowed from the eye” (“TA,” lines 82-84), indicating that what is referred to here is, in all likelihood, a categorically different type of distance. Whereas “the remoter charm supplied by thought” referred to the intermingling of intellectual notions and sense data, the “afar” from which the child’s fancies are brought appears to refer to the mysterious origin of the child’s experience of the world altogether, an origin that retains its hold on the child’s imagination only as long as its awareness has not yet been fully adapted to the world into which it has been born.

H. C., in short, is subtly implied to be a visitor from a better world who has not yet forgotten the ways of his old home. In this state of lingering foreignness, he is described as a “faery voyager” with the capacity to perceive the world as one mystical whole: he floats “suspended in a stream as clear as sky, / Where earth and heaven doth make one imagery” (lines 8-10). In this state, the child’s inner life is ‘whole’ in that it has not yet been reduced through the conversion into artificial language (“words” for H. C. is merely a “mock apparel”) – instead, his thoughts must be expressed approximatively and creatively, by “fit[ing] to unutterable thought / The breeze-like motion and the self-born carol” (lines 2-4). The ethereal nature of his ways of thinking are described as being somehow at odds with the lowly materiality of this world: “Thou art a Dew-drop, which the morn brings forth, / Not framed to undergo unkindly shocks; / Or to be trailed along the soiling earth” (lines 27-29). However, much like the child in “There was a Boy,” this temporal proximity to a mysterious otherworldly origin runs two ways: by retaining his connection to a state preceding birth, H. C. is also more susceptible to slipping back out of this world through an early death: “A gem that glitters while it lives, / And no forewarning gives; / But, at the touch of wrong, without a strife / Slips in a moment out of life” (lines 30-33). Straddling the boundary between the here and the mysterious “afar,” the child possesses a link to the otherworldly that turns out to be a double-edged sword: it enchants its earthly existence even as it constantly threatens to recall it.

The notion of the pre-natal afterglow, only hinted at here, is developed in “Ode: Intimation of Immortality” (1802-1807), where it is incorporated into a thematic framework similar to that of “Tintern Abbey.” Like “Tintern Abbey,” the “Ode” hinges on a comparison between past and present modes of perception, and concludes that the loss of emotional vividness in the present is compensated for by a more holistic understanding of the conditions of human existence. Thus, although the dominant tone of the poem is elegiac, the thematic trajectory bends toward dawning vision, or hard-bought but superior attunement to a higher truth.

The “Ode” begins by lamenting that, in the speaker’s childhood, all sights were “appareled in celestial light” and had “the glory and the freshness of a dream,” but “it is not now as it hath been of yore,” since those things “I can see no more” (”Ode” lines 1-9). The reason, however, is not that the objects themselves have changed, but because the cooling passions of adulthood is making the speaker feel as though “there has past away a glory from the earth” (lines 10-19). Next, a tableau of perceptions that would have been fully at home in the poetry of Wordsworth's earlier bird-and-flower phase passes by – birds singing a "joyous song," "young lambs" that "bound / As to the tabor's sound" – yet these are powerless to stave off the speaker's descent into indifference (lines 19-22). In marked contrast to the atmosphere of sharedness that underpinned the world of "contented Wordsworth," this speaker feels isolated and alone in his unhappiness: in this landscape of joy, "to me alone, there came a thought of grief" (lines 19-23). As this passage suggests, the beautiful illusion of contentedness kept alive by Dorothy that informed the bird-and-flower poems of 1795-1802 is no longer tenable: this speaker must confront his problems on a different level.

Instead, it is a "timely utterance" that finally manages to dispel this gloom, a phrase which critics have tended to interpret as a reference to one of the several poems which he wrote around this period.[93] The lesson taught by the "timely utterance" is suggested by the different tableau of perceptions that follow in its wake, and which help the speaker out of his melancholy. Two of these perceptions connote distance, once again through mountain and river imagery ("the cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep," and "I hear the Echoes through the mountain throng"), while the third is an enigmatic half-sensation that seems to cross over from the immaterial realm of sleep ("the winds come to me from the fields of sleep"; lines 23-29). These perceptions, reviving the preoccupations of the Wordsworth fascinated by gaps and distances, seemingly accomplish what the birds and the lambs could not: namely, reassure him that there is something else that has not fled, and which has instead grown stronger in the absence of sensory distractions.

The same argument is seemingly repeated near the end of the fourth stanza, where another list of perceptions that would have delighted "contented Wordsworth" is introduced, only to be rejected by this new, disenchanted speaker:

> But there's a Tree, of many, one,
> A single field which I have looked upon,
> Both of them speak of something that is gone;
>   The Pansy at my feet
>   Doth the same tale repeat:
> Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
> Where is it now, the glory and the dream?
> (Wordsworth, "Ode" lines 51-58)

There are three objects here, all characterized by their vividness and precise definition: a tree singled out from the many, a similarly "single field," and a pansy so close that it is practically at the speaker's feet. All of them fit Danby's criteria for objects characteristic of Wordsworth's bird-and-flower mode: they are all distinct, alone and self-sufficient in their solitude. Yet, rather than delighting the speaker, they speak only of "something that is gone," a visionary gleam, a glory and a dream that have "fled." In effect, there is a marked contrast between things that are vivid, definite and in close proximity, which have lost their restorative power, and things that are indefinite and remote, which have made proportional gains.

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[93] Here, scholars have proposed different poems. Lionel Trilling has argued that the "timely utterance" is "Resolution and Independence," while H. W. Garrod argues that it is "The Rainbow," which Dorothy suggests was composed during the writing of the "Ode" (Trilling 131-134, Garrod 112-113).

This subtly arranged attunement to the distant and unknown is then paralleled by the thematic shift to the origins of the human soul, at which point the central metaphysical motif is introduced into the poem:

> Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;
> The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
> Hath had elsewhere its setting
> And cometh from afar;
> Not in entire forgetfulness
> And not in utter nakedness,
> But trailing clouds of glory do we come
> From God, who is our home
> Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
> (Wordsworth, "Ode" lines 59-68)

Taken at face value, this passage would appear to leave little room for ambiguity: the soul is not created at birth, but has "had elsewhere its setting / And cometh from afar," linguistically echoing the "afar" from which the child's fancies were brought in "To H. C.." Birth is not the beginning of the soul's life-cycle but an intermediate point, a threshold across which certain knowledge simply cannot be transferred: a "sleep and a forgetting." However, some of it nonetheless survives, because we arrive "not in entire forgetfulness" and "not in utter nakedness" into the present world – instead, we come "trailing clouds of glory," which become the source of the "Heaven" that "lies about us in our infancy." Whether metaphor or not, this description appears to be outlining the notion of the "pre-natal afterglow" in fairly definite terms.

If such remnants of pre-natal existence are the source of the emotional vividness of youth, this lingering paradise is brief as "shades of the prison-house" soon "begin to close / Upon the growing boy" (lines 69-70). This process of imaginative disrepair is likened to a westward journey, during which the traveler moves farther and farther away from the sunrise that illuminated his birth, but who continues to behold "the light, and whence it flows" through the joy he derives from looking at nature, until finally even that light dies away, and "fade[s] into the light of common day" (lines 71-79). While journeys have long been a standard metaphor for the passage of life, here the focus falls not so much on the distance traversed as the increasing distance – spatial as well as temporal – to the metaphorical sunrise and the loss of access to its light. This would appear to further substantiate the idea that what is described here is not simply the passage from birth to death, but primarily the human soul's increasing estrangement from an external influence that it located outside of the arena of life altogether.

Furthermore, the fact that the "afterglow" stems from a transcendent and not an immanent source is made clear in the next stanza. Nature, which becomes the makeshift beneficiary of the child's fanciful attachment, is not actually responsible for its spiritual powers; instead "Earth" is a mere foster-mother, surrounding "her foster-child" with "pleasures of her own" to make the boy "forget the glories he hath known, / And that imperial palace whence he came" (lines 80-87). In short, the divinity spoken of here does not appear to be the pantheistic world-soul or Spinozan nature that could plausibly have been accommodated by Wordsworth's earlier poetry; this "mother" is defined by her remoteness.

The next few stanzas contain a number of phrases that emphasize the degree to which the child is a stranger in the present world, and someone who retains a spiritual connection to a different state of existence. The child has a mere "dream of human life, / Shaped by himself with newly-learn[e]d art," and proceeds into adulthood through "con[ning]" part after part, "as if his whole vocation / Were endless imitation" (lines 88-110). Underneath such performances, the child retains its connection to the place from which it came: it "read'st the eternal deep," "haunted for ever by the eternal mind" and has access to "those truths" which "we are toiling all our lives to find," and which to adults have been "in darkness lost, the darkness of the grave" (lines 111-120). The child is allegorized as a "seer," whose power of vision is all the stronger for being unaffected by the distractions of adulthood (here allegorized as an enlightened state of deafness and muteness): thus, the child is an "Eye among the blind, / That, deaf and silent, / read'st the eternal deep" (lines 114-117). These gifts, moreover, are referred to specifically as a "heritage," indicating that they were carried over from a previous state of existence, rather than merely bestowed.

The most explicit formulation of the "pre-natal afterglow" comes in the ninth stanza, where the speaker singles out these echoes of a preceding existence as that for which he feels the deepest gratitude:

> Not for these [Delight and liberty] I raise
> The song of thanks and praise
> But for those obstinate questionings
> Of sense and outward things,
> Fallings from us, vanishings;
> Blank misgivings of a Creature
> Moving about in worlds not realised,
> High instincts before which our mortal Nature
> Did tremble like a guilty thing surprised:
> But for those first affections,
> Those shadowy recollections,
> Which, be they what they may
> Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,

> Are yet a master-light of all our seeing;
>   Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make
> Our noisy years seem moments in the being
> Of the eternal Silence: truths that wake,
>   To perish never… (lines 140-157)

As in “Tintern Abbey,” the speaker constructs a miniature poem of negatives in order to convey the impression of an existence beyond sense experience. The most formative parts of his childhood (i.e. those that merit his “song of thanks and praise”), he says, are not memories of perception, but remembered doubts about perception: “obstinate questionings / Of sense and outward things,” not accumulations but “fallings from us” and “vanishings,” not growing trust in the world but the “blank misgivings of a Creature / Moving about in worlds not realised.” These intimations were felt to belong to a higher order of truth to the young speaker; they were taken to be “high instincts” capable of making “mortal Nature” ashamed of itself, now feeling “like a guilty thing surprised.” Next, negatives are replaced by positives as these doubts are re-conteptualized as dim intuitions of what is being elided in material reality: these feelings of something else beyond sense are now “first affections” and “shadowy recollections,” albeit of what remains unclear (“be they what they may”). These recollections of another world, however, are stated to be “yet the fountain-light of all our day” and “yet the master-light of all our seeing.” Through them, the world of sense is placed in the larger context of a surrounding, metaphorically “silent” world beyond sense: seen this way, “our noisy years seem moments in the being / Of the eternal Silence.”

Via these intimations, a connection is forged between sense and supersensory reality that is finally given the name “sight,” although it is a sight only accessible to the “soul,” not the corporeal eye:

> Hence in a season of calm weather
>   Though inland far we be,
> Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea
>   Which brought us hither,
>   Can in a moment travel thither,
> And see the Children sport upon the shore,
> And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore. (lines 162-168)

The distinction between supersensory reality and the here and now is conceptualized as the opposites of ocean and “inland.” It is the “immortal” sea that is the source of the afterglow and the “afar” from which we came (“Which brought us hither”), and upon the beach of this ocean, we find the “Children,” sated with metaphysical afterglow, “sport[ing] upon the shore.” As often in Wordsworth’s poems, children straddle the boundary between this world and whatever lies beyond, yet it is important to note that they remain firmly “upon the shore” and not in the ocean; this gap between the borrowed light of childhood and its actual source, never transgressed in the entirety of the poem, is integral to its poetic and metaphysical vision.

Although the themes of the "Ode" broadly overlap with those of "Tintern Abbey" and *The Prelude,* its more explicit religiosity along with its seeming resignation in the face of dwindling creative power has made it a useful master-text for critics seeking to explain what they see as the poet's regrettable transformation into a respectable Victorian bore. Similarly, the overtly transcendent bent of its religious vision stands out in comparison to the more pantheism-adjacent communion with nature that critics tend to associate with Wordsworth's prime. For these reasons, it is not difficult to see why there has been a long critical tradition of dulling the edges of the "Ode" by reducing its outwardly radical metaphysical vision to mere psychological metaphor. Much of this has been done on the basis of the "Fenwick notes," a series of short texts that Wordsworth dictated to his friend Isabella Fenwick in 1843, offering context to, and sometimes explanations of, his major poems. In the note for the "Ode," we find the following:

> In later periods of life I have deplored, as we have all reason to do, a subjugation of an opposite character, and have rejoiced over the remembrances, as is expressed in the lines, 'Obstinate questionings,' &c […] having in the Poem regarded it as presumptive evidence of a prior state of existence, I think it right to protest against a conclusion which has given pain to some good and pious persons, that I meant to inculcate such a belief. It is far too shadowy a notion to be recommended to faith as more than an element in our instincts of immortality. But let us bear in mind that, though the idea is not advanced in Revelation, there is nothing there to contradict it, and the fall of man presents an analogy in its favour. Accordingly, a pre-existent state has entered into the popular creeds of many nations, and among all persons acquainted with classic literature is known as an ingredient in Platonic philosophy […] Having to wield some of its elements when I was impelled to write this poem on the 'Immortality of the Soul,' I took hold of the notion of pre-existence as having sufficient foundation in humanity for authorizing me to make for my purpose the best use of it I could as a Poet. (Wordsworth, "Notes and Illustrations" 194-195)

As will be shown, this note has often been treated as sufficient evidence to disregard the concept of preceding existences as mere metaphor. However, there are numerous reasons why scholars may want to proceed with caution, if not outright skepticism, with regard to the Fenwick note. Firstly, there is an established tradition of Romantic poets 'laundering' unorthodox religious speculations as harmless poetic fancy (Coleridge does this in "The Eolian Harp," as discussed on page 55), so claims of this nature cannot always be taken as authoritative.[94] Furthermore, the Fenwick notes were dictated in 1843, that is to say forty-one years after the idea of the poem was first conceived, placing them squarely in the territory of Wordsworth's late, revisionist phase, in which he habitually excised radical notions from his earlier poems in the name of propriety.[95] In fact, scholars have long been sensitive to Wordsworth's late-career habit of mischaracterizing the interests of his younger self with regard to revisions of *The Prelude*, yet the order of authority is seemingly reversed when it comes to Wordsworth's equally revisionist explanation of the "Ode."[96] Finally, the outsized authority accorded to this particular metatext even in comparatively recent scholarship can be said to raise questions about the somewhat selective basis upon which scholars invoke, or in this case neglect to invoke, the intentional fallacy.

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[94] In fact, in one of his letters, Wordsworth can be seen to do the same with regard to the pantheistic undertones of the "sense sublime" in "Tintern Abbey," claiming that the passage was "a passionate expression uttered incautiously in the Poem upon the Wye," which a hostile reader has erred in reading by "substituting the letter for the spirit" (*DWL3* 188).

The Fenwick note itself offers additional reasons for nuancing the scholarly discussion. For instance, the language Wordsworth uses is evasive with regard to the main points, undercutting its ostensible reassurance with a number of important qualifiers. Firstly, Wordsworth's stated reason for offering this clarification is to reassure the "good and pious persons" who have taken offense at his unorthodox speculations, providing a necessary bit of context: this is Wordsworth on the defensive, defending himself against suspicions of heresy. Secondly, his grounds for advising against the inculcation of this belief is specifically that it is "far too shadowy a notion to be recommended to faith as more than an instinct in our immortality": in other words, the disavowal concerns specifically its value as institutional belief, not its utility as spiritual instinct. In fact, his stated reason for disavowing this notion as explicit religious tenet is not that it is untrue or heretical, but simply the fact that it is too "shadowy" – a criticism that in no way contradicts its role in the poem, where it is specifically its function as a vague remembrance (indeed, as an "intimation") that it constitutes a foundation for the spiritual life of the mind.

Having offered these qualifiers, Wordsworth then sets out a more strongly-worded defense of this notion, outlining not only its philosophical pedigree but also its fundamental compatibility with Scripture. The notion of pre-existence, he writes, while not "advanced in Revelation," is also not contradicted by it, and the central narrative of the fall of Man in fact "presents an analogy in its favour." This, along with its prevalence in other philosophical traditions such as Platonism, is deemed sufficient justification to make "for my purpose the best use of it I could as a Poet."

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[95] In other contexts (such as the poet's late-career backtracking of his early political radicalism), the critical norm has long been to distrust anything that has the tenor of ideological damage control, which makes it noteworthy that the same possibility is rarely raised with regard to the "Ode."

[96] See, for instance, Ernest de Selincourt's preface in the 1926 edition of *The Prelude*, in which he states that "the ideas [Wordsworth] has introduced [into the 1850 text] […] were entirely alien to his thought and feeling […] their intrusion has falsified our estimate of the authentic Wordsworth, the poet of the years 1798-1805" (de Selincourt xxxvii). "Since de Selincourt," W. Michael Johnstone argues, "the ethical concerns of editors have focused on recovering Wordsworth's original intentions and inspirations, believing them obscured, if not damaged, by Wordsworth's revisions and by the publication of the 1850 *Prelude*" (Johnstone 43).

The wording here implies that there is a clear distinction between the religious and the poetic use of a particular notion, but this need not concern truth value per se. After all, much of the correspondence between Wordsworth and Coleridge makes clear that they both considered poetry to be a fully legitimate, and in some cases the best, avenue for exploring subtle metaphysical truths.

Nevertheless, there has been a long scholarly tradition of treating the notion of the pre-natal afterglow as a mere poetic device shorn of greater metaphysical implications. Part of this seems to stem from a general embarrassment at the idea itself, too *outré* for philosophy, too heretical for theology, too unworldly for radicalism, too transcendent for pantheism, and too mystical for post-Victorian critics, all of which dovetailed neatly with an early twentieth-century drive to rehabilitate the Romantics as covert forerunners of modern psychology disguised behind a façade of pulpy mysticism. Thus, Robert Langbaum argues that "the Platonic idea of pre-existence is advanced in the 'Ode' – Wordsworth tells us in the Fenwick note to that poem – as a figure of speech, as a fanciful and traditional way of generalizing the psychological phenomenon revealed to him by his own life – that 'the Child is Father of the Man'." This apparent metaphor is then contrasted with the more overtly psychologized treatment of the topic in *The Prelude*, which Langbaum concludes "is the authentically Wordsworthian one, because it is naturalistic, psychological, and sensationalist" (Langbaum 266). Similarly, Lionel Trilling calls the use of the motif of pre-existence "theistic metaphor" and an expression in metaphysical terms what is stated in naturalistic language in the "blest the infant Babe"-passage from *The Prelude*; furthermore, he argues that this metaphor is at odds with the rest of the "Ode," which is otherwise "largely naturalistic in its intention" (Trilling 135-141). Even Robert Pack, who takes the poem's words at face value as "postulat[ing] a 'heavenly' influence which the child received as his inheritance at birth," ultimately ends up treating it as functionally a metaphor standing in for cognitive depth: a "precious recognition that goes deeper than consciousness" so that "the sources of this power precede consciousness AS IF they existed in another life" (Pack,182-183).

Instead, the doctrine of pre-existence has frequently been re-interpreted to refer to the earliest stage of psychological development in the infant, either by ignoring the distinction between the afterglow and the source of the afterglow, or by following Freud in resolving the "oceanic sensation" of desire for spiritual wholeness into a longing for the womb.[97] Langbaum does the former when he locates this stage in "the 'dawn of being' where [the mind] is indistinguishable from its first sensation," while Trilling does the latter when he traces it back to the undifferentiated subject-object awareness experienced in earliest infancy and the memory of the womb (Langbaum 269; Trilling 140). More recently, David W. Ross has also concluded that "the former home is the womb, a place where the unity and coherence not only of self but of self with other can be re-experienced" (Ross 631).

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[97] This idea was proposed by Freud in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (Freud 11-14).

Neither of these explanations, however, offers a convincing account of the explicitly transcendent language used in the poem's key passages. Langbaum, in reading the notion of pre-existence as a metaphorical representation of what *The Prelude* calls "those first-born affinities that fit / Our new existence to existing things," collapses the distinction between the afterglow and the source of the afterglow in a way that leaves much of the poem bereft of sense: to stop the train at the first-born affinities is to stop at the "trailing clouds of glory" rather than the place from which they came. Moreover, the statement that we arrive on Earth "not in entire forgetfulness" and "not in utter nakedness" indicates that the glory enjoyed in childhood is only a fragment of that which it possessed in its pre-natal condition, a layer of meaning that is lost if the two are taken to be identical.

As for the strong Freudian line of approach taken by Trilling and Ross, which reads Wordsworth's religious sentiment as a version of the narcissistic impulse which Freud terms the oceanic feeling, the notion that this is what the "Ode" is *really* about becomes somewhat tautological. In other words, since this is Freud's explanation of religious feeling altogether, the argument already presumes that religious poetry is, per definition, neurotic poetry. Thus, the argument shifts from describing the content of the poem to offering a blanket explanation for a *type* of experience, becoming unhelpfully reductive; by the same token, one might say that the real complaint in "Dejection: An Ode" concerns serotonin production. If, instead, a somewhat weaker line is adopted to suggest that Wordsworth was making poetic use of a half-remembered sensation that, if traced back far enough, would culminate in the womb, much of the poem stops making sense. For instance, in what sense can the passage out of the womb even metaphorically be described as a "sleep and a forgetting," when existence in the womb was neither awake nor capable of forming memories? Why would memories of the womb prompt "obstinate questionings" or "blank misgivings" about a world "not realised"? Other passages take on a quality of mock-epic bathos, such as the idea that the passage through the birth canal constitutes a coming "from afar." In short, such a reading seemingly renders much of the poem's figurative language irrelevant, if not outright nonsensical.

Moreover, the unspoken assumption underpinning Trilling and Langbaum's analyses appears to be that if there are two parallel descriptions of the same event, one naturalistic-psychological (as in *The Prelude*) and the other spiritual-metaphysical (as in the "Ode"), one may conclude that the former is the actual claim and the second merely a fanciful poetic complement. However, this is a clear bias in that imposes an order of priority that could just as well run the other way around: a believer in a mystical dimension of the world would understand many material effects to have spiritual causes. As previously discussed, Coleridge appears to have been drawn to Hartley's philosophy because finding a neurological basis for spiritual experience in the construction of the brain indicated to him that the brain 'accommodated' a spiritual dimension in the same way that it accommodated a sensory reality. By the same logic, the resemblance of a psychological experience to a metaphysical narrative may just as well have been thought by Wordsworth to confirm, rather than undermine, the reality of the latter.

Nevertheless, some critics who read the poem as explicitly and non-metaphorically mystical have also treated the "obstinate questionings" as a problem to be worked around. Florence Marsh has argued that the poem expresses two distinct religious experiences, one suggesting divine immanence (represented by the child, who sees the divine presence everywhere) and the other suggesting transcendence (the intimations of pre-existence), with the central flaw of the poem being that the two strands never quite cohere (Marsh 230). However, this division understates the degree to which the first experience was always merely the reflection of the second, as evidenced by the motif of the fast-dissipating, trailing clouds of glory. Once again, there often seems to be an interest on the part of critics (of all orientations) to explain the pre-natal afterglow as a deviation or an intellectual lapse, as opposed to an added layer of complexity.

Overall, I view the case for a 'literal' reading of the intimations – that is to say, literal in the sense that they represent an attempt to convey a genuine metaphysical suspicion, however "shadowy" and undefined – to be considerably stronger than has typically been argued by critics. Moreover, the recurring association between childhood and unspecified forms of distance in a number of poems written between 1802 and 1807 indicates that the concepts were closely linked in Wordsworth's mind during this period. This association occurs again in "Personal Talk" (1807), where the wisdom of childhood is said to inhere in the judicious balancing between the present and the distant, as opposed to the myopic focus on the present that predominates in adulthood:

> Children are blest, and powerful; their world lies
> More justly balanced; partly at their feet,
> And part from them; – sweetest melodies
> Are those that are by distance made more sweet;
> Whose mind is but the mind of his own eyes,
> He is a Slave; the meanest we can meet!
> (Wordsworth, "Personal Talk," lines 23-38)

However, where does this sharp swerve toward the idea of sense perception as a longing for the lost and unreachable fit within the context of Wordsworth's conversation with Coleridge?

So far, my hypothesis has been that Wordsworth pulled ahead in the conversation by usurping the role of 'ideal perceiver' in "Tintern Abbey," while Coleridge was frustrated to find that, for whatever reason, he could not practice the type of seeing described by Wordsworth in his poem. Announcing his failure to do so in "Dejection: An Ode," Coleridge then challenged Wordsworth to respond to his sensory-emotional blockage. That the two "odes" are in communication with each other has long been an accepted fact by scholars, and can be shown by considering the close textual similarities between the texts, which Fred Manning Smith have outlined in great detail. Where Wordsworth's ode has "There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream" (line 1), Coleridge's has "There was a time, when, tho' my path was rough" (line 77). Wordsworth's poem states that the earth was once "apparelled in celestial light" (line 4), while Coleridge's refers to "a light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud / Enveloping the earth" (lines 55-56). Wordsworth describes the moon in "heavens" that are "bare" and "the waters on a starry night" as "beautiful" and "fair" (lines 12-15), while Coleridge places the moon "in its own cloudless, starless lake of blue," calling it "fair" and "beautiful" (lines 33-39). Wordsworth claims that "the things which I have seen I now can see no more," but that "the fulness of your bliss, I feel – I feel it all" (lines 9, 42), while Coleridge laments that "I *see*, not *feel* how beautiful they are" (line 39). Finally, Wordsworth's poem states that "to me alone there came a thought of grief: / A timely utterance gave that thought relief," while Coleridge speaks of "a stifled, drowsy, unimpassion'd grief, / Which finds not nat'ral outlet, no relief," both passages positioned exactly as lines 22-23 in their respective poems. At the same time, Smith shows that the poems contain antinomies which suggest that each poem conceived of itself as the other's opposite. For example, Wordsworth's "grief finds relief and ends in joy," Coleridge's "grief finds no relief and ends in dejection"; Wordsworth's ode is set during morning in the month of May while "the sun shines warm," Coleridge's ode is set during evening in "the month of showers" (Smith 224-225). The correspondences outlined by Smith are overwhelming enough that the two poems can almost certainly be classified as explicit (and opposing) contributions to the same conversation.

The question of who 'responds' to whom is complicated by the closely intertwined composition histories of the two poems. While the publication of "Dejection" preceded that of Wordsworth's "Ode" by five years, both poems existed in earlier versions beforehand, and critical discussion of the chronology of authorship has been impeded by the fact that the earliest draft of "Dejection" (the so-called "Letter to Sara") came to light only in 1977.[98] Thus, the pattern of influence would appear to run as follows: 1) Wordsworth's "Ode: There Was a Time" (consisting of the first four stanzas of "Ode: Intimations of Immortality"), 2) Coleridge's "Letter to Sara," 3) Coleridge's "Dejection: An Ode," 4) Wordsworth's complete "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" (chronology taken from Sisman 352).

For the purpose of this thesis, the most important fact is that both Wordsworth and Coleridge appear to have seen their poems as competing to have the final word on a particular state of mind. "Ode: There Was a Time" does not venture into metaphysical territory at all, instead simply posing the question of why the speaker's perceptions have changed since childhood. Vickers reads "Letter to Sara" as Coleridge's response to this question, saying that Wordsworth made a mistake by attributing the power of his childhood perceptions to nature, when in reality those were the product of an inner sensation: "Joy" (Vickers, *Doctors* 127-129). However, Vickers argues that the argument had changed by the time "Letter to Sara" was reworked into "Dejection," going from being a poem about the "avoidance of feeling" to one about an "inability to feel," and trading romantic troubles for philosophical dissatisfactions (129-133). Thus, in my view, the finished "Dejection: An Ode" instead has Coleridge posing a question to Wordsworth, provocatively published on Wordsworth's wedding day: why can *I* not perceive the world the way *you* do? Finally, in 1807, the longer "Ode," with its extended metaphysical argument, is presented in part as a response to Coleridge. In other words, with regard to the final versions, Coleridge's poem seems to be the question, Wordsworth's the response.

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[98] In fact, it was discovered by chance when it was offered for sale at Sotheby's as part of a mass of Wordsworth's letters and writings labelled, inconspicuously, as "the Property of a Gentleman" (Lawder 74).

If my hypothesis is correct, "the life of things" was very much on Coleridge's mind in the years 1799-1802, as he brooded over what type of perception Wordsworth spoke of and whether he himself was capable of it. For this reason, Coleridge began the "Dejection"-"Ode" conversation by proposing that something was stopping him from perceiving the world in the way that Wordsworth had recommended; a "joy" was missing which would unite his poetic and perceptual powers in the way that "Tintern Abbey" had proposed. Wordsworth, somewhat cruelly, responded by saying that this was a natural condition, a consequence of aging, in which the true, semi-divine perceptions of childhood are replaced by the cooler, more contemplative joys of adulthood. In other words, Coleridge had attempted to put words to an individual crisis, Wordsworth had moved the conversation back to a universal predicament, with a salutary lesson to just accept it.

However, this may have been a crucial moment in Coleridge's realization that the differences between his and Wordsworth's perceptual habits were more fundamental than he had previously recognized. The way in which Wordsworth had transcended the boundary to the unseen in "Tintern Abbey" had made him suspicious that Wordsworth did not perceive the same problems surrounding perception that he did, and now Wordsworth's cool rebuke of the depth of his crisis seemed to have widened the gap further. While the argument of the "Ode" superficially resembles that of "Tintern Abbey" in that it proposes a decline from a state of all-consuming perceptions in youth to an adulthood state where perception is dependent on other forms of thought for its power, there is a substantial difference with regard to the transcendent power of perception. In the second communion coda of "Tintern Abbey," the "sense sublime" still pointed toward an exalted here and now, while the speaker still recognized in "nature and the language of the sense / the anchor of my purest thoughts" (lines 110-111). In the "Ode," it is powerless: the object of communion has been moved back to before birth. Thus, Coleridge's protestation that he cannot perceive as he feels that he must receives the response from Wordsworth that what Coleridge is asking for is impossible: it occurred only in a diluted form during childhood, and only properly before birth. Coleridge, needing to perceive and not perceive at the same time, first received an answer too much in the affirmative (with “Tintern Abbey” transcending the boundary in a way that Coleridge could not recognize) and now an answer too much in the negative (with the “Ode” saying that the unseen is, and was always, inaccessible). Never has the paradox at the heart of Coleridge’s interest in perception been more cruelly exposed: Wordsworth has forced him imagine both alternatives, and neither solved his crisis.

After 1807: Diminishing returns

Poems in which sense perception serves as the vehicle for metaphysical speculation become comparatively rare in Wordsworth’s oeuvre after 1807.[99] Already in the poems written during the “Ode” years (1802-1807), a streak of epistemological pessimism about the value of perceptions feels increasingly prominent. “Sonnet XII [Those words were uttered…]” (1804/1807) is strongly reminiscent of the world-weary Platonism that Coleridge also gravitated toward in his late career, in which interest in the material world began to reside in favor of an appreciation of timeless ‘moral’ truths. In this poem, the speaker concludes that “[g]rove, isle, with every shape of sky-built dome, / Though clad in colours beautiful and pure, / Find in the heart of man no natural home” (“Those words…,” lines 9-11). Instead, “[t]he immortal Mind craves objects that endure: / These cleave to it; from these it cannot roam, / Nor they from it: their fellowship is secure” (lines 12-14). In these lines, there is no indication of a magical meeting point between perceived and unperceived, but a clean break: Platonic ideas are reached through contemplation, not by pushing sensory experience to its utmost limits.

In other poems, it is the decay of the times that is implied to be responsible for a growing rift between mind and world. In “Sonnet XXXIII [The world is too much with us…]” (1807), the speaker posits that there has been a decline in man’s relationship to nature, which he attributes to the artificial narrowing of perception that he deems to be the signature of an industrialized society: the type of seeing through which “the world is too much with us,” and through which “we lay waste our powers,” so that all the sights of nature that were alive to pagan man are “up-gathered now like sleeping flowers: / For this, for everything, we are out of tune” (“The world…,” lines 1-8). Whether accepted at face value as a collective lament for an industrial age, or as rationalization of a personal loss of the powers of perception, what remains is a poem about a poet experiencing a worrying gap between mind and world, and a sense of powerlessness about closing it through either perceptual or imaginative means.

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[99] Other critics have noted a major change after 1805-1807; for instance Eugene L. Stelzig, who claims that, at some point after 1805, Wordsworth becomes “no longer willing to risk the sorts of feeling that might change him profoundly,” and that “the model of a fluid, outgoing, experience-oriented self is gradually replaced by that of a hard, impenetrable self, impervious to time and experience” (*All Shades* 185, 194).

In a world where the metaphysical promise has seemingly been drained out of a world that is "too much with us," Wordsworth seems to have concluded that the poetic life of the senses now mostly occurs in the gap between expectation and reality. In other words, the expectation of a sight or sound still retains some mystical power before it is converted into fixed sensation, which means that it can be a poetic act to either defer or wholly abstain from perceiving a long-awaited object. This idea, already hinted at in the Mont Blanc episode in Book VI of *The Prelude,* is front and center in "Star-Gazers" (1806/1807), in which the speaker observes a variety of people as they line up to watch the night sky through a telescope, all of whom seem disappointed as they walk off afterwards. The speaker, notably abstaining from looking through the telescope himself, ventures a number of hypothetical answers to this seemingly universal sense of disappointment. Perhaps "radiant pomp" simply does not move the human mind after all, or maybe – as Coleridge concluded at Elbingerode – it is only personal associations that render a sight truly meaningful, so that a thing gives "but small delight that never can be dear" (lines 13-14). Next, he wonders whether the "silver moon with all her vales" might actually be a rather mundane sight, so that the magic of this location lies merely in the suggestive power of language (lines 15-16). Finally, he turns the question on its head and raises the possibility that the perceptual blind spot may be his own: that what he is mistaking for disappointment is in fact the sadness of returning back to Earth after having spent time in the heavens, or simply that the speakers may be feeling a wholly inward joy that "admits no outward sign" (lines 21-28). Nevertheless, the overall conclusion is one of pessimism in the possibility of ever attaining true rapture in the act of looking: "Whatever be the cause, 'tis sure that they who pry and pore / Seem to meet with little gain, seem less happy than before" (lines 29-32).

If "Star-Gazers" portrays abstaining from perception as the best alternative in a world that can no longer compete with expectation, a more moderate position is represented by the three "Yarrow poems," which instead deal with the idea of deferring perception. These poems, each centering on a journey to Scotland in which the river Yarrow is being considered as a stop in the itinerary, express three different takes on the relationship between deferred perception and meaning, and give the impression of a mind gradually coming to grips with the propensity of reality to not always conform to expectations. In "Yarrow Unvisited" (1803/1807), the speaker and his unnamed companion (in reality Dorothy), deliberate whether to depart from their route and pay an impromptu visit to the river, but eventually decide against it. In the poem, the speaker chooses first to rationalize this decision by presenting Yarrow as one river among many, and thus unworthy of a visit ("what's Yarrow but a river bare, / That glides the dark hills under? / There are a thousand such elsewhere, / As worthy of your wonder"), but is reproved when his companion "sigh[s] for sorrow" and gives him a stern look (lines 25-32). This leads him to adopt the more moderate position that Yarrow might indeed be fair and green, but that there is value in deferring a sight so fair for a future visit. This way, he argues, they will have two Yarrows for the price of one: the sight painted by the imagination, "treasured dreams of times long past," and the future sight of the real Yarrow, to be saved for an occasion when their spirits may be "low" and in need of soothing pleasures (lines 33-64). This appeal, it is implied, wins the day, and Yarrow remains unvisited for the time being.

The efficacy of deferring perception is put to the test in the two follow-up poems, "Yarrow Visited" (1814) and "Yarrow Revisited" (1834), which deal with the question of what remains after expectation comes face to face with reality. In the first poem, the speaker alternates between obvious disappointment that the real Yarrow has now usurped the place of his imagined river ("And is this – Yarrow? – *This* the Stream / Of which my fancy cherished, / So faithfully a waking dream?"), and an attempt to objectively evaluate it on its own terms ("Yet why? – a silvery current flows / With uncontrolled meanderings; / Nor have these eyes by greener hills / Been soothed, in all my wanderings"; "Yarrow Visited," lines 1-16). Eventually, he manages to negotiate a truce between reality and expectation, admitting that "thou, that didst appear so fair / To fond imagination, / Dost rival in the light of day / Her delicate creation" (lines 41-44). On this basis, he concludes that imagination and perception were both necessary for obtaining the particular image of Yarrow that will now forever be branded upon his memory: "I see – but not by sight alone, / Loved Yarrow, have I won thee; / A ray of fancy still survives -- / Her sunshine plays upon thee!" (lines 73-77). Although this is phrased as a poetic victory, it seems that the province of the unseen has merely been narrowed further: the deferring of perception adds a sliver of meaning to a finished image, but it is so slight – a mere "ray of fancy" – that it seems little more than a trick of the light.

Twenty years later, in "Yarrow Revisited," the speaker rephrases the same lesson in terms that leave even less room for what is left out of the act of perception. Reminiscing on what he now views as his earlier unwillingness to simply face up to the facts, "to surrender / Dreams treasured up from early days," he now recalls only unqualified joy in the "looks of love and honour / As thy own Yarrow gave to me / When first I gazed upon her" ("Yarrow Revisited," lines 73-80). The poem ends by resolving the dispute between perception deferred and perception fulfilled in favor of a third option: perception remembered; "Flow on for ever, Yarrow Stream! […] To dream-light dear while yet unseen, / Dear to the common sunshine, / And dearer still, as now I feel, / To memory's shadow moonshine!" (lines 105-112). In stark contrast to the poems of his early career, the unseen now retains only a small, instrumental role in the overall assignation of meaning to perception, a process in which memory now occupies the most prominent position.

Wordsworth was to revisit the same theme periodically through the late portion of his career, for instance in the *Memorials from a Tour in Italy* (1842). In "At Rome," the speaker arrives at the long-expected view of the Capitolian Hill in Rome, only to find it a "petty Steep, a "local Phantom proud to mock / The

Traveller's expectation" (line 1-5). This leads him to conclude that, although "full oft, our wish obtained, deeply we sigh," it can be an instructive lesson in guiding the mind to its proper activity: Platonic contemplation ("Yet not unrecompensed are they who learn, / From that depression raised, to mount on high / With stronger wing, more clearly to discern / Eternal things"; lines 9-14). Here, once again, the moral lesson seems tacked-on and obligatory, a transparent rationalization of obvious disappointment.

Meanwhile, when motifs that were previously treated as contact-points with the unseen world – chasms, mountain floods and sounds of the earth – appear in Wordsworth's late poetry, they tend to be comparatively de-mystified. The *River Duddon* sonnets (1820) provide a characteristic example; here, the "sunless cleft" and "gloomy niche" serve not as boundaries to unknown states of existence, but as sites of past wonder long since dispelled, the memory of elves that have fled and statues left behind by ancient builders ("The Faery Chasm," lines 1-14; "XV," lines 1-14). Similarly, natural phenomena that would previously have inspired reveries with pantheistic resonances tend to be reconfigured as something much less potent, such as in "Devotional Incitements" (1832/1835), where a number of nature motifs are drily and prosaically evaluated as 'aids' to religious devotion ("Devotional Incitements"). Any fascination with hidden powers or boundaries to unperceived realms has long since disappeared, or else ossified into artificial mannerism.

However, any attempt to chart the evolution of Wordsworth's poetic interests must also consider his longer poems. Wordsworth himself envisioned the texts that have so far been dealt with as mere "little cells, oratories, and sepulchral recesses" in relation to the "gothic church" that was to be *The Recluse*, his three-poem magnum opus (*Excursion*, "Preface" 38). Thus, having now wandered through the recesses, it is time to step into the great cathedral.

Chapter 4: Perception and the education of the mind in *The Prelude* and *The Excursion*

Overview

As is hardly surprising for a poem with such nakedly Miltonic aspirations, *The Prelude* was written with more than one purpose in mind. Firstly, as the subtitle makes clear, the poem can be read as a narrative of "the Growth of a Poet's Mind," in which general truths about the creative imagination are gleaned from an ostensibly autobiographical narrative of the poet's early life. This introspective dimension of *The Prelude* has often been treated as its primary concern, as can be seen in the many ways that the work has been summarized over the years: as a "creative autobiography" pointing forward to Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (Abrams, *Supernaturalism* 80), as a text that "illuminates the inner workings of his [Wordsworth's] mind" (Darbishire 83-84), as an "active searching of the past in order that the poet may rediscover the Imagination which he found and lost at Racedown" (C. Moorman 420), or as Wordsworth deciphering the "primary laws" of his own "selfhood" (Bedsole 424).

However, *The Prelude* also continually makes reference to a more extraverted aim, one that has been comparatively underemphasized in scholarship but is stressed both in the poem and in the language by which Wordsworth refers to it in his private writings. This is the fact that the poem, particularly in its 1805 version, is directly addressed to a particular reader – Coleridge – with the stated intention of helping out of his psycho-philosophical crisis.[100] In Book VI, the fact that these events are being recorded for someone else's benefit is even claimed to be the main reason for the poem's scope and length, "else sooner ended."[101] Furthermore, the title *The Prelude* was added posthumously; in life, William and Dorothy referred to it variously as "the poem on [Wordsworth's] earlier life" or "the poem to C" (Selincourt x). Thus, in addition to its more introspective aims, *The Prelude* is embedded in the context of a particular social relationship, and from this perspective the poem can be seen as the conclusion to a poetic conversation that took place primarily during the years 1797-1802; namely, the conversation about the right way for the mind to grapple with the limitations of human perception.

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[100] The fact that this personal address is largely missing from the 1850 version has been cited by numerous critics as a reason why the 1850 *Prelude* feels less personal than the 1805 poem. For example, Helen Darbishire argues that the 1850 *Prelude*, through its substitution of "general for particular expressions" and replacement of "the pronoun 'I' by impersonal constructions," "turns what was a glorified private letter to Coleridge into a poetic confession, fit for the medium of cold print" (Darbishire 82-83). Similarly, Richard Gravil has contrasted the "intimate, ingenious voice of the poem to Coleridge" with the "more literary voice of the '1850' version" (Gravil 15).

As this chapter aims to show, *The Prelude* treats receptivity to the unseen as an index of psychological and moral health: a master category that indirectly governs how the mind relates to anything that transcends the narrow confines of the self, including, as advertised in the title of Book VIII, the path back to the "love of mankind." This, of course, cuts to the core of Coleridge's recurring doubts about the power of an unhappy mind to achieve transcendent knowledge through its perceptions, a fact that Wordsworth would presumably have been well aware of at this point. Seen this way, the description of psychological growth in *The Prelude* can be seen as offering not only a creative genealogy of Wordsworth's own mind, but also a step-by-step guide to how 'healthy' powers of perception are attained, offered to a friend whom Wordsworth diagnoses as having been deprived of the right formative influences for obtaining them on his own.

In this respect, *The Prelude* can be said to continue in the pattern of "Tintern Abbey" and "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," with Wordsworth constructing and revising new perceptual ideals around 'corrections' of Coleridge's perceived mistakes. Of course, one could argue that the decision to address *The Prelude* directly to Coleridge, however well-meant, may simultaneously have been motivated by less altruistic concerns. After all, an authentically companionable voice and a sense of moral urgency can serve as aesthetic advantages in themselves, while Wordsworth's assumption of the role of teacher in relation to Coleridge can potentially be read as an act of public one-upmanship toward a well-known competitor. However, such questions do not fall within the purview of this particular chapter; instead, what will be explored here is the way that the 'conversational' approach embeds the poem in a system of shared reference points: allusions to works by either of the two poets that are made to stand for fixed, mutually-acknowledged meanings. In other words, *The Prelude* often communicates 'Coleridge's' position on a particular subject by alluding to an idea or incident from one of Coleridge's poems, which is then treated as a conversational 'move' for *The Prelude* to rebut or otherwise respond to. In effect, *The Prelude* occupies a form of shared poetic universe, in which a speaker whose past largely overlaps with material from earlier Wordsworth poems speaks to an addressee whose opinions are, in turn, reconstructed from material taken from well-known Coleridge poems.

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[101] "Throughout this narrative, / Else sooner ended, I have known full well / For whom I thus record the birth and growth / Of gentleness, simplicity, and truth, / And joyous loves that hallow innocent days / Of peace and self-command. Of Rivers, Fields, / And Groves, I speak to thee, my Friend…" (*P* VI, lines 269-275).

The casting of Coleridge as *The Prelude*'s addressee has been interpreted in a number of ways, but perhaps most commonly as a way for Wordsworth to obtain external validation of what would otherwise be a project of excessively private interest. Eugene L. Stezig has argued that this mode of address creates a "fiction of alterity," whereby a constructed, maximally sympathetic reader is used to provide affirmation of Wordsworth's poetic ambitions that he cannot supply himself, as well as more immediately a way for Wordsworth to solicit Coleridge's approval following his disappointing lack of progress on *The Recluse* (Stelzig 24-25). However, a few critics have also commented on the poem's ambition to impart a lesson to Coleridge. Frank McConnell reads the address to Coleridge as a convention borrowed from the 'confessional' genre of religious literature, where the aim of this mode of address is to 'convert' the actual reader into the implied reader simultaneously addressed and constructed within the text. Thus, McConnell argues, "Wordsworth's effort to recreate his own past is inseparable from his effort to remake the personality of his friend Coleridge" (McConnell 24-27). While my analysis will to some extent echo these observations by McConnell, I will argue that the ambition in question is fundamentally therapeutic rather than convertive, and my focus will be on how this ambition can be related specifically to the development of perception.

The aforementioned sense of conversational 'sharedness' is one of the attributes that sets *The Prelude* apart from *The Excursion*, a thematically similar poem which attempts to perform a comparable poetic experiment in social isolation. The result is a poem in which the conversation takes place between characters within the poem rather than between a speaker and an extra-diegetic addressee. As will be argued in the following pages, this difference is reflected in a swerve away from *The Prelude*'s intertextual allusiveness into a more closed, private idiom, and in a weakening of the socially-maintained higher 'self' that had been the product of *The Prelude*.

Thus, the first overarching argument of this chapter is that *The Prelude*, alongside its investigation of the development of a poet's mind, also traces the gradual emergence of a psychologically and morally 'healthy' way to apprehend the unseen. In the chapter, I suggest subdividing this process into seven distinct phases, demarcated by major realizations, crises or other changes in the speaker's life, with the seventh phase amounting to the state of 'transcendent' receptiveness that is being offered to Coleridge as a solution to his psycho-philosophical crisis. Seen this way, *The Prelude* continues the exploration of the idea of transcendent perception that I traced through his shorter poems in Chapter 3, while simultaneously participating in a broader poetic conversation with Coleridge about the link between the mind's attitude to the unseen and the attainment of moral and psychological health. Conversely, *The Excursion* – written during a period where Wordsworth and Coleridge were not in close contact – represents a move away from this shared philosophical value system, one effect of which is a corresponding lack of interest in the philosophical value of sense perceptions.

The second overarching argument of this chapter is that the ‘creed’ of perception outlined in *The Prelude* is inseparable from its conversational framework: as a quasi-religious attitude to the world, it requires not merely poetic-philosophical depth but also a moral function, in this case providing therapeutic benefit to a receptive reader (Coleridge). *The Excursion,* in contrast, represents a move away from this social framework, with the result that struggles to find an adequate and convincing poetic form for its unifying moral message.

Because it is primarily *The Prelude* that concerns itself with the topic of sense perception, most of the chapter will devoted to the study of this poem. Furthermore, because of the great relevance of the poem’s conversational aspect to my analysis, I have chosen the 1805 *Prelude,* the version in which the address to Coleridge is most prominent, as my main text. In my analysis of *The Excursion,* I will first discuss some more local echoes of *The Prelude* in Books I and II for the purpose of establishing their shared philosophical territory, then treat the rest of the text a bit more briefly, focusing mostly on broader differences between the two poems that are attributable to the absence of a conversational framework.

The Prelude, Books I-II

The Prelude begins on a note of long-awaited liberation and restoration. The speaker, announcing himself as a “captive” who is “coming from a house of bondage,” now finds himself “free, enfranchised and at large,” with the opportunity “to fix my habitation where I will” (Wordsworth, *P* I, lines 6-10). The literal change of scenery, of moving from “yon city’s walls” to the rural landscape where he feels more at home, is paralleled by the psychic liberation of shedding an identity that has come to feel foreign and inauthentic: “That burthen of my own unnatural self, / The heavy weight of many a weary day / Not mine, and such as were not made for me” (lines 23-25).[102] On a metatextual level, the speaker (that is to say Wordsworth) has two other reasons for his relief. Firstly, by writing an ‘epic poem’ about himself simply because he wants to, he is writing under very few constraints as a poet. Secondly, he is clearly using the composition of the present poem to procrastinate from a more daunting work, on which he was making no progress (the planned beginning of *The Recluse*, which later became *The Excursion*).

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[102] Here, the shedding of an artificial identity is describing in terms that strongly recall the shedding of the material world enabled by heightened perception in “Tintern Abbey:” “in which the burthen of the mystery, / In which the heavy and the weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world, / Is lightened” (lines 38-41). This, it seems to me, suggests an intuitive pairing of the need to transcend perception and the need for creative and psychological rejuvenation.

However, this is also the opening of a poem that Wordsworth is addressing directly to Coleridge, a man who at the time of writing he deems to be "a lonely wanderer," plagued by "pain" and "sickness" (*P* X, lines 941-976).[103] This fact adds a new dimension to the curative and therapeutic language used in the poem's opening lines, which in its more immediate context might otherwise seem strangely lethargic for a poem about commencing work on a great poem, especially one that will later be referred to as an "awful burthen" (*P* I, line 235). Regardless of whether *The Prelude* offered some respite to Wordsworth from work on *The Recluse*, the emphasis on rest, relaxation and retreat from work seems strangely paradoxical for a project that is, after all, hugely ambitious in its own right. The speaker mentions looking ahead to "long months of ease and undisturbed delight," "a pleasant loitering journey" with no "wish / Again to bend the sabbath of that time / To a servile yoke," and the opportunity to "quit the tiresome sea and dwell on shore" (*P* I, lines 28, 110-113, 35). However, in creating this textual oasis, far away from the burden of all social obligations, *The Prelude* seems to be pitching itself almost as much to the needs of its tired, suffering addressee (Coleridge) as to those of its newly liberated speaker. Already in these early lines, the consciousness of the poem's primary reader lingers over the language like a second presence.[104]

The transition from the speaker's reflections on his present situation to the narrative of his past is presented as fluid and associative, almost accidental. Beset by creative anxieties over the work that he is putting off – recognitions that too much is "wanting in himself" to do justice to his chosen themes, doubts regarding his indecisiveness, his "timorous capacity" and "infinite delay" – the speaker asks himself whether it was for this that he absorbed all the great formative experiences of his youth, which now threaten to come to nothing (lines 274-288). The memories that form the basis of *The Prelude* are thus enlisted to solve a problem in the present: the creative crisis of its speaker, a problem which – as will be shown – merges in interesting ways with the psychological crisis of its primary reader and addressee.

The first phase of perceptual development outlined in the poem spans across Books I and II, and concerns early habits of perception laid down in childhood. This phase can be summarized as *an emotionally powerful and holistic attachment to the world, punctuated by glimpses of something darker and more deeply rooted beneath*

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[103] Throughout Books I and II, the speaker continually envelops his "dear Friend" in the conversation through direct addresses and the use of the pronoun "we," suggesting that the narrative is in fact the end-point of some shared inquiry. There are six direct addresses to the "dear friend" in Books I and II (on lines 55, 116, 145, 650, 658-653 in Book I; on line 1 in Book II), while "we" is used on line 1 in Book II ("Thus far, O Friend! have we, though leaving much / Unvisited, endeavour'd to trace…").

[104] There are also Coleridgean echoes in the language of the opening lines. James P. Davis has argued that the inclusion of the "harp" and the "creative breeze" is a nod to Coleridge's "The Eolian Harp," partly so as to "acknowledge respect for a fellow poet and friend," and "partly to include that Wordsworth's *Prelude* should be read in the manner in which one reads 'The Eolian Harp'" (Davis 70). The shared poetic language of this section further heightens the sense of Coleridge being enlisted as a co-traveler on the mental journey that is about to begin.

the world of appearances. Since this phase begins in earliest infancy, of which the speaker cannot reasonably retain any memories, the passages that relate to the earliest formation of perception are cloaked in a veil of uncertainty, giving them an air of quasi-philosophical speculation.[105] At the same time, the speaker stresses that the inexactness of this knowledge is a product not just of the limited power of memory but of the inadequacy of the sciences to ever do justice to the processes that shape the mind. "[W]ho," he asks, "shall parcel out / His intellect, by geometric rules, / Split, like a province, into round and square? / Who knows the individual hour in which / His habits were first sown, even as a seed, / Who that shall point, as with a wand, and say, / 'This portion of the river of my mind / Came from yon fountain?'" (*P* II, lines 208-215). Here, in the poem's first direct address to its primary reader, Coleridge is enlisted as a sympathetic ally in the speaker's interrogation of the limitations of science, presenting a picture of Coleridge's philosophical outlook that is intriguingly at odds with the one offered in the rest of the poem:

> […] Thou, my Friend! art one
> More deeply read in thy own thoughts; to thee
> Science appears but, what in truth she is,
> Not as our glory and our absolute boast,
> But as a succedaneum, and a prop
> To our infirmity. Thou art no slave
> Of that false secondary power, by which,
> In weakness, we create distinctions, then
> Deem that our puny boundaries are things
> Which we perceive, and not which we have made.
> To thee, unblinded by these outward shows,
> The unity of all has been reveal'd
> And thou wilt doubt with me, less aptly skill'd
> Than many are to class the cabinet
> Of their sensations, and, in voluble phrase,
> Run through the history and birth of each,
> As of a single independent thing. (*P* II, lines 215-231)

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[105] The speculations about early infancy in *The Prelude* are largely compatible with the vision of childhood in the "Ode," primarily because *The Prelude*, by taking its starting point at the child's first sensory encounter with the world, avoids any entanglement in the question of pre-natal existences. This omission is probably attributable to the early date at which this section was composed (1798-1799, thus preceding the first mention of the 'pre-natal afterglow' by at least three years). The later sections (written in 1804-1805), on the other hand, seem to occasionally allude to the afterglow, such as in the following lines from Book V: "our childhood sits, / Our simple childhood sits upon a throne / That hath more power than all the elements. / *I guess not what this tells of Being past, / Nor what it augurs of the life to come,* / But so it is" (*P* V, 531-536, italics mine).

These lines stand out for their romanticized view of Coleridge's philosophical thinking, in a poem otherwise inclined toward a post-"Dejection" portrait of Coleridge's philosophizing as compensation for a creative or spiritual loss. One reason is undoubtedly the early date of composition of these lines: they occur in near-identical form in the 1799 *Prelude* (*PL1799* II, lines 250-262), indicating that they are the product of the *Lyrical Ballads*-phase of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's friendship rather than the 1804-1805 period when the poem was revised. However, is there a reason why these lines were not changed in the revision, given the poem's new framing as an intervention into what is essentially Coleridge's *crisis* of philosophical thought? Were they kept as a way of positioning the 1799 Coleridge as the 'real' philosopher and the mind-fractured metaphysician of 1805 as a temporary aberration that the speaker can perhaps coax Coleridge into giving up? Or is Wordsworth merely enlisting Coleridge, famed for his cerebral bent, as a more generic intellectual ally so as to lend more weight to his own observation, and in the process flattering his friend in the eyes of the public? Whichever the case, the oracular talent ascribed to Coleridge in these lines suggests either that Wordsworth was more convinced of the soundness of Coleridge's philosophical explorations than Coleridge himself was, or – as will be theorized later in this chapter – that the portrait of Coleridge's predicament in *The Prelude* is inconsistent, and that it can be seen to change subtly to fit the demands of different surrounding arguments.

Committed to a mood of uncertainty strengthened by the assumption that Coleridge thinks alike, the speaker proceeds to theorize that certain primal memories experienced in earliest infancy may still be accessible through hidden emotional imprints on experiences in the present. More specifically, strong affective attachments to objects and places in the present may stem from such primal experiences of perceptual 'bonding': "those first-born affinities that fit / Our new existence to existing things, / And, in our dawn of being, constitute / The bond of union betwixt life and joy" (*P* I, lines 582-585).[106] However, once again, there is a qualifier that stresses that his knowledge of this topic is necessarily uncertain – "if I err not" – maintaining an air of secrecy around the earliest period of childhood, as required by Wordsworth's larger creed of childhood-mysticism.

The next reflection on perception in earliest infancy – once again phrased as uncertain theorizing ("with my best conjectures I would trace / The progress of our being"; *P* II, 238-239) – concerns the child's acquired ability to discern hidden wholes underneath fractured appearances. This is a skill that the child gradually picks up from learning from learning to identify its own mother in a surrounding chaos of sensory details:

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[106] Holt and Gilroy argue that the "first-born affinities" refer to "instinctual affections […] for our natural habitat with which we are born" (Holt and Gilroy 24). However, it seems unclear whether the phrase refers to attachments to specific, local objects or more universal phenomena (i.e. types of landscapes, weather, moods, etc.), or a combination of both.

Nurs'd in his Mother's arms, the Babe who sleeps
Upon his Mother's breast, who, when his soul
Claims manifest kindred with an earthy soul,
Doth gather passion from his Mother's eye!
Such feelings pass into his torpid life
Like an awakening breeze, and hence his mind
Even [in the first trial of its powers]
Is prompt and watchful, eager to combine
In one appearance, all the elements
And parts of the same object, else detach'd
And loth to coalesce. Thus, day by day,
Subjected to the discipline of love,
His organs and recipient faculties
Are quicken'd, are more vigorous, his mind spreads,
Tenacious of the forms which it receives.
In one beloved presence, nay and more,
In that apprehensive habitude
And those sensations which have been deriv'd
From this beloved Presence, there exists
A virtue while irradiates and exalts
All objects through an intercourse of sense. (*P* II, lines 245-260)

The sense that there is a hidden 'other mind' (the mother) that expresses itself through a variety of seemingly unrelated physical features is the impetus that teaches the infant to "combine in one appearance" perceptions that would otherwise be "detach'd" and "loth to coalesce."[107] Although never stated outright in the passage, the emphasis on visual discernment suggests that the infant learns this by looking specifically into its mother's face. However, David S. Miall has suggested that the description can also be understood as referring to a wider category of mother-child interactions, including the ability to learn by "follow[ing] its mother's gaze," and the emergence of new "feelings authorized by her presence" (Miall 240-241). This lesson, the child's first step toward intuiting invisible relationships beneath appearances, is imprinted through the feeling of love, which gives the recombining instinct a strong affective association that will survive into adulthood: a link between uncovering hidden substructures and feelings of attachment that "pass into [the infant's] torpid life / Like an awakening breeze." In other words, the child's observation of its mother's face becomes not only the 'primal scene' of its relationship to the unseen, but also the source of a recurring association between the unseen and the expectation of love and connection.

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[107] David S. Miall summarizes this process as a "type of emotional knowing" that "enables the infant to discriminate form, or, as we would now put it, to separate figure from ground (the first gestalt, fundamental to any act of perception)." The important role accorded to emotion in this process, Miall argues, constitutes a rejection of Hartleian psychology in that the organizing principle is not "frequent joint impression" but "feeling" (Miall 238).

This two-faced experience of reality, happy immersion in the sensory world combined with occasional glimpses of secret, hidden realities underneath appearances, is a theme to which the speaker returns numerous times throughout Books I and II. On the one hand, the speaker remembers a great deal of "vulgar joy," which he describes as "that giddy bliss / Which, like a tempest, works along the blood / And is forgotten" (*P* I, lines 609-613). The long-lasting effect of this joy, which "by its own weight / Wearied itself out of the memory," was a gradual accumulation of emotional attachments to particular sights and sounds: perceptions that would habitually occur along with strong feelings would be gradually imprinted on the brain, until "their hues and forms were by invisible links / Allied to the affections" (*P* I, lines 625-640). On the other hand, this "vulgar joy" is contrasted with certain rare perceptions that seemed to stumble upon deeper, secret truths about the world, which resembled "[g]leams like the flashing of a shield," when "the earth / And common face of Nature spake to me / Rememberable things" (lines 613-616). However, the meaning of these more elusive perceptions was not understood by the speaker at the time, and so they were "doom'd to sleep" in his memory "[u]ntil maturer seasons call'd them forth / To impregnate and to elevate the mind" (lines 622-624). Therefore, in stark contrast to the strong emotional associations laid down when under the influence of the "vulgar joy," the more mysterious "gleams" left no immediate emotional impression (they were "lifeless then"; 623, 631-632). Once again, then, we see the experience of childhood bifurcated into two layers: 1) a blissful surface-level immersion in perceptions of the world, moulding the child's consciousness according to ordinary affective patterns, and 2) occasional glimpses into something darker and more dimly understood underneath appearances, whose subtler effect on the speaker's mind would only become apparent much later.

Although the speaker does not provide any examples of these "flashes like the surface of a shield," there is one incident in Book I that stands out for its dark, suggestive power compared to the other, comparatively innocent memories. This is the famous "boat episode," in which the child speaker finds himself near Lake Ullswater on a moonlit evening, and comes upon a cave, wherein a small boat floats on the water, tethered to a willow tree. On a whim, he decides to jump into the boat and steer it out on the lake, although guilt over his theft soon begins to interfere with his boyish enjoyment, leaving him in a confused, ambivalent state of "troubled pleasure" (line 389). Looking behind as he exits the cave, he sees "a rocky Steep" rise up "[a]bove the cavern of the Willow tree" (lines 394-395). The speaker, eager to peer further into the unseen, fixes his attention upon the top of the cliff, "the bound of the horizon," behind which he can make out "nothing but the stars and the grey sky" (lines 399-400). Then, as he drifts further away from the cave, a second, much larger cliff suddenly rises up behind the rocky steep:

> And, as I rose upon the stroke, my Boat
> Went heaving through the water, like a Swan;
> When from behind that craggy Steep, till then

> The bound of the horizon, a huge Cliff,
> As if with voluntary power instinct,
> Uprear'd its head. I struck, and struck again,
> And, growing still in stature, the huge Cliff
> Rose up between me and the stars, and still
> With measur'd motion, like a living thing,
> Strode after me. With trembling hands I turn'd,
> And through the silent water stole my way
> Back to the Cavern of the Willow tree.
> […] and after I had seen
> That spectacle, for many days, my brain
> Work'd with a dim and undetermin'd sense
> Of unknown modes of being; in my thoughts
> There was a darkness, call it solitude,
> Or blank desertion, no familiar shapes
> Of hourly objects, images of trees,
> Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
> But huge and mighty Forms that do not live
> Like living men mov'd slowly through my mind
> By day and were the trouble of my dreams. (*P* I, lines 404-427)

The unexpectedness of a second cliff interjecting itself out of nowhere between the first cliff and the stars gives it the appearance of some monstrous agency ("voluntary power instinct"), and as it grows in stature with distance, the overall impression created is one of pursuit. Terrified and chastened, the speaker retreats back to the cave, tethers the boat to the willow and heads back home in the dark.

Due to the conventional moral framing of this episode, some critics, such as Jonathan Bishop, have read the boat incident straightforwardly as a moral lesson: "[The speaker's] action is guilty; he has stolen the boat, and nature's reaction is correspondingly punitive" (Bishop 137). However, as the second half of the quoted passage makes clear, even as a child the speaker finds this experience to be troubling for reasons that go beyond mere fear of punishment. For days after the incident, he wrestles with a "dim and undetermin'd sense" of "unknown modes of being," suggesting that he is primarily grappling with the ontology of something previously unknown, of which his apprehension can only be "dim" and "undetermin'd" (*P* I, lines 419-420). Furthermore, this new revelation is perceived to be fundamentally at odds with visible appearances: in his new state of mind, the speaker experiences a "darkness," "solitude" and "blank desertion," in which "no familiar shapes of hourly objects," whether "trees," "sea," "sky" or "fields," can be discerned (lines 420-424). Instead, the new objects of his thoughts are "huge and mighty forms that do not live," but which nonetheless "like living men mov'd slowly through my mind / By day and were the trouble of my dreams" (lines 425-427). These "huge and mighty forms" are never identified, but in the next stanza, the speaker goes on to offer thanks to the "Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe" for imbuing the "forms and images" of his childhood with "everlasting motion," and allowing his childhood mind to “intertwine” his passions “not with the mean and vulgar works of Man, / But with high objects, with enduring things, / With life and nature” (lines 427-437). By implication, this would include the “forms that do not live” in the category of “life and nature,” although the use of paradox suggests that their relationship is dark and only obscurely understood by the speaker.

Understandably, the metaphysical undertones of this passage has made it the object of a wide range of interpretations; however, the apparent mysticism has often been read in metaphorical terms as instead masking a more limited epiphany about the subjective nature of experience. Geoffrey Hartman reads the passage as a revealing example of the speaker beginning to externalize his own growing powers of mind. According to Hartman, his mind’s “intense effort not to know its own separateness results in so forceful an attribution of its own energy to parts of nature that these appear endowed with independent life and vex the very power that has given them this life” (Hartman, *Wordworth’s Poetry* 88). Because “Nature [in Wordsworth] is a haunted house through which we must pass before our spirit can be independent,” Hartman concludes, sights of this kind are ultimately not valuable for their own sake, but only as aids toward the liberation of subjective experience (Hartman, “Nature” 123-124).[108]

Colin C. Clarke, on the other hand, reads the episode within a larger thesis about Wordsworth’s poetry as torn between the “simultaneous belief in an outside world that transcends us, and [the belief] that this world can somehow be brought within the compass of our own life without annulment of its externality” (Clarke 1-2). In Clarke’s view, the strangeness of the boat incident leads to a lingering feeling of derealization, in which the speaker briefly begins to doubt the existence of the external world altogether. “The sinister power of the language,” Clarke argues, “can largely be traced to an unstated meaning: viz. that the darkness hangs over the boy’s thoughts and the whole visible world […] The inner chaos has spread outwards and engulfed the entire imagery of nature” (56). Finally, a number of critics have read the passage through a psychoanalytical lens (Heffernan 259; Goss 154). Despite their differing conclusions, all of the above critics agree on one point: that the ‘cliff epiphany’ represents an encounter with some hitherto-unrealized potential in the speaker’s own mind rather than a genuinely mystical experience.

However, while the language used in this passage does accommodate a purely psychological reading of the incident, one must be wary of anachronistically imposing the demands of contemporary psychology on wording that seeks to evoke what W. J. Harvey has called “that shadowy region where psychological and metaphysical meet” (Harvey 209). There is a carefully maintained ambiguity throughout the passage that is trivialized if the mystical undertones are treated as merely metaphorical. The phrase "unknown modes of being" lends itself equally well to describing external entities (i.e. non-human ways of existing in the world) as internal states of mind (i.e. dimly-intuited new ways of being human). Similarly, the addition of the word "familiar" leaves it ambiguous to what extent all visible forms have actually deserted the speaker: it could mean either "no *familiar shapes* of hourly objects" (i.e. no physical shapes at all, leading to a general loss of familiarity) or "no *familiar* shapes" (i.e. the absence only of shapes that are recognizable). This level of ambiguity seems to deliberately impede all attempts to reduce the incident to a single, monolithic 'lesson', but easily facilitates a reading of the experience as positioned halfway between childish imagination and a brush with another reality.[109]

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[108] Richard W. Clancey argues along similar lines: “the emergence of threatening nature in the form of a looming mountain and its haunting possession of Wordsworth’s consciousness hardly bespeak his mind’s being ‘lord and master’ […] yet clearly it is. It is his imagination which has configured nature in this context as a judgmental force. It is not any ‘voice of conscience’ which reproves him for appropriating someone else’s boat; it is a mountain *he* has imaginatively endowed with judicial powers” (Clancey 141-142).

For the purpose of this thesis, however, it is sufficient to note that the speaker seems to apprehend something larger underneath the world of appearances, whose forbidding aspect is troubling because it violates the infant mind's expectation of an unseen correlated with love and wholeness. Thus, the cliff epiphany can be read as the counterpoint to the "mother" episode, refuting the simple assumption of the unseen as unconditionally kind and nurturing. This would explain why the cliff epiphany stresses the unfamiliarity and loneliness of its effect on the mind; it is "unknown" because it is no longer an encounter with a "kindred Soul," but something foreign and non-human (forms that "do not live"), and the severing of the intuitive connection between the speaker and a nurturing unseen induces feelings of "solitude" and "blank desertion" (*P* I, lines 418-427). Furthermore, whereas the previous empathic connection to a loving unseen spread through all perceptions and irradiated the entire object-world, the loss of this connection leads to a corresponding experience of perceptual alienation: a feeling that previously nurturing forms have become ghostly and de-realized now that the mind no longer knows exactly what underpins them. Thus, the general trajectory of Phase 1 is one in which the womb-like, unconditionally sustaining unseen is gradually displaced by something darker and more ontologically foreign, which requires the cultivation of new aesthetic faculties.

The incident that triggers the transition to the second phase is obliquely referred to in two different sections of Book II, and although it is never identified outright, David S. Miall suggests the death of the speaker's mother as the likely catalyst (Miall 247).[110] At some point later in the speaker's childhood, it is stated that "[t]hose incidental charms which first attach'd / My heart to rural objects, day by day / Grew weaker," while "Nature, intervenient till this time, / And secondary, now at length was sought / For her own sake" (*P* II, lines 203-208). A few lines later, the same change is announced in more dramatic terms:

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[109] The mystical reading may also explain why it is so troubling to the speaker. G. Wilson Knight, who reads the experience as "at once abysmal and transcendental," puts it well: "since 'familiar shapes' and natural 'images' are clearly at least half of the poet's, especially the nature-poet's, stock-in-trade, our passage constitutes almost an attack on poetry itself." (Knight 9).

[110] Wordsworth's mother died in March 1778, which would make the speaker seven years old at this time.

> […] now a trouble came into my mind
> From unknown causes. I was left alone,
> Seeking the visible world, nor knowing why.
> The props of my affection were remov'd,
> And yet the building stood, as if sustain'd
> By its own spirit! All that I beheld
> Was dear to me, and from this cause it came,
> That now to Nature's finer influxes
> My mind lay open, to that more exact
> And intimate communion which our hearts
> Maintain with the minuter properties
> Of objects which already are belov'd,
> And of those only. (*P* II, lines 291-303)

In other words, the second phase is inaugurated by the loss of certain unspecified "props" of the speaker's affections, in the long term causing "those incidental charms which first attach'd / My heart to rural objects" to grow weaker. This break prompted a reorientation of his interests from the somewhat arbitrary affective patterns forged by early childhood memories to a more disinterested appreciation of the content of his perceptions. However, this new interest was somewhat confusingly restricted to "objects which already are belov'd," making it less of a departure from than simply a refinement of earlier patterns of perception. In other words, the objects of interest were still things that he had bonded with in the first phase, although he could now engage with their properties more objectively, as opposed to merely responding to the residual emotion of habits laid down in early infancy. Most importantly, the second phase is characterized by an increasing self-sufficiency of the perceiving faculty – the "building" that still "stood, as if sustain'd / By its own spirit" – and which gradually shifts the speaker's attention from *what* is being perceived to *how* this perception is being processed by his mind. Thus, the second phase can be described as *a growing independence of the perceiving faculty, allowing it on the one hand to discern clear objects in the world more precisely, while on the other hand refining its capacity to discern unclear objects more sublimely*.

The first of these two abilities is described in the text as a dawning capacity to discern "transitory qualities / Which, but for this most watchful power of love / Had been neglected," which "left a register / Of permanent relations, else unknown" in his mind (lines 309-312). The same capacity, or more specifically its logical continuation, is rephrased a few lines later as the ability to discern "difference […] in things, where to the common eye, / No difference is" (lines 318-320). With regard to this capacity, it is the role of emotional investment in producing perceptual richness that is foregrounded: the “watchful power of love” does not merely enliven the speaker’s perception, but adds a sense of vividness that reshapes attention entirely, bringing details to the fore that the eye would otherwise not have been able to make out. The boundary between the perceived and the unperceived is very tenuous here: between the clearly seen and the definitely unseen there is a fluid layer of “transitory qualities,” “difference[s]” and “relations” that simply slip out of existence unless crystallized in the medium of the right enabling emotions.

The second ability was a “sublimer joy” which may seem like the diametrical opposite of the first, but which the speaker insists stemmed “from the same source.” This ability is described in the following terms:

> […] for I would walk alone,
> In storm and tempest, or in starlight nights
> Beneath the quiet Heavens; and, at that time,
> Have felt whate’er there is of power in sound
> To breathe an elevated mood, by form
> Or image unprofaned; and I would stand,
> Beneath some rock, listening to sounds that are
> The ghostly language of the ancient earth,
> Or make their dim abode in distant winds.
> Thence did I drink the visionary power.
> I deem not profitless those fleeting moods
> Of shadowy exultation: not for this,
> That they are kindred to our purer mind
> And intellectual life; but that the soul,
> Remembering how she felt, but what she felt
> Remembering not, retains an obscure sense
> Of possible sublimity, to which,
> With growing faculties she doth aspire,
> With faculties still growing, feeling still
> That whatsoever point they gain, they still
> Have something to pursue. (*P* II, lines 321-341)

Here, the attention is turned not to minute details, but to emotional states that cannot be correlated with sights – “an elevated mood, by form / Or image unprofaned” – and which can only be very imperfectly mediated through certain sounds. These sounds are positioned somewhere halfway between actual sound and mystical idea – “sounds that are / The ghostly language of the ancient earth” or else “make their dim abode in distant winds” – and are articulated so as to defy precise identification: when exactly does the ancient earth make sounds, and when do these sounds become ghostly? What does it mean for a mood to make its “dim” (a visual descriptor) abode in the sound of “distant winds”? Yet their specific nature or origin is beside the point; as the speaker says, the reason that he deems these moods “not profitless” is the “obscure sense / Of possible sublimity” stemming from the soul “remember[ing] how she felt, but what she felt / Remembering not.” The profit is contained in the refinement of the *how* at the expense of the *what*.

Compared to the end state of Phase 1, this is a comparatively non-mystical, even functionalist, mode of perception: the object is irrelevant, what matters is what the mind learns about itself from the incidental qualities of its perceptions. Perceiving indefinitely at this time is above all *educational*. At the same time, it is implied that this is a temporary development, attributable to the fact that the mind at present can intuit no object commensurate to the power that is being developed: the sublime object is telescoped into the future, with the mind at present having only objects at its disposal that are not “kindred to our purer mind / And intellectual life,” but valuable primarily as educational props.

These two growing abilities (clear vision and sublime vision) once again bifurcate the experience of reality into two layers, an interest in superficial qualities and a deeper attention to what cannot at present be seen, much like in Phase 1. However, the difference here is that they have changed in ways that attest to the increasing empowerment and liberation of the mind at the expense of the world in Phase 2, creating a sense of ambiguity about whether perception ultimately serves the interest of the mind or the external world. This sense continues throughout the later portions of Book II, which centers on the growth of a “plastic power” that increasingly “abode with me, a forming hand.” This power is situated somewhere between being an agent of the mind and a conduit to the world outside, with the scale currently, but precariously, tipped in favor of the latter: “at times” this faculty was “rebellious, acting in a devious mood, / A local spirit of its own, at war / With general tendency,” but most often it was “subservient strictly to the eternal things / With which it commun’d” (*P* II, lines 381-387). At all times, however, even when its vision was coextensive with objective reality, it served as an “auxiliar light” which “bestow’d new light” on sights and sounds in nature, and this mind-created light is stated to be the source of speaker’s love of nature: “Hence my obeisance, my devotion hence / And hence my transport” (lines 388-395). In other words, while the “auxiliar light” remains in a deferential truce with reality, it casts a light of its own on all things, a light which the speaker at present values more than the things themselves. Even in a passage where the world is described as having the upper hand, the scale seems to be secretly tipping in the other direction.

A deeper ambiguity is struck a few lines later, where the speaker once again pays tribute to the newly awakened faculty of emotionally-augmented perception: “that interminable building rear’d / By observation of affinities / In objects where no brotherhood exists / To common minds” (lines 402-405). Here, the speaker once again suggests that the emotional life of things observed is a projection of the mind, describing how “[t]o unorganic natures I transferr’d / My own enjoyments,” thus “coercing all things into sympathy,” the verb ‘coerce’ suggesting a measure of forcible, violent manipulation of something dead and unyielding, almost a form of aesthetic necromancy (lines 409-411). However, in the next passage, the source is identified as “Nature and her flowing soul”:

> […] Thus did my days pass on, and now at length
> From Nature and her overflowing soul
> I had receiv'd so much that all my thoughts
> Were steep'd in feeling; I was only then
> Contented when with bliss ineffable
> I felt the sentiment of Being spread
> O'er all that moves, and all that seemeth still,
> O'er all, that, lost beyond the reach of thought
> And human knowledge, to the human eye
> Invisible, yet liveth to the heart […] Wonder not
> If such my transports were; for in all things
> I saw one life, and felt that it was joy.
> One song they sang, and it was audible,
> Most audible then when the fleshly ear,
> O'ercome by grosser prelude of that strain,
> Forgot its functions, and slept undisturbed. (*P* II, lines 415-434)

The similarities to the visionary scenes in "Tintern Abbey" are significant: in both cases, a suspension first of the senses, then of thought itself, leads to a powerful experience of heightened immateriality. As in "Tintern Abbey," there is a progress of immaterialization: "all that moves" leads to "all that seemeth still," which in turn leads to "lost beyond the reach of thought / And human knowledge, to the human eye / Invisible, yet liveth to the heart." Furthermore, the "sentiment of Being" is felt most powerfully when the "fleshly ear" "forgot its functions, and slept undisturbed," echoing the description of the speaker in "Tintern Abbey" as "laid asleep in body" and seeing with an "eye made quiet by the power of joy" ("TA," lines 45-48). Interestingly, the passage also suggests a potential awareness of, and acknowledgement of, Coleridge's criticism of the "Tintern Abbey"-visions, with "[t]o unorganic natures I transferr'd / My own enjoyments" closely resembling Coleridge's critique of "seeing into the life of things" as the mind's confusion between an image and its own emotional attachment to the image.[111] However, the way in which the passage finds refuge in an embrace of the "one life" obscures Book II:s otherwise pervasive uncertainty about whether the mind or nature is in charge, making it fundamentally evasive on this main point.

Thus far, apart from being occasionally addressed, Coleridge himself has been mostly absent from *The Prelude,* suggesting that his presence was not particularly integral to the original 1799 version (which ends with Book II), and only received his later prominent role in the 1805 revision. However, Book II concludes with a well-wishing for his friend that would have formed the concluding paragraph of the original poem ("Fare thee well! / Health, and the quiet of a healthful mind / Attend thee!" (lines 479-481), but which in the 1805 version is left somewhat stranded in what is now a much longer work. This section also implicitly justifies Coleridge's absence by stating that Coleridge's urban upbringing would have given his childhood a somewhat different cast ("Thou, my Friend! wert rear'd / In the great City, 'mid far other scenes"; lines 466-467). Differences in formative experiences notwithstanding, however, the speaker concludes that the two of them have arrived at the same destination through different pathways ("But we, by different roads at length have gain'd / The self-same bourne"), so that Coleridge ended up becoming "the most intense of Nature's worshippers" and "in many things my Brother" (lines 476-477). From Book III and onwards, these different pathways begin to converge.

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[111] Discussed in chapter 1 on pages 76-77, and in chapter 5 on page 209.

The Prelude, Books III-VIII

The five-year gap chronological gap between the writing of Books II and III, which has left a number of tonal and thematic traces in the poem, appropriately coincides with a set of major changes in the speaker's life. Books III-VI centers on the speaker's uneven attempts to adapt to life as a student at Cambridge: a life that he ultimately rejects as foreign to his inner self. Above all, Cambridge breaks his ties to nature: here, the harmonious humming of bees finds only a lacking substitute in the "humming sound" of "college kitchens," "with shrill notes / Of sharp command and scolding intermix'd" (*P* III, lines 47-50). In place of birdsong and running rivers, the predominant sounds are "Trinity's loquacious clock" and "[h]er pealing organ," while the view from his window is of a Gothic antechapel, where the statue of Newton stands brooding like a monument to disconnected introversion.[112] However, the unfamiliarity of this new world gives it a shimmer of unreality that allows the speaker to retain some mental independence: here, "I was the Dreamer, they the Dream" (line 28).

In the early stages of Phase 3, the speaker is torn between the pleasure of novelty, of roaming "delighted, through the motley spectacle," and recurring "melancholy thoughts," "a feeling that I was not for that hour, / Nor for that place" (lines 28-29, 75-81). However, this initial grace period soon gives way to a need to reclaim what has been lost, as the speaker's mind eventually returns "as if with a rebound […] Into its former self" (lines 96-97). At first, his attempts to return to Phase 2 seem promising: venturing into the nature that surrounds his new home, he finds that his separation from "shapes sublime" is being compensated for with a new understanding of his own "powers and habits." Now the speaker can "spread [his] thoughts with a wider creeping," feeling "incumbences more awful" and "visitings / Of the upholder of the tranquil Soul / Which underneath all passion lives secure / A steadfast life" (*P* III, lines 101-118). However, by the time he returns to the Lake

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[112] The 1805 version identifies him simply as "Newton, with his prism and silent face," while the 1850 version adds the more famous line: "the marble index of a mind forever / Voyaging through strange seas of thought, alone" (*P1850* III, lines 63-64).

District for his summer vacation, it becomes clear that an irreversible change has taken place. An "inner falling-off" has occurred within him: "[s]omething there was about me that perplex'd / Th' authentic sight of reason, press'd too closely / On that religious dignity of mind, / That is the very faculty of truth (*P* IV, lines 295-298). Instead, his mental habits slowly begin to resemble what he takes to be the mood of Cambridge: where there had previously been "deep quiet and majestic thoughts," now there is only "empty noise," "superficial pastimes," "forced labor" and "forced hopes," and – "worse than all" – "a treasonable growth of indecisive judgments that impair'd and shook the mind's simplicity" (*P* III, lines 210-216).

On the other hand, Cambridge gives the speaker the opportunity to look around for alternative paths to the experience of communion that he previously received only through the senses. In "geometric science" he finds an "image not unworthy of the one / Surpassing Life, which out of space and time, / Not touched by welterings of passion, is / And hath the name of God" (*P* VI, lines 154-158). As with the unseen, the speaker gravitates toward geometry because its abstract forms posits something deeper than physical reality, and offers a refuge from thoughts and images alike: "Mighty is the charm / Of those abstractions to a mind beset / With images, and haunted by itself" (*P* VI, lines 178-180). Unlike the unseen, however, geometry points inward, toward a wholly psychological world – "an independent world / Created out of pure intelligence" – foreshadowing the troubles that these nascent interests will give rise to in Phase 6 (*P* VI, lines 186-187). Such minor awakenings aside, however, Cambridge is a time when "imagination slept" and the "under soul" was "lock'd up in such a calm, / That not a leaf of the great nature stirr'd" (*P* III, lines 260-261, 539-541). Thus, if Phase 3 is taken to encompass the entirety of the speaker's time at Cambridge, it can be summarized it as *a reduced attention to the deeper substrates of perception, punctuated by minor intellectual awakenings and brief, largely unsuccessful attempts to return to Phase 2.*

The experience of Cambridge as a stultifying, sense-depriving environment is one that the speaker recognizes that Coleridge would have shared, and it is on the basis on this commonality that the poem's addressee now enters the poem. Reflecting on the stunting effects of modern education, which makes of each boy "a dwarf Man" or "the noontide shadow of a man complete" (*P* V, lines 294-297), the speaker makes an exception for children who are saved from this fate by their rich and varied childhood reading, a category that includes Coleridge and himself.[113] No parental guidance is needed to guide those children to the right books: thanks to the workings of a "gracious Spirit," children who are free to follow their own inclinations can find the intellectual sustenance they need by simply following their own unconscious impulses, which direct "those to works of love / Who care not, know not, think not what they do" (*P* V, lines 516-520).[114] Later in life, when the glory period of childhood reading gives way to a time of "stinted powers" and "meagre vassalage," it yields a compensatory gift in the form of a lifelong ability to connect deeply with language, which is celebrated as the primary repository for transcendent feeling in adulthood, when "[v]isionary Power / Attends upon the motions of the winds / Embodied in the mystery of words" (lines 619-621). Thus, whereas in Book II Wordsworth and Coleridge were divided by virtue of (respectively) their rural and urban upbringings, Book V establishes a deeper form of shared ancestry in the fictional worlds they both inhabited, and the lifelong linguistic affinity that grew out of these experiences.

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[113] "Where had we been, we two, beloved Friend, / If we, in lieu of wandering, as we did, / Through heights and hollows, and bye-spots of tales / Rich with indigenous produce […] Had been attended, follow'd, watch'd, and noos'd, / Each in his several melancholy walk / String'd like a poor man's Heifer, at its feed / Led through the lanes in forlorn servitude[?]" (*P* V, lines 234-241).

Furthermore, the speaker seems over-eager to incorporate Coleridge within the action of the poem, even though the section in question precedes their actual acquaintance: although "we had not seen thee at that time," "a power is on me and a strong / Confusion, and I *seem* to plant thee there" (*P* VI, lines 246-249, italics mine). Whatever the ultimate source of this "Confusion," it soon becomes clear that the speaker *wishes* that they had met at Cambridge, because it would have given him the opportunity to avert his friend's subsequent misfortunes:

> […] Oh! it is a pang that calls
> For utterance, to think how small a change
> Of circumstances might to Thee have spared
> A world of pain, ripen'd ten thousand hopes
> For ever wither'd. Through this retrospect
> Of my own College life I still have had
> Thy after sojourn in the self-same place
> Present before my eyes […] Not alone
> Ah! surely not in singleness of heart
> Should I have seen the light of evening fade
> Upon the silent Cam, if we had met,
> Even at that early time; I needs must hope,
> Must feel, must trust, that my maturer age,
> And temperature less willing to be mov'd,
> My calmer habits and more steady voice
> Would with an influence benign have sooth'd
> Or chas'd away the airy wretchedness

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[114] Just like Books I and II bear the marks of Wordsworth's thinking during the "Tintern Abbey" period, so Books III and onward are unmistakably the product of the 1802-1807 timeframe in which they were composed. This is especially evident in the sixteenth stanza of Book V, which briefly restates the argument of "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" within the context of childhood reading. In this passage, the speaker asserts that "our simple childhood sits upon a throne / That hath more power than all the elements. / I guess not what this tells of Being past, / Nor what it augurs of the life to come; / But so it is" (*P* V, lines 531-536). Here, the fluid transition from the wisdom of childhood to a dim suspicion of a mysterious, unknowable "Being past" that may constitute its source marks its ideas as contemporaneous with afterglow poems like the "Ode" and "To H. C."

That batten'd on thy youth… (*P* VI, lines 292-326)

Despite the degree of concern expressed in these lines, however, they are followed by a qualifier that significantly undercuts their urgency: "But thou hast trod, / In watchful meditation thou hast trod / A march of glory, which doth put to shame / These vain regrets" (lines 327-329). There is a clear contradiction between the anxious tenor of the paragraph as a whole and the abrupt backtracking that follows it: why does the speaker "needs must hope" that it was within his power to rescue his friend, if Coleridge's accomplishments since then have rendered such regrets "vain"? Furthermore, if Coleridge has since embarked on a "march of glory," what exactly were the "ten thousand hopes / For ever wither'd"? One interpretation is that the speaker is affirming Coleridge's self-diagnosis in "Dejection: An Ode," with the prospect of a philosophical career (the "march of glory") serving as compensation for the breakdown of his ability to derive emotional meaning from his perceptions. In that case, however, it arguably diminishes, even belittles, the sentiment of Coleridge's poem, in its attempt to put an optimistic spin on what "Dejection" positioned as a debilitating crisis. The resulting impression is that of poetic resolution elevated over coherent advice, and of the poem aspiring to consolation as a poetic *genre* rather than to the type of direct personal address that it closely resembles.[115]

The impression of public performance is heightened by the heavily intertextual diagnosis that is offered of his friend's dilemma, overlapping as it does with various passages in Coleridge's conversation poems (this is a "Coleridge" that many readers will recognize without knowing him). Coleridge is addressed as one raised amid the "cloisters" of London, who, "yet a liveried School-Boy, in the depths / Of the huge City, on the leaded Roof / Of that wide Edifice, thy home and School, / Wast used to lie and gaze upon the clouds / Moving in Heaven" (lines 275-280), a portrait readily recognizable as the speaker in "Frost at Midnight," "reared / In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim," and who "saw nought lovely but the sky and stars" (Coleridge, "Frost" lines 51-53).[116] Moreover, Coleridge's interests are referred to as "subtle speculations, toils abstruse / Among the Schoolmen, and platonic forms /

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[115] Here, I want to clarify that I do not mean that Wordsworth was using his friend to win the approval of the reading public (after all, the 1805 *Prelude* was never published, and the 1850 version excised the most personal parts of the address to Coleridge). What I mean by "public performance" is something more akin to prioritizing aesthetic effect over accuracy, so that the rhetoric of consolation is used with an eye to what will make for the best possible poem.

[116] While acknowledging the nod to "Frost at Midnight," Frank McConnell has suggested *Paradise Lost* as the original source of the motif altogether: "As one who long in populous City pent, / Where Houses thick and Sewers annoy the Aire, / Forth issuing on a Summers Morn to breathe / Among the pleasant Villages and Farmes / Adjoynd, from each thing met conceaves delight, / The smell of Grain, or tedded Grass, or Kine" (Milton, *Paradise Lost* IX, lines 445-450; McConnell 46). In a poem consciously modeled after *Paradise Lost*, the decision to use a Coleridge intertext that also contains the appropriate Miltonic echoes adds yet another dimension of poetic performance to what on the surface seems like a personal address.

Of wild ideal pageantry […] The self-created sustenance of a mind / Debarr'd from Nature's living images, / Compell'd to be a life unto itself" (lines 308-314), an echo of "Dejection: An Ode," where the speaker is forced "haply by abstruse research to steal / From my own nature all the natural man," till "that which suits a part infects the whole" (Coleridge, lines 89-92). It is not impossible that Coleridge habitually used these phrases and images to describe his own predicament, so that what looks like poetic correspondence may be merely fidelity to Wordsworth's and Coleridge's real-life conversations. Nonetheless, the impression remains that this at least in part a performed kindness: this is Wordsworth responding to the speaker[s] of "Frost at Midnight" and "Dejection: An Ode" first, and Coleridge the man second.

In the section where the speaker discusses his acquired taste for melancholy, picked up during his student days, Coleridge is not directly addressed, yet there is a subtly moralizing tone that suggests an educational parallel. Admittedly, the speaker describes his own melancholy as half-cultivated – "A melancholy from humours of the blood / In part, and partly taken up […] A treasur'd and luxurious gloom, of choice / And inclination mainly, and the mere / Redundancy of youth's contentedness" (lines 192-198) – making it categorically different from the "world of pain" that Coleridge would have been on the cusp of at the same age (line 295). In fact, the speaker's melancholy manifests itself mostly as a change in aesthetic tastes: a preference for "a pensive sky, sad days, and piping winds," for "twilight more than dawn, Autumn than Spring" (lines 193-195).[117] It is possible that there is a hint of a reprimand to Coleridge in these lines, with the speaker demonstrating the right way to confront the beginnings of depression in adolescence, and consequently how he avoided becoming like Coleridge. At the same time, the passage can also be seen to establish commonality between Wordsworth and Coleridge, with the former reassuring the latter that he has had experiences that Coleridge might recognize. Interestingly, the 1850 *Prelude* adds two lines which give the passage a blunt, moralizing finish ("Yet why take refuge in that plea? – the fault, / This I repeat, was mine; mine be the blame"; *P1850* VI, lines 188-189), whereas the version personally addressed to Coleridge ends with lines that imply that the speaker's temperament was such that he may have fallen prey to such experiences anywhere ("without regard / To Duty, might have sprung up of itself / By change of accidents, or even, to speak / Without unkindness, in another place"; *P* VI, lines 205-207). Without the 1850 lines, the passage becomes more intimate, conspiratorial: a non-judgmental confession of vice to someone whom the speaker suspects will understand.

The main development in Phase 3, the parallel development of sensory disillusionment and intellectual growth, only intensifies in the next period of the speaker's life, which is also demarcated by a change in environment: from Cambridge first to France, then to London. Phase 4 can be described as *a prolonged period of muted perceptions, which is paralleled by a greater sense of the unknowability of the reality that is increasingly inaccessible to the senses*.

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[117] John Milton's presence hangs heavy over the Cambridge books: there is a scene in which the speaker drinks to Milton's memory in the room where his idolized poet once lived, and there are linguistic echoes of Milton's "Il Penseroso" scattered through this section (as noted by Owen, "Echoes," 6). Thus, there is also the possibility that consciously cultivating the melancholic *penseroso* mood may have been a waystation on Wordsworth's following in the footsteps of Milton.

The transition occurs gradually, beginning with the speaker's first visit to France. While this section contains two of the most thoroughly critically-dissected passages in the poem, it does not, arguably, constitute a radical break with what has come before: instead, it intensifies the thwarted attempts to return to childhood perception which punctuated Phase 3, and prefigures the sensory self-abnegation to be experienced in London. The famous episode of the crossing of the Alps centers on the theme of disappointed expectation. First, there is the discovery that the long-awaited sight of Mont Blanc is not adequate to the "living thought" that the travellers had carried in their minds beforehand, so that they "griev'd / To have a soulless image on the eye / Which had usurp'd upon a living thought / That never more could be" (*P* VI, lines 452-456). While this disappointment is compensated for when the "wondrous Vale / Of Chamouny did, on the following dawn […] make rich amends," a deeper and more profound disappointment shortly follows (lines 452-460). This occurs when the travellers, bracing themselves for a revelatory experience upon completing their crossing, are anticlimactically informed by a local peasant that they had already crossed the Alps some time ago without knowing it.

The easiest way to interpret the disappointment that follows seems, as hyperbolic as it appears, to be one of shaken faith in the idea of sensory experience as overlapping with a divine plan. Namely, where is the 'numinous' aspect in a reality that is so uncooperative with the mind as to deliver such an anticlimactic bait-and-switch? Once again, some form of compensation is needed, and this time, it occurs in a sharp turn toward immateriality. This appears first in an extended apostrophe to Imagination:

> Imagination! lifting up itself
> Before the eye and progress of my Song
> Like an unfather'd vapour; here that Power,
> In all the might of its endowments, came
> Athwart me; I was lost as in a cloud,
> Halted, without a struggle to break through.
> And now recovering, to my Soul I say
> I recognize thy glory; in such strength
> Of usurpation, in such visitings
> Of awful promise, when the light of sense
> Goes out in flashes that have shewn to us
> The invisible world, doth Greatness make abode,
> There harbours whether we be young or old.
> Our destiny, our nature, and our 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.
> The mind beneath such banners militant
> Thinks not of spoils or trophies, nor of aught
> That may attest its prowess, blest in thoughts
> That are their own perfection and reward,
> Strong in itself, and in the access of joy
> Which hides it like the overflowing Nile (*P* VI, lines 525-548)

These lines, in turn, are followed immediately by the famous Simplon Pass episode, the meaning of which have been debated by critics at great length:

> The dull and heavy slackening that ensued
> Upon those tidings by the Peasant given
> Was soon dislodg'd; downwards we hurried fast,
> And enter'd with the road which we had miss'd
> Into a narrow chasm; the brook and road
> Were fellow-travellers in this gloomy Pass,
> And with them did we journey several hours
> At a slow step. The immeasurable height
> Of woods decaying, never to be decay'd,
> The stationary blasts of water-falls,
> And every where along the hollow rent
> Winds thwarting winds, bewilder'd and forlorn,
> The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky,
> The rocks that mutter'd close upon our ears,
> Black drizzling crags that spake by the way-side
> As if a voice were in them, the sick sight
> And giddy prospect of the raving stream,
> The unfetter'd clouds, and region of the heavens,
> Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light
> Were all workings of one mind, the features
> Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree,
> Characters of the great Apocalypse,
> The types and symbols of Eternity,
> Of first and last, and midst, and without end. (lines 549-572)

Unlike earlier epiphanic moments, such as the boat-episode in Book I or the climbing of Mount Snowdon in Book XIII, the Simplon Pass episode is almost completely self-contained. It is not described as a development or revolution in the speaker's thinking, but exists as a unique, rather cryptic response to the speaker's disappointment in his preceding experience. The apostrophe in lines 525-548, which digresses from the scene to seek refuge in the supremacy of "the invisible world," indicates a sharp turn into "Ode"-territory, with a renewed interest in the immaterial arriving as compensation for a defeat on the level of perception. However, in the Simplon Pass episode itself (lines 549-572), the poem returns to the present to celebrate the speaker's natural surroundings in transcendent, even seemingly apocalyptic, terms. Like “There was a Boy,” this episode was originally a separate poem, “The Simplon Pass” (1799), and so its enigmatic role in *The Prelude* may in part be a consequence of the fact that the price of repurposing a poem about such a specific experience was that it had to be inserted at an appropriate chronological moment in Wordsworth’s life (after the crossing of the Alps), or not be used at all. However, given that the arresting effect on the reader of including the passage can hardly have been unintentional, its role must of course also be grappled with as part of the overall vision of *The Prelude*.

Jonathan Roberts has given an excellent summary of the trajectory of the most influential critical readings of the Simplon Pass episode, beginning with Geoffrey Hartman’s interpretation of the episode as “displaced apocalypse,” by which the speaker’s mind retreats from a full-blown Blakean retreat into itself by attempting to bind itself back to nature. This was followed by M. H. Abrams’s reading, which read the episode as a characteristic effort by Wordsworth to effect a union between mind and world, and, finally, Alan Liu’s new historicist reinterpretation of the passage as displacement of historical reference (specifically Napoleon’s crossing of the Alps), so that the “apocalypse” effected is the mind obtaining freedom from historical reference (Roberts 363-368). Roberts, who contests all three readings in various ways, reads the passage as a “humanized” understanding of apocalypse which departs from the violent, allegorical apocalypses which predominated in the writings of the 1790s. Instead, the Simplon apocalypse is one that “entails no sudden transformation of history,” in which there are no secret meanings hidden in the objects, but which leaves everything as it is, “everyday and divine” (369-376).

My assessment is similar to Roberts’ in that the Simplon Pass “apocalypse” does not appear to entail a powerful swerve either toward the mind or the world. Instead, the passage seems primarily to be an attempt to find a convincing transcendent framing for a reality that has just been exposed as uninterested in accommodating the speaker’s high hopes.[118] Hence, the speaker begins to suspect the existence of a conflict at the heart of nature, one that his mind suddenly comes to visualize as a cosmic drama of opposites. This vision of nature is a roiling war between discordant qualities, “decay” contending with “never to be decay’d,” “tumult” with “peace,” “the darkness” with “the light” (lines 557, 567). The framing is one of forcibly opposed unity, as the discord becomes frozen into a kind of internally warring monism, where the seeming combatants are in fact revealed to be “features of the same face,” the very “types and symbols of Eternity” (lines 570-571). Thus, the rift is patched up, compensation is had, and the speaker can leave the Alps undisturbed by what could have been a severe crisis of perception.

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[118] Here, it is useful to also consider lines 711-741 in Book VIII, which were originally intended to precede the apostrophe to the Imagination (J. Wordsworth et al. 304n7). In both passages, the speaker attempts to forcibly impose a structure on a mass of discordant details which the speaker deems intolerable (see my discussion of this passage on page 182).

In London, once again, the speaker finds himself torn between the superficial pleasures of novelty and a more profound sense of alienation: a lopsided state of mind that gradually hardens into a kind of ethic of resignation. Now that he can look upon the "real scene" of London, the site of a thousand childhood fantasies, he experiences disappointment so strongly and frequently that he eventually picks up the curious ability to transmute his disappointment into "keen and lively pleasure even there / Where disappointment was the strongest" (VII, lines 139-142). The pleasure is no longer aesthetic, but ethical by virtue of being *anti*-aesthetic: a state of "courteous self-submission," with accurate, unembellished perception serving as a "tax / Paid to the object by prescriptive right," acknowledging each object as a "thing that ought to be" (lines 142-145). While there are shades of the late Wordsworth of the Yarrow poems here, he who resorts to half-convincing moral language when emotion is lacking, there is also a self-diagnosed need for mental diversification: between the respective states of being in and out of touch with nature, there must be a baseline where emotion gives way to discipline and accuracy.

At the same time, however, the very qualities that alienate the speaker from London life – its anonymity and fragmentariness – also occasionally have the opposite effect: when the complexity becomes too overwhelming, his mind retreats and begins to apprehend it like a blank. Thus, paradoxically, the sensory excess of the city yields associations similar to those that the speaker earlier derived from the unseen: the "distinctness which a contrast gives / Or opposition, made me recognize / As by a glimpse, the things which I had shaped / And yet not shaped, had seen, and scarcely seen, / Had felt, and thought of in my solitude" (lines 508-516). The following passage provides a detailed account of this transformation in action:

> O Friend! one feeling was there which belong'd
> To this great City, by exclusive right;
> How often in the overflowing Streets,
> Have I gone forward with the Crowd, and said
> Unto myself, the face of every one
> That passes by me is a mystery.
> Thus have I look'd, nor ceas'd to look, oppress'd
> By thoughts of what, and wither, when and how,
> Until the shapes before my eyes became
> A second-sight procession, such as glides
> Over still mountains, or appears in dreams;
> And all the ballast of familiar life,
> The present, and the past; hope, fear; all stays,
> All laws, of acting, thinking, speaking man
> Went from me, neither knowing me, nor known.
> (*P* VII, lines 593-607)

As in Cambridge, excessive anonymity leads to a dream-like derealization: the feeling of observing a "second-sight procession, such as glides / Over still mountains, or appears in dreams." However, unlike in Cambridge, this more profound derealization takes on some of the properties of a transcendent vision. There is a notable similarity to the visionary episode in “Tintern Abbey” in the parallel metaphors of burdensome cognitive weights being eased: there the “burthen of a mystery” and the “heavy and the weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world” was “lightened”; here, “all the ballast of familiar life […] went from me, neither knowing me, nor known” (lines 603-607). Whether this similarity is due to genuine experiential similarity or a repurposing of familiar poetic language for a new form of the ineffable, it remains a strong indicator that the speaker is groping his way toward the sense of perceptual wholeness that had begun to desert him in Phase 3.

This impression is heightened by the final stanza of Book VII, although here the means by which the speaker arrives at his experience of ‘oneness’ is stated to be something more conventional: a mnemonic pattern set in place during his rural upbringing. In the face of London’s “perpetual flow / Of trivial objects, melted and reduced / To one identity, by differences / That have no law, no meaning, and no end” (lines 702-705), the speaker retains an inherited “feeling of the whole” due to his early exposure to forms that expressed a contrasting sense of “simplicity and power”: mountains, hills and other natural scenery (lines 717-730). Hence, the speaker manages to find, amid the “self-destroying, transitory things” that surround him, “composure and ennobling harmony” (lines 736-741). While this path to transcendence runs through memory rather than, as in the preceding section, sensory overload, both experiences point toward a new and more remote conception of nature-communion which gradually emerges throughout Phase 4: one that exists in the heart rather than in the direct response to natural scenery.[119]

Despite a general trajectory back toward holistic vision, however, there are a few epiphanies in the fourth phase that instead incline toward the particularistic. Most prominently, there is an episode with a blind beggar:

> And once, far-travell’d in such mood, beyond
> The reach of common indications, lost
> Amid the moving pageant, ‘twas my chance
> Abruptly to be smitten with the view
> Of a blind Beggar, who, with upright face,
> Stood propp’d against a Wall, upon his Chest
> Wearing a written paper, to explain
> The story of the Man, and who he was.
> My mind did at this spectacle turn round
> As with the might of waters, and it seemed
> To me that in this Label was a type,
> Or emblem, of the utmost that we know,
> Both of ourselves and of the universe;

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[119] Whether this represents, as J. Robert Barth has claimed, a “stirring affirmation” of earlier patterns of thinking (Barth, “Feeding Source” 29), or in fact a gradual dismantling of them, remains a matter of interpretation.

> And, on the shape of the unmoving man,
> His fixed face and sightless eyes, I look'd
> As if admonish'd from another world.
> (*P* VII, lines 608-623)

Although the choice of motif might suggest a moral or political lesson, most critics have interpreted the curiously detached wording as suggesting a reflection of a private and epistemological nature.[120] J. Douglas Kneale summarizes it as a realization of the limitations of language, the thwarting of "a sentimental desire to have language become one with the objects it intends" effected by the humiliating inadequacy of language (the beggar's sign) to do justice to its in many ways unknowable referent (the beggar; Kneale, 357). If one accepts the assumption that knowledge is predominantly a product of language, this makes the label the boundary of conceptual understanding, and the inner world of the blind man the 'object' supposedly known, but in reality sealed up in a dimension that is inaccessible to the speaker's thoughts. This occasions an epiphany in the speaker that registers simultaneously as a profound reversal of something previously known or expected ("My mind did at this spectacle turn round / As with the might of waters"), and an encounter with something seemingly otherworldly ("on the shape of the unmoving man […] I look'd / As if admonished from another world"). The experience that revelations could still be had at the particularistic level in London may indeed count as a reversal; however, as yet another example of the speaker trying to transform the disconnectedness of urban existence into a vehicle for transcendent insight, the incident also feels very much of a piece with the overall trajectory of Phase 4.

While Coleridge is largely absent from the London section, the speaker's key insights in Phase 4 bear certain resemblances to the poems of Coleridge's early crisis period of 1799-1802. In "Lines Written in the Album at Elbingerode, in the Hartz Forest" (1799), Coleridge's speaker experienced the discovery that unfamiliar sights were largely impenetrable to the poetic mind as a philosophical crisis: it revealed to him that emotional response to perception was far more dependent on personal associations than he had previously assumed.[121] In contrast, Wordsworth's speaker treats his inability to connect with this mass of foreign and disconnected stimuli as a threshold to sublime experience: the 'life of things' is still there, but it must be accessed through more indirect means (either through perceptual blockage or via the memory). Alternately, as in the episode with the beggar, the mind is forced to realize the extent of its powers and capitulate before the unknowable, a realization which in itself registers as a brush with the transcendent (the feeling of being “admonished from another world”). In consequence, if *The Prelude* can be seen as Wordsworth’s chronicle of how he avoided becoming like Coleridge, there is a sense in which London functions as his Elbingerode: this is where he demonstrates his refusal to make his connection to the world contingent on his personal associations, and in consequence, the point where he avoids taking a sharp, self-destructive inward turn.

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[120] Some critics not so subtly judge Wordsworth for this, such as Jonathan Wordsworth: "the London beggar is completely an object, save that a label attached to his chest claims for him human attributes" (J. Wordsworth 9). However, a few critics have discerned an implicit moral message in the accepted epistemological reading. For instance, David V. Boyd calls it an "experiential confirmation" of the speaker's earlier reflections on his lack of connection to the people around him, but suddenly "purge[d] of its glibness, its ease," and turned to a "disturbing" effect (Boyd 630-631).

[121] See discussion of "Lines Written in the Album at Elbingerode, in the Hartz Forest" in chapter 1, pages 70-71.

The transition from Phase 4 to 5 is obscured slightly by being stuck in a book otherwise dedicated to “retrospect” (Book VIII), and because of the many temporal shifts, it is only near the end that it becomes possible to discern that Phase 5 overlaps with the later portion of the speaker’s time in London. In this phase, the speaker begins to mine his perceptions for poetic potential, resulting in a *gradual augmentation of perception with, and later subordination to, the interests and standards of the poetic imagination*. The immediate effect of this shift is a habit of reading poetic meaning into all sights and sounds, no matter how trivial: “the Elder-tree that grew / Beside the well-known Charnel house had then / A dismal look; The Yew-tree had its Ghost, / That took its station there for ornament” (VIII, lines 525-529). This change is felt to be a reinvigorating influence on the speaker’s relationship to nature, with fiction and reality cross-pollinating each other’s beauty: “Nature and her objects beautified / These fictions, as in some sort in their turn / They burnish’d her” (lines 523-525). However, he also admits that this over-enthusiastic poeticization of nature did not necessarily translate to great poetry: due to the combined effects of an unspecified “pain” and the “half-insensate impotence of mind,” worthy impressions were often imperfectly translated into poetic hyperbole (lines 536-538). For example, the sight of a widow frequenting her husband’s grave would swell into the image of a “Visitant the whole year through,” “wetting the turf with never-ending tears” and buffeted by “all the storms of heaven” (lines 533-541). Poetic truth during this phase knew no middle ground for the speaker: “the tragic super-tragic, else left short” (line 532).

Despite the speaker’s claim that nature and the poetic imagination beautified each other during this stage, Phase 5 contains the first indications of the speaker increasingly coming to prioritize artifice over reality. If in Phase 2, the “auxiliar light” of the imagination had remained “subservient strictly” to the objects themselves, in Phase 5 this faculty begins to assert itself over the sensory world: when reality interferes with the demands of poetic beauty, it is reality that invariably gives way. This can be seen in the extended reflection on the “sparkling patch of diamond light,” a memory whose origin would appear to predate the speaker’s time in London, but which is cited as part of the general development of Phase 5:

> There was a Copse

> An upright bank of wood and woody rock
> That opposite our rural Dwelling stood,
> In which a sparkling patch of diamond light
> Was in bright weather duly to be seen
> On summer afternoons, within the wood
> At the same place. ‘Twas doubtless nothing more
> Than a black rock, which, wet with constant springs
> Glister’d far seen from out its lurking-place
> As soon as ever the declining sun
> Had smitten it. Beside our cottage hearth,
> Sitting with open door, a hundred times
> Upon this lustre have I gaz’d, that seem’d
> To have some meaning which I could not find:
> And now it was a burnish’d shield, I fancied,
> Suspended over a Knight’s Tomb, who lay
> Inglorious, buried in the dusky wood;
> An entrance now into some magic cave
> Or Palace for a Fairy of the rock;
> Nor would I, though not certain whence the cause
> Of the effulgence, thither have repair’d
> Without a precious bribe, and day by day
> And month by month I saw the spectacle,
> Nor ever once have visited the spot
> Unto this hour. (*P* VIII, lines 559-583)

This example stands out for the way in which the mystery surrounding the central sensation (the patch of light) is presented as a fiction that will not bear closer examination, but which is assumed by the speaker to be more worthy of poetic treatment than the truth. Unlike the “flashes like the surface of a shield” in Phase 1, where the half-seen was taken to be a conduit into unknown worlds, or the “sublimer joy” in Phase 2, where it served to train the mind toward future experiences of sublimity, the value of the patch of light is simply that, by being only imperfectly seen, it gives rise to various fanciful interpretations (a “burnish’d shield,” an entrance to a fairy cave, etc.). Seeking to preserve this aura of enchantment, the speaker voluntarily abstains from exploring the cause, which he assumes to be mundane (“’Twas doubtless nothing more / Than a black rock […] wet with constant springs”). This expectation that reality will fall short of the mind’s own productions and must therefore be kept at arm’s length would have been foreign to the previous phases of the speaker’s development, but can be seen as characteristic of Phase 5.

The resulting full-scale rebellion of the “auxiliar light” can be seen as a direct result of the growing alienation from the sensory world that began already near the end of the second phase, and which grew stronger during the third and fourth phases. Thus, while the chronology-skipping subtitle (“Retrospect”) and the somewhat free-ranging structure of Book VIII can give the impression of some parallel, big-picture pattern of creative awakening, I would argue that it is more likely that the poeticization of reality is a distinct phase that follows chronologically upon the speaker's disappointment with London, and which leads directly into the hyper-rationalism of Phase 6. This is strongly suggested by the extended simile that compares the speaker's arrival in London to a traveler entering a vast cave, and where the fanciful interpretation of his surroundings enters as the final step in a three-step process:

> [1] As when a traveler hath from open day
> With torches pass'd into some Vault of Earth,
> The Grotto of Antiparos, or the Den
> Of Yordas among Craven's mountain tracts;
> He looks and sees the Cavern spread and grow,
> Widening itself on all sides, sees, or thinks
> He sees, erelong, the roof above his head,
> Which instantly unsettles and recedes
> Substance and shadow, light and darkness, all
> Commingled, making up a Canopy
> Of Shapes and Forms and Tendencies to Shape
> That shift and vanish, change and interchange
> Like Spectres, ferment quiet and sublime;
> [2] Which, after a short space, works less and less,
> Till every effort, every motion gone,
> The scene before him lies in perfect view,
> Exposed and lifeless, as a written book.
> [3] But let him pause awhile, and look again
> And a new quickening shall succeed, at first
> Beginning timidly, then creeping fast
> Through all which he beholds; the senseless mass,
> In its projections, wrinkles, cavities,
> Through all its surface, with all colours streaming,
> Like a magician's airy pageant, parts
> Unities, embodying everywhere some pressure
> Or image, recognis'd or new, some type
> Or picture of the world; forests and lakes,
> Ships, rivers, towers, the Warrior clad in Mail,
> The prancing Steed, the Pilgrim with his Staff,
> The mitred Bishop and the throned King,
> A Spectacle to which there is no end.
> (*P* VIII, lines 711-741; numerical division mine).

These lines were originally meant to precede the apostrophe to Imagination in Book VI, which explains why its function here feels similar to that of the Simplon Pass episode: to impose a structure upon a mass of seemingly discordant details (J. Wordsworth et al. 304n7). The first two steps illustrate the transition from the initial intoxication of the senses created by a perceived lack of boundaries (as true of a cave as of the disorienting complexity of a big city) to the exposure of the scene as perceptually ‘closed’ once the illusion of infinity has been dispelled, “in perfect view, / exposed and lifeless, as a written book” (line 727). Finally, the failure of perception leaves the door open for the imagination, which subsequently conjures up a “magician’s airy pageant” from the scene, complete with imaginary landscapes, warriors, bishops and kings (lines 728-741). Here, there is a direct connection between the sensory disappointments of London and the awakening of a new ‘poetic’ perception, suggesting to my mind that the latter is a discrete phase following upon Phase 4, rather than a more general pattern of development.

A second argument for the poetization of perception constituting a distinct phase is that it constitutes a logical transition between the sensory blockage of Phase 4 and the intellectualization of perception of Phase 6. This is because the increasing delegation of power to the “auxiliar light” of the speaker’s imagination is accompanied by a strong empowering of the self at the expense of its surroundings: “I sought not then / Knowledge; but craved for power, and power I found / In all things” (lines 754-756). In this equation, the direction of influence no longer flows from the world into the mind (in the form of knowledge), but from the mind out into the world in the form of an enlarged, externalized and diffused sense of self. The speaker describes the “Human nature unto which I felt / That I belong’d, and which I lov’d and reverenced” as “not a punctual Presence, but a Spirit / Living in time and space, and far diffus’d” (lines 761-764). While this experience of oneness sounds deceptively similar to the “one life” experienced in Phases 1 and 2, combined with the earlier mantra of self-empowerment, the “one life” of Phase 5 registers more clearly as a form of imaginative projection. Thus, what appears on the surface to be a worthy substitute for earlier feelings of ‘wholeness’ already contains the seeds of the colonization of perception by the mind that serves the basis of Phase 6.

The Prelude, Books IX-XII

So far, the most frequent catalyst for a change in the speaker’s attitude to perception has been a change in environment (from the Lake District to Cambridge, from Cambridge to London), and similarly, the dividing line between Phase 5 and 6 is made up of the speaker’s second visit to France in Books IX and X. The speaker’s main concern in this section is to account for, as well as simultaneously atone for and defend, his younger self’s attraction to the ideas of the French Revolution. Most pertinent for this thesis, however, is the way in which this reorientation of intellectual interest affected the speaker’s general cognitive-affective attitude to the sensory world. His “heart” “turn’d aside / From nature,” the speaker now began to apply the same standards of reason that prompted his political awakening to his former objects of affection, “dragging all passions, notions, shapes of faith, / Like culprits to the bar,” above all “demanding *proof*, / And seeking it in everything” (*P* X, lines 885-897). These exacting epistemological standards led to a gradual devaluation of the empirical world and its endless uncertainties, so that finally only "mathematics" was left as "the sole / Employment of the enquiring faculty" (lines 901-904). Phase 6, then, can be described as *a hyper-rationalization of perceptual reality, where abstract criteria predominate over intuition and deep feeling*.

The creative crisis incurred by this new way of thinking, and the speaker's eventual overcoming of it, is the main preoccupation of the last four books, and in many ways constitutes the 'climax' of *The Prelude*. The speaker describes this crisis as a self-imposed state of cognitive division ("strangely did I war against myself"), in which past ways of feeling and knowing are strenuously rejected in favor of new abstract ideals: "like a Monk who hath forsworn the world / Zealously [did I] labour to cut off my heart / From all the sources of her former strength" (*P* XI, lines 74-78). Spiritually no less than creatively, this leads to a hollowing-out of the world: "as by a simple waving of a wand / The wizard instantaneously dissolves / Palace or grove, even so did I unsoul / As readily by syllogistic words […] Those mysteries of passion which have made […] One brotherhood of all the human race" (lines 79-88). While "the life of nature" remains with him, so that he can still "scan" the "visible universe" "with something of a kindred spirit," this influence is diluted by abstract criteria: it "fell / Beneath the domination of a taste / Less elevated, which did in my mind / With its more noble influence interfere, / Its animation and its deeper sway" (lines 99, 115-120).

This is the framework that sets up the famous extended passage on the "tyranny" of the eye. This phrase directly echoes one that recurs in several places throughout Coleridge's later work (the "despotism of the eye"), and which he, in *Biographia* Literaria, defines as "a strong sensuous influence," under which "we are restless because invisible things are not the objects of vision; and metaphysical systems, for the most part, become popular, not for their truth, but in proportion as they attribute to causes a susceptibility of being seen, if only our visual organs were sufficiently powerful" (*BL1* 107-108). This concept (and its variants, including "sensuality") constitutes an important part of Coleridge's long-term critique of Wordsworth's treatment of perception, and is discussed at length in chapter 5. Thus, it seems not improbable that Wordsworth was already aware of this objection by Coleridge from previous conversations, and that he knew that proving his overcoming of eye-tyranny would be a primary challenge that *The Prelude* needed to overcome in order to win back Coleridge's adulation.

In Wordsworth's poem, the core problem is nominally divided into two different 'errors,' both of which lead to the same end result: a superficiality of vision more concerned with quantitative than qualitative perceptual value. The first error is the adoption of a certain acquired critical 'taste' (presumably for the picturesque), which interferes with his natural appreciation for nature. This taste is described as a "love / Of sitting thus in judgment," which gradually leads to a "comparison of scene with scene," a preoccupation with "superficial things," an overvaluation of "meagre novelties / Of colour and proportion," and a greater attention to "the moods / Of time and season" than to the deeper qualities of "moral power" and "the spirit of the place" (lines 155-164). The second error is "more subtle and less easily explain'd," yet "almost seems inherent in the Creature, / Sensuous and intellectual as he is," as opposed to the transitory influence of trends (lines 164-170). This is the error that the speaker identifies as "one / In which the eye was master of the heart":

> The state to which I now allude was one
> In which the eye was master of the heart,
> When that which is in every stage of life
> The most despotic of our senses gain'd
> Such strength in me as often held my mind
> In absolute dominion. […] my delights
> Such as they were, were sought insatiably,
> Though 'twas a transport of the outward sense,
> Not of the mind, vivid but not profound:
> Yet was I often greedy in the chace,
> And roam'd from hill to hill, from rock to rock,
> Still craving combinations of new forms,
> New pleasure, wider empire for the sight,
> Proud of its own endowments, and rejoiced
> To lay the inner faculties asleep. (*P* XI, lines 171-195)

On the surface, the sentiments described in this passage appear to be categorically different from the other errors that predominate in Phase 6. Specifically, perception that offers only "transport of the outward sense, / Not of the mind," and which "lay the inner faculties asleep" appears to be virtually the opposite of the overreach by the rational faculty that is otherwise the main topic of Book XI. However, these two errors – 'unthinking' and 'overthinking' – are in fact different expressions of the same problem of superficiality. In other words, a perceptual attitude preoccupied with surfaces could be seen as a possible result of the hollowing-out of the world by "syllogistic words" and fixed, schematic language.

Moreover, it is important to note that what takes precedence over mind in the tyranny of the eye is not the world of objects itself, but the surfaces created by "outward sense" (i.e. appearances). This is clear from the observation that nature summons all the five senses to counteract the supremacy of any one sense: in other words, the more precise, multi-sensory apprehension of 'things' in the world *undermines* the tyranny of the eye rather than contributes to it. Secondly, what characterizes eye-tyranny is not perception itself, but perception as *disconnected* from deeper mental or spiritual activity: the transport of the outward sense without the mind as co-traveler, and a resulting impression of the world that is "vivid, but not profound."[122] The end-result is the same as with the first error: a perception that is fundamentally quantitative rather than qualitative in its identification of meaning;

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[122] David P. Haney has argued along similar lines that it is sight detached from imagination that is the object of criticism here; "sight on its own is a tyrannical and immature faculty that must be transformed into imaginative 'vision'" (Haney 178).

an indiscriminate hoarding of "combinations of new forms," a perceptual imperialism that simply seeks to widen the "empire of sight," and the subsequent atrophy of the "inner faculties," now consigned to sleep.

Some critics, like W. J. B. Owen, have argued that the tyranny of the eye represents the 'eye-centric' transcendence celebrated in "Tintern Abbey," in effect turning Book XI into a disavowal of Wordsworth's poetic work of the *Lyrical Ballads* period. Here, Owen points to similarities in vocabulary between the two poems ("appetite" in "Tintern Abbey" paralleled by "hunger," "craving," "greedy" in Book XI; "no need of a remoter charm" in "Tintern Abbey" paralleled by "lay the inner faculties asleep" in Book XI), concluding that "Tintern Abbey" falls under the tyranny of the eye because it centers on experiences in which the mind is not "lord and master" (Owen 137-138, 143). In my view, there are some important differences between the "Tintern Abbey"-visions and the tyranny of the eye which need to be considered. For example, eye-tyranny in *The Prelude* is said to have created "vivid" but not "profound" perceptions, whereas the highly non-specific, immaterial language of "Tintern Abbey" suggests an experience that is certainly profound, but on no account vivid. Moreover, the speaker of *The Prelude* claims that he was rescued from eye-tyranny by the combined influences of Dorothy and Coleridge, which would appear to peg eye-tyranny as receding after 1796, and certainly by the time that he wrote the communion codas of "Tintern Abbey" in 1798. However, I agree with Owen that "Tintern Abbey" looms over this section of *The Prelude*: namely, I see Wordsworth as responding to what at this point he must have realized were *Coleridge*'s objections to those lines, so that what the speaker is effectively recanting is what *someone else* had begun to read into lines like "we see into the life of things." Thus, the extended discussion of the tyranny of the eye functions as Wordsworth's acknowledgement of his friend's critique, an alternative and corrective narrative of how he avoided the mistake in question, and finally an intention to reach a conclusion which will finally satisfy Coleridge. In doing so, Wordsworth arrives at the idea that the path out of eye-tyranny is to supplant vision as influenced by rationality to vision as subordinated to the imagination.

First of all, Wordsworth implicitly establishes the combined crisis of excessive rationalism and excessive attention to his senses as comparable to Coleridge's "dejection" crisis, establishing yet another commonality between the two. This is hinted at through the numerous echoes of "Dejection: An Ode" in this section, placing the two poems in direct conversation with each other. Just as Coleridge's speaker had complained that "I see them all [Nature's sights] so excellently fair, / I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!" ("D:O," lines 17-18), Wordsworth's speaker contrasts the "Soul of Nature! that dost overflow / With passion and with life" with his lack of appropriate affective response: "how feeble have I been / When thou wert in thy strength!" (*P* XI, lines 146-149). Moreover, Wordsworth even implies that his own crisis was less excusable than Coleridge's; it was not due to "stroke / Of human suffering, such as justifies / Remissness and inaptitude of mind" (which could be said about Coleridge's crisis), but the more self-inflicted error of "presumption," that of being "pleased / unworthily," stemming from the projection of "rules of mimic art" to things that are in fact "above all art" (lines 149-155). Moreover, by returning to the territory of "Dejection: An Ode," Wordsworth seems to be aligning his own message with a message that the speaker in "Dejection" had uttered in a state of crisis: "we receive but what we give" ("D:O," line 47), which, in Wordsworth's reading, becomes a far more positive and affirmative doctrine of the "spots of time."

The most important step in the transition from Phase 6 to 7 is the passage from eye-tyranny (quantitative perception) to its natural opposite: the philosophy of the 'spots of time' (qualitative perception). In this state of mind, the mind cultivates a relationship to *selected* experiences, which enter the mind as raw sense data but come to full fruition when matured in the memory under the influence of the creative imagination. Thus, through the peculiar alchemy of remembering leavened with misremembering, "memory," in Bennett Weaver's words, "becomes the substance of things unseen" (Weaver 559). The chief characteristic of a "spot of time" is the accompanying sense that "the mind / Is lord and master, and that outward sense / Is but the obedient servant of her will" (*P* XI, lines 269-273). Such moments, the speaker says, "are scatter'd everywhere," but are "most conspicuous" when they appear "in our childhood" (lines 274-277). Because it is the input by the mind that transforms an experience into a "spot of time," the most important determinant is not the sensory qualities of the experience, but rather the often accidental context in which the speaker encountered it.[123]

In the case of the first "spot," the memory of the girl, the pitcher, the pool and the beacon, it is the proximity in time to a preceding experience of fear (the sight of a murderer hung in iron chains) that imbues it with its particular tone of "visionary dreariness": taken on its own, the speaker admits that "[i]t was, in truth, / An ordinary sight" (lines 308-316).[124] Likewise, in the second "spot," the speaker's memory of waiting on a hill for his brothers to arrive, it is the complex combination of original feelings (sorrow following the death of the speaker's father, his "anxiety of hope" and "trite reflections of morality") that imbues the accidental details (the "single sheep" and the "whistling hawthorn") with the requisite meaning to create a spot of time (lines 346-389). Thus, the importance of emotional context to higher perception leads the speaker to a conclusion that would have had a familiar ring to his primary auditor: "this I feel, / That from thyself it is that thou must give, / Else never can receive" (lines 332-334).

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[123] As W. J. B. Owen argues, "[a] distinction must also be made between the spots of time and natural images, even though the effect of the two classes in recollection may be similar. The spot of time is an event arising by accident […] Natural objects contributed to the effect of all these episodes, but the objects had not been sought for their own sake" (Owen, "Despotic" 142-143).

[124] Full quote: "It was, in truth, / An ordinary sight; but I should need / Colours and words that are unknown to man / To paint the visionary dreariness / Which, while I look'd all around for my lost guide, / Did at that time invest the naked Pool, / The Beacon on the lonely Eminence, / The Woman, and her garments vex'd and toss'd / By the strong wind" (lines 308-316).

The fact that these lines are an almost verbatim echo of two lines from "Dejection: An Ode" – "Oh Lady! we receive but what we give, / And in our life alone does Nature live" (lines 47-48) – further substantiates the idea that the climax of *The Prelude*, i.e. the transition from Phase 6 to 7, functions as the core of Wordsworth's therapeutic advice to Coleridge. Here, he uses Coleridge's defeatist lament, uttered in a moment of crisis, that all meaning seems to come from within to support his own turn toward the mind as guarantor of meaning. In a sense, Wordsworth here requests Coleridge to do precisely what Coleridge feels himself blocked from doing (summoning up the requisite emotional investment in his perceptions to make them live). Likewise, the advice to nurture "spots of time" experienced mainly in childhood instead of trying to be transported in the present registers as curiously unhelpful, even disingenuous, in the light of Wordsworth's own portrait of Coleridge as someone deprived of a healthy rural upbringing.[125] However, the reorientation of perception toward memory and the past does allow the poem to meaningfully cast the two poets as fellow travelers in one respect: aging.

In addition to the echoes from "Dejection," Book XI contains numerous echoes of Wordsworth's own "Ode." As in that poem, the link between mind-sustaining experiences and the magic of childhood is taken as evidence for human existence emerging from an mysterious, possibly infinite "depth," with childhood the first discernible link in the chain ("[I] see in simple childhood something of the base / On which thy greatness stands"; lines 331-332). Due to his advanced age, the speaker's ability to distinguish this depth has grown weaker ("I see by glimpses now; when age comes on, / May scarcely see at all") and fragmentary, even contradictory ("the hiding-places of my power / Seem open; I approach, and then they close"; lines 338-339, 336-337). However, he retains his intuitive sense of a "new world" underneath the world of everyday perceptions, whose base is that "whence our dignity originates," "that which both gives it being and maintains / A balance, an ennobling interchange / Of action from within and from without, / The excellence, pure spirit, and best power / Both of the object seen, and the eye that sees" (XII lines 370-379). Here, Wordsworth appears to insist upon an interchange between mind and world, subject and object cooperating to produce higher perceptions, and such a goal remains paramount to the project, being front and center in its conclusion in Book XIII. However, such phrasing cannot disguise that what the trajectory from eye-tyranny to "spots of time" actually entails is a sharp swerve toward the supremacy of mind over world. Indeed, many critics have read the transition from eye-tyranny to the opposite ideal of the "spots of time" as, in effect, tilting the balance resolutely in favour of the mind over its perceptions. For example, Sybil S. Eakin claims that "[i]n the place of his faith in the active ministry of nature […] Wordsworth asserted, in 1805, the dominance of the mind" (Eakin 404), while Emily V. Epstein Kobayashi reads Wordsworth as "rebel[ling] against John Locke's theory that imagination is dependent on bodily sensate," tipping the scale instead toward introspection (Epstein Kobayashi 833). Likewise, Alan Richardson reads the overcoming of eye-tyranny as evidence of the poet's "active, even aggressive, approach to perception," and concludes that "every version of *The Prelude* celebrates power, portrays the mind mastering its environment, and valorizes the mind's active 'dominion'" (Richardson 18).

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[125] The advice becomes even more unhelpful if one accepts the claim, posed by a number of scholars, that the "spots of time"-motif builds on Coleridgean ideas. James P. Davis has argued that it may be inspired by the structural composition of Coleridge's conversation poems (Davis 70-84). Norman Fruman, who is critical of the use of this motif in the poem, calls it an "importation, doubtless via Coleridge, of an ill-understood concept from Transcendental Idealism," although he does not specify which concept (Fruman 13).

Nevertheless, when the speaker finally addresses his auditor at the end of Book XI, it is with a sense that they have regained a bond, even reached some sort of agreement. They are now fellow travelers, and that the end result will be of use to them both: "Thou wilt not languish here, O Friend, for whom / I travel in these dim uncertain ways / Thou wilt assist me as a pilgrim gone / In quest of highest truth. Behold me then / Once more in Nature's presence, thus restored" (lines 390-397).

The Prelude, Book XIII

The last book of *The Prelude* establishes the completion of the speaker's perceptual development through a 'spot of time' in which the full powers of his mind are active: the climbing of Mount Snowdon. This incident forms the basis of the reflections on the mind that conclude the poem, and therefore serves as a symbolic illustration of Phase 7, which can be summarized as *the awakening of the deepest faculty of the mind through interchange with sublime objects in the world, and a resulting awareness of the underpresence of the invisible world*.

In this episode, which takes place on a misty summer night, the speaker and his companion have just completed the ascent, and stand overlooking the thick layer of mist that blankets the landscape beneath them. The mist blots out most of the features of the terrain, hiding everything from the ridges of the hills (although their peaks are still visible) to the coast and the beginnings of the ocean, creating a symbolic analogue for a second world hidden beneath the veil of appearances.[126] However, farther out at sea, a "blue chasm" has appeared in the mist, through which the speakers can hear the roar of waters, giving an indication of what actually dwells under the deceptive covering:

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[126] The sense of a major numinous event is heightened by the number of linguistic echoes of the description of God creating the world from Book VII of *Paradise Lost,* as noted by W. J. B. Owen ("Echoes" 10). In Milton, the mountains' "broad bare backs upheave / Into the clouds" (crf. Wordsworth: "A hundred hills their dusky back upheaved"), while, immediately below them, "down sunk a hollow bottom broad and deep, / Capacious bed of waters" (crf. Wordsworth's "still ocean").

> […] and from the shore
> At distance not the third part of a mile
> Was a blue chasm; a fracture in the vapour,
> A deep and gloomy breathing-place thro' which
> Mounted the roar of waters, torrents, streams
> Innumerable, roaring with one voice.
> The universal spectacle throughout
> Was shaped for admiration and delight,
> Grand in itself alone, but in that breach
> Through which the homeless voice of waters rose,
> That dark deep thoroughfare had Nature lodg'd
> The Soul, the Imagination of the whole. (*P* XIII, lines 54-65)

In this passage, the qualities that Wordsworth habitually attaches to the unseen (sublimity, uniformity, transcendence) are joined by new descriptors that present it as more familiarly 'mind-like', essentially transforming it into a counterpart to the mind that perceives it. As in "Tintern Abbey," the unseen is inherently uniform: the "dark thoroughfare" unites the whole scene by serving as "[t]he Soul, the Imagination of the whole," and homogenizes the multitude of water-related sounds that passes through it into "one voice." It is also emphatically transcendent: the gulf in the mist is simultaneously the 'source' of the scene (its "Soul" and "Imagination") and distinct from it (a "breach" in its fabric), and the sounds that pass through it are said to be "homeless," signaling that invisibility in this metaphor stands in for the immaterial (i.e. that which does not have a physical origin or 'home'). Finally, it appears to have mind-like properties, an observation that is elaborated upon in the immediately following stanzas:

> A meditation rose in me that night
> Upon the lonely Mountain when the scene
> Had pass'd away, and it appear'd to me
> The perfect image of a mighty Mind,
> Of one that feeds upon infinity,
> That is exalted by an underpresence,
> The sense of God, or whatsoe'er is dim
> Or vast in its own being… (lines 66-73)

Although perhaps *The Prelude*'s clearest explication of what its speaker takes to dwell in the unseen, there are multiple ambiguities in this passage that has given rise to debate among critics. Firstly, while the language of Book XIII trends toward the idea of nature as a "genuine Counterpart" to the mind (line 88), it is an arrangement with curious implications. Most importantly, it seems to bifurcate nature into a 'conscious' and an 'unconscious', with the mind-like power distinct from an "underpresence," a "sense of God" and "whatsoe'er is dim / Or vast in its own being," an idea that does not occur anywhere else in Wordsworth's writings. Secondly, the quoted passage seems equally well to accommodate a reading of an ‘inward turn’, with the human observer seeing in the gulf the analogue of a self-sustaining mind, drawing its power no longer from an external reality, but from an internal “underpresence” that is identified with “whatso’ever is dim / Or vast in its own being.” This has given rise to a lengthy debate about whether the passage in question, and by extension Book XIII, actually positions the mind and nature as genuine counterparts, or merely offers up an extended metaphor for the growing domination of nature by the mind.

While numerous critics have accepted the ‘counterpart’-model, they tend to differ in their identification of what type of mind is being recognized in nature. John F. Danby has argued for a Kantian view, reading the passage as a comment on the relationship between the phenomenal world and its underpresence (the *noumena*), with the gulf in the mist constituting “a central nothingness umbilically connecting the finite given to the infinite giver” (Danby 106). David P. Haney has suggested a reversal of the maxim outlined at the end of Book II, so that the “what” is now once again prioritized over the “how,” reawakening the mind to the “otherness by which we are confounded, and which is only heard through tears in the fabric of vision” (Haney 186-191). Other critics, like Joshua Wilner, opt for a less conceptually precise model: although gravitating toward a literal interpretation of the counterpart-model, he suggests that more study is needed to uncover precisely what intersection of “perceptual” and (external) “physical processes” is being referred to here under the name of “Nature” (Wilner 30).

On the other hand, critics who argue that the Snowdon incident elevates the mind over nature typically acknowledge the counterpart-model as the ‘official’ lesson of the passage, and instead focus on ways in which the language appears to undermine itself. For example, Geoffrey Hartman admits that “its import, daring if taken literally, is that there exists an imagination in nature analogous to that in man” and “Wordsworth did take the experience literally,” and acknowledges that the episode only works as a repudiation of what has come before if it expresses something “which could not be laid to the fantasy of an excited mind” (Hartman, *Wordsworth’s Poetry* 184). However, because Hartman reads the argument of an active principle in nature as founded on a “sudden” change in the scenery (the silence of the scene intruded upon by the “ascent of the voice of the waters”), Wordsworth’s argument is, in his view, undermined by the fact that the ‘change’ in question is not a physical alteration but simply the result of a shifting attentional focus. Thus, he deems “Wordsworth’s greatest visionary sight” to be “based on the simplest kind of psychical error,” offering proof that “Wordsworth is of the mind’s party without knowing it” (184-185). While Hartman bases his analysis on the 1850 *Prelude*, which enlarges the role of the moon in the passage and thus accentuates the attentional shift more than the 1805 version, he arguably overstresses the importance of temporal change in the symbolic system established by the passage in both versions. As I see it, it is the synchronic relationship between the mist and the hidden ocean, as well as the mere fact that sounds are coming from the gulf, that are the operative symbolic qualities; the notion that the sounds ‘encroach’ upon a static scene is not particularly prominent, either in the description of the incident or in the speaker's reflection on it. In fact, the "suddenness" that Hartman attributes to the sounds from the gulf is not present in the descriptions of either the 1805 or the 1850 versions, both of which record them as simply emanating from a static feature (the gulf).[127] Thus, while I agree with Hartman that, as a whole, *The Prelude* (particularly in the transition from eye-tyranny to the "spots of time") leaves the door open to the domination of mind over world, I believe that the Snowdon incident represents a genuine case where the poem imagines an equal subject-object interchange.

Indeed, most critics seem to agree that the wording of the speaker's following reflections on the Snowdon vision suggests that the counterpart interpretation is being offered up as the 'official' lesson of Book XIII. What was exhibited in the vision, the speaker states, is a "Power" that is inherent in nature, and which constitutes a "genuine Counterpart" and "Brother of the glorious faculty / Which higher minds bear with them as their own" (lines 84-90). In nature, this faculty is identified as a shaping, recombining power whereby nature "moulds" the object-half of human perception, thereby imparting targeted lessons or inspiring particular feelings in the minds of human observers.[128] In man, it is identified as a portion of the imagination that can respond to the aforementioned power by "send[ing] abroad / Like transformations," thus collaborating with nature in creating powerful, poetically meaningful perceptions.[129] The result of the meeting of these powers is stated to be an equal interchange between mind and nature, by which the human mind is "quicken'd" rather than – as during the 'tyranny of the eye' – "enthralled" by "sensible impressions," and "made thereby more fit to hold communion with the invisible world" (lines 97-105).

Upon the basis of this reflection, the speaker announces the completion of *The Prelude*'s main objective, which has been the tracing of the development of the faculty of "Imagination": this, he states, has been "the moving soul / Of our long labour," as its stream has been traced "[f]rom darkness, and the very place of birth

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[127] 1805 *Prelude*: "and from the shore / At distance not the third part of a mile / Was a blue chasm; a fracture in the vapour, / A deep and gloomy breathing-place thro' which / Mounted the roar of waters…" (lines 54-58); 1850 *Prelude*: "All meek and silent, save that through a rift— / Not distant from the shore whereon we stood, / A fixed, abysmal, gloomy, breathing-place— / Mounted the roar of waters…" (lines 56-59).

[128] "…above all / One function of such mind had Nature there / Exhibited […] That domination which she oftentimes / Exerts upon the outward face of things, / So moulds them, and endues, abstracts, combines, / Or by abrupt and unhabitual influence / Doth make one object so impress itself / Upon all others, and pervade them so / That even the grossest minds must see and hear / And cannot chuse but feel" (lines 73-84).

[129] "…the glorious faculty / Which higher minds bear with them as their own. / This is the very spirit in which they deal / With all the objects of the universe; / They from their native selves can send abroad / Like transformations, for themselves create / A like existence, and, whene'er it is / Created for them, catch it by an instinct…" (lines 89-96).

/ In its blind cavern, whence is faintly heard / The sound of waters" (lines 165-168). He then proceeds to define Imagination as a type of synthesis of the mind's highest faculties: it is "but another name for absolute strength / And clearest insight, amplitude of mind, / And reason in her most exalted mood" (lines 160-163). Furthermore, Imagination is a necessary prerequisite for the "intellectual love" that facilitates the mind's emotional link to the world of its perceptions, from which "all grandeur comes, / All truth and beauty" (lines 146-149). The conclusion of a love-like sensation being the animating influence that awakens the higher qualities of the perceptual world is strongly reminiscent of Coleridge's conclusion in "Dejection: An Ode," where this feeling was called – as elsewhere in Wordsworthian-Coleridgean terminology – "Joy."[130] Thus, a direct line drawn from Imagination, carefully assembled over the thirteen books of *The Prelude*, and the "intellectual love"/"Joy" whose absence Coleridge had mourned in "Dejection," can be seen as simultaneously concluding the therapeutic strand of the poem, or at any rate as a statement that the limit of Wordsworth's assistance to his primary reader has been reached.

Appropriately enough, a statement to this effect appears a few lines later, suggesting that the last step in the development of Imagination is one that its auditor, like Wordsworth before him, must take on his own:

> Here must thou be, O Man!
> Strength to thyself; no Helper hast thou here;
> Here keepest thou thy individual state:
> No other can divide with thee this work,
> No secondary hand can intervene
> To fashion this ability; 'tis thine,
> The prime and vital principle is thine
> In the recesses of thy nature, far
> From any reach of outward fellowship,
> Else 'tis not thine at all. (*P* XIII, lines 181-190)

If, in addition to its commentary on the human condition, this passage is read as simultaneously addressing Coleridge, it provides perhaps the clearest example of the autobiographical endeavor being placed in service of a therapeutic goal. The tone of finality, implying that up until now a "secondary hand" has been in play, helping its reader along, creates the appearance of an altruistic goal having been reached, pointing toward a moral conclusion that feels larger than the poem itself.

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[130] Full quote: "And would we aught behold, of higher worth, / Than that inanimate cold world allowed / To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd, / Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth / A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud […] O pure of heart! thou need'st not ask of me / What this strong music in the soul may be! / What, and wherein it doth exist, / This light, this glory, this fair luminous mist, / This beautiful and beauty-making power. / Joy, virtuous Lady! […] is the spirit and the power, / Which wedding Nature to us gives in dower / A new Earth and new Heaven […] And thence flows all that charms or ear or sight, / All melodies the echoes of that voice, / All colours a suffusion from that light" (Coleridge, "D:O," lines 50-75).

In the final sections of the poem, the hierarchical relationship between speaker and addressee show signs of giving way, as though driven by a sense that a more equal relationship of mutual ‘helping’ will be needed to power the elevated creative partnership posited in the last stanza. The foundation for this development begins already in Book X, in which the speaker addresses Coleridge in terms that suggest that their separation has taken a psychic toll on him as well:

> To me the grief confined that Thou art gone
> From this last spot of earth where Freedom now
> Stands single in her only sanctuary,
> A lonely wanderer, art gone, by pain
> Compell’d and sickness, at this latter day,
> This heavy time of change for all mankind […]
> My own delights do scarcely seem to me
> My own delights; the lordly Alps themselves,
> Those rosy Peaks, from which the Morning looks
> Abroad on many Nations, are not now
> Since thy migration and departure, Friend,
> The gladsome image in my memory
> Which they were used to be. (*P* X, lines 980-995)[131]

This continues in Book XIII, where the speaker indicates that the last few years have been hard not just on Coleridge, but also brought “much sorrow” and “private grief” to the speaker (*P* XIII, lines 404-412). Furthermore, Coleridge’s role as actual ‘auditor’, and thus on some level a co-creator of Wordsworth’s insights, becomes increasingly foregrounded as the speaker refers to him as a “most loving Soul! / Placed on this earth to love and understand,” and credits him with awakening Wordsworth to the unity of all things, including the human element.[132] Furthermore, Coleridge is enlisted as someone whose approval is necessary to qualify Wordsworth for future labors, and as the one true reader of the poem, in whose eyes the work “shall justify itself,” since “it will be known, by thee at least, my Friend, / Felt, that the history of a Poet’s mind / Is labour not unworthy of regard,” and consequently “[t]o thee the work shall justify itself” (*P* XIII, lines 379-403).

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[131] Further heightening the therapeutic dimension of these lines, Reeve Parker has shown that lines 900-1028 of Book X, which are addressed to Coleridge, contain numerous thematic and linguistic parallels to “This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison” and “Frost at Midnight,” borrowing the former poem’s language of the “liberated prisoner” to project similar liberating characteristics upon the Sicilian landscape in which Coleridge now moves (Parker 244-249).

[132] ”…and thus the life / Of all things and the mighty unity / In all which we behold, and feel, and are, / Admitted more habitually a mild / Interposition, and closelier gathering thoughts / Of man and his concerns, such as become / A human Creature, be he who he may!” (*P* XIII, lines 246-252).

Finally, in the final two stanzas of Book XIII, speaker and auditor finally merge into one, as the poem looks into the future through the lens of their future partnership. Having established the two of them as fellow sufferers in the recent past, the speaker expresses the hope that this shared experience will be the foundation of their future reconciliation: "after the first mingling of our tears," he hopes that they will be able to derive mutual "pleasure from this Offering of my love" (lines 404-420). However, as he proceeds to rally Coleridge with the promises of future redemption in work – "Oh! yet a few short years of useful life, / And all will be complete, thy race be run, / Thy monument of glory will be raised" (lines 421-423) – the traditional dynamic of their creative relationship glints underneath the encouraging language. It is clear that it is primarily Coleridge that the speaker deems to be in need of a future 'monument of glory', yet the knowledge that the monument in question is *The Recluse* indicates that Coleridge's redemption is to be effected, once again, through serving as the enabler of Wordsworth's own productivity. However, the poem ends on a note of a shared poetic mission, with speaker and auditor becoming "United helpers forward of a day / Of firmer trust," and joint teachers of a new creed: "how the mind of man becomes / A thousand times more beautiful than the earth / On which he dwells" (lines 430-441).

Throughout the entirety of *The Prelude,* a crucial concern has been the formation of a mind capable of either directly or indirectly apprehending the unseen. However, on the basis of the preceding analysis, I would like to contend that the 'self' whose formation it traces is at least in part a social creation: it is a sensory-affective state of mind that requires a particular auditor's sympathetic attention to emerge, and it is animated (and elevated from mere egotism) by the intention and energy of reframing its own experiences as therapy and moral instruction for a receptive reader. By way of contrast, I will now look at a poem which is broadly similar on the level of ambition, but the circumstances of whose composition differ significantly.

The Excursion

The rough critical consensus that holds *The Excursion* to be inferior to *The Prelude* is, in fact, relatively recent. In the Victorian period, critical judgments were generally tilted in favor of *The Excursion*, in part because of a general Victorian preference for the later Wordsworth of the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, and in part because of the circumstances of publication: by the time the extensively-edited 1850 *Prelude* was published after Wordsworth's death, it was received largely as an afterthought to *The Excursion,* which had articulated similar ideas and feelings already in 1817.[133] In the twentieth century, however, and especially after Ernest de Selincourt's 1926 publication of the newly-restored 1805 Prelude, critical appraisals of *The Excursion* began to grow steadily less favorable. Modern scholars have called *The Excursion* a "falling off from Wordsworth's best" (Noyes 150), "prolix" and "laborious" (Patterson 153), "turgid" (Johnston 836), "ponderous" in its later books (Borck 183), and a "grave and plodding work" that "lacks dramatic interest" (Bromwich 110). Even a rare positive assessment like that of Richard E. Brantley drily qualifies its praise by admitting that the poem offers "scant humour" (Brantley 168). Although different explanations have been proposed for this aesthetic gap, the one that is most salient to the thesis of this chapter relates to their different contexts of composition.

Martin H. Greenberg has thoroughly outlined the intricate and in many ways co-dependent creative relationship between the two poets, as well as the effects of the breakdown of this relationship on their respective careers. Pointing to correspondence around the time of Wordsworth's aborted attempts to begin *The Recluse*, he concludes that "Wordsworth's dependency on Coleridge for writing 'The Recluse' was extreme," with the former soliciting "detailed written notes" from his friend in addition to their regular conversations about the poem's progress (Greenberg 72-73). During one of Coleridge's spells of illness in 1804, Wordsworth's letters carry a tone of self-interested desperation that borders on the callous, calling the news of his friend's illness "the severest shock to me, I think, I have ever received." "I would gladly have given 3 fourths of my possessions for your letter on the Recluse at that time," Wordsworth writes, demanding his sick friend "for heaven's sake" to "put this out of reach of accident immediately" (quoted in Greenberg 73). Greenberg describes the tone of the letter as "that of a policeman imploring an expiring victim to say who his attacker was before he dies," but moreover it bespeaks a feeling of being not entirely at home with the project he has begun (Greenberg 73). However, the requested notes never arrived; the courier died during the voyage from Malta, his luggage along with notes were burnt, and Coleridge never rewrote them (Moorman II, 19). Consequently, Wordsworth gave up hopes for *The Recluse* as a collaborative project, and instead wrote *The Excursion*, which deviated strongly from the work that "the two friends had once schemed about with so much excitement" (Greenberg 73).

Much like the absence of Coleridge's input hangs like a cloud over the composition of *The Excursion*, his absence as its addressee also leaves an imprint on its voice as well as its structure. If the intimacy and 'moral' dimension of *The Prelude*'s investigation of perception is strongly dependent on its conversational framing, *The Excursion* instead represents an attempt to stage a similar conversation within the poem itself. This decision, which simultaneously poeticizes and literalizes the element that had constituted *The Prelude*'s strongest indicator of a world outside of itself, can be seen to have paved the way for what has occasionally been cited as one of *The Excursion*'s main problems: its inability to bring the conversations that drive its philosophical arguments to life. More specifically, the multitude of characters masks what very often comes across as a conversation between characters that are not sufficiently distinguished from each other, and who speak in variations of the same voice.[134]

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[133] According to Richard Gravil, at the time of its 1850 publication "*The Prelude* was seen by its reviewers as a kind of rehearsal for *The Excursion*, to which, it was assumed, it added nothing of philosophical or poetic value" (Gravil 13).

As with *The Prelude*, large sections of the first two books of *The Excursion* were written much earlier than the rest of the poem, albeit with no epic design in mind (these sections tend to be dated to around 1798-1799). Thus, it is not surprising that Books I and II retread some of the territory of the speaker's reminiscences of his childhood in *The Prelude* (which were written at around the same time). However, the absence of an addressee in the form of Coleridge makes itself felt from the start, as does the effect created by switching the confessional autobiographical framing for a fictional 'internal' conversation, which conveys a strong sense of psychological duplication. The first character to be introduced is not the speaker, but a man reclining on the cool moss at the edge of "some huge cave," establishing a major difference from the opening of The *Prelude*: whereas the earlier poem began in movement and facing open vistas ("the earth is all before me"), its successor begins in stasis, even recline, and on the boundary of a prototypical symbol of interiority. Later in the stanza, the focus abruptly shifts to the speaker ("other lot was mine…") as he is "toiling" across a "bare wide Common." The speaker, in turn, almost immediately encounters a third man, the Wanderer or Pedlar, who becomes the main focus of Book I as the speaker gradually blends into the background, ceding space to a more experienced practitioner of the Wordsworthian doctrine. Already, there are three characters that seem to differ primarily by their position in the narrative and by the degree of their relative contentedness, and the remainder of the poem will add two more, in the form of the Solitary and the Parson.

Although the Wanderer is given a detailed biography in Book I, there is significant overlap between the sketch of his childhood and that of the speaker in *The Prelude*. Like the latter, the Wanderer enjoys the long-lasting effects of strong "first-born affections" ("deep feelings had impressed / Great objects on his mind, with portraiture / And colour so distinct, that on his mind / They lay like substances, and almost seemed / To haunt the bodily sense"), and recalls being checked early on by nature's "ministry of fear" ("in such communion, not from terror free"; lines 132-142). Later in childhood, he too went in search of "sublimer joy" in deep caves and gloomy mountains ("many an hour, in caves forlorn, / And 'mid the hollow depths of naked crags / He sate, and even in their fix'd lineaments […] He traced an ebbing and a flowing mind, / Expression ever varying!"; lines 153-162). Furthermore, despite the claim that the Wanderer had "small need of books," he too received the early initiation into natural wisdom from fairytales and folktales recommended in Book V of *The Prelude* ("many a Legend […] nourished Imagination in her growth" and "gave the Mind that apprehensive power / By which she is made quick to recognize / The moral properties and scope of things"; lines 163-169). The most notable difference between the Wanderer and *The Prelude*'s speaker is the occupation of the former ('pedlar'), whose working class connotations gives him a distinguishing mark of humbleness that sets him apart from the poem's more materially-privileged cast of characters, and singles him out as a model for the speaker (and, later, the Solitary) to aspire to.

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[134] Samuel H. Hay and others have remarked on the similarity between the characters, and between the characters and their creator: "Like the other principal characters of the poem – the Poet, the Wanderer, and the Pastor – the Solitary is very much Wordsworth himself: as a number of commentators have noticed, each of the four represents a different side of their creator" (Hay 243). Coleridge used the poem ("as in the different dramatis personae of THE RECLUSE") as an example of "whenever, though under a feigned name, it is clear that he [Wordsworth] himself is still speaking" (*BL* 219).

The strong thematic overlap between *The Prelude* and the Wanderer passages in *The Excursion* is, it seems safe to say, mainly a product of the early authorship of this section. However, without the continuation in the form of a multi-stage development of the speaker's creative faculties, which *The Prelude* arrives in Books III-XIII, the philosophy of these sections becomes static, even inert. The prevailing attitude toward perception in Book I remains one of uncertainty regarding whether the source of its power lies in the mind or in nature, so that it never progresses beyond the ambiguity regarding the role of the 'auxiliar light' in perception. To the Wanderer, perception is said to have offered a palliative to the "wasting power" in all things, so that "with [Nature's] hues, / Her Forms, and with the spirit of her forms, / He clothed the nakedness of austere truth" (*Excursion* I, lines 288-290). Here, as in Book II of *The Prelude,* reality is divided into two segments – one the "nakedness of austere truth," and the other a living presence consisting of "hues," "Forms" and "the spirit of her forms" – and it is not entirely clear what it means for the Wanderer to "clothe" one segment with the other. In other words, are the "hues" and "Forms" superadded by the imagination or merely heightened?

A similar ambiguity pervades the following lines uttered by the Wanderer:

> […] we die, my Friend
> Nor we alone, but that which each man loved
> And prized in his peculiar nook of earth
> Dies with him, or is changed; and very soon
> Even of the good is no memorial left.
> -- The Poets, in their elegies and songs
> Lamenting the departed, call the groves,
> They call upon the hills and streams to mourn,
> And senseless rocks; nor idly; for they speak,
> In these their invocations, with a voice
> Obedient to the strong creative power
> Of human passion. Sympathies there are
> More tranquil, yet perhaps of kindred birth,

> That steal upon the meditative mind,
> And grow with thought. Beside yon spring I stood,
> And eyed its waters till we seemed to feel
> One sadness, they and I: For them a bond
> Of brotherhood is broken: time has been
> When, every day, the touch of human hand
> Dislodged the natural sleep that binds them up
> In mortal stillness: and they ministered
> To human comfort. (*Excursion* I, lines 502-523)

In this passage, the ‘life’ attributed to nature seems to flicker indeterminately between projection and reality. On the one hand, the Wanderer states that whatever “each man loved / And prized in his peculiar nook of earth / Dies with him, or is changed,” leaving no “memorial left,” seemingly making the object of communion the product of each person’s unique imaginative investment (lines 503-505). Likewise, while it is not “idly” that poets call upon “groves,” “hills” and “streams” when they mourn, and while these objects are accorded a “voice” of their own, their value ultimately lies in the fact that they are “[o]bedient to the strong creative power / Of human passion,” making them little more than pliable material for human feeling to work on (lines 512-513). However, on the other hand, the Wanderer states that there are “sympathies” of “kindred birth” that work in a more mysterious region of perception. While the language used to describe the Wanderer’s bond to the spring leans toward subjectivity (“I stood, / And eyed its waters till we *seemed* to *feel* / One sadness, they and I”; italics mine), this bond is implied to be merely the remnant of an earlier connection, “a bond / Of brotherhood,” when both human observer and spring communed as equals.[135] At that time, the waters were awakened by sympathetic human attention, their “natural sleep” “dislodged” by “the touch of human hand,” while in return “they ministered / To human comfort.” In these lines, there is a sense of unwillingness to surrender either the power of mind over nature or nature’s power to meet it accordingly, effectively restaging the conflict of *The Prelude*’s Phase 2.

A more general note of indeterminacy is struck in the final lines spoken by the Wanderer in Book I, a section that in some ways functions as a provisional conclusion. The speaker begins by looking around the cottage garden, “tracing fondly” what he takes to be the lingering presence of its previous tenant: “the secret spirit of humanity / Which, mid the calm oblivious tendencies / Of nature, mid her plants, and weeds, and flowers, / And silent overgrowings, still survived” (lines 927-930). This, however, prompts the Wanderer to reproach him as having read “the forms of things with an unworthy eye”; according to the Wanderer, “peace is here,” while the woman who once lived among these plants “sleeps in the calm earth.”

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[135] This point has also been made by Jim Springer Borck, who argues that “the spot’s Edenic qualities are not of a paradise, but of a paradise destroyed and lost,” of “a broken communal bond” (Borck 184).

Instead, the Wanderer urges the speaker to connect with nature as it manifests itself outside of the realm of human interests, a peace beyond thought:

> […] an image of tranquility,
> So calm and still, and looked so beautiful
> Amid the uneasy thoughts which filled my mind,
> That what we feel of sorrow and despair
> From ruin and from change, and all the grief
> The passing shews of Being leave behind,
> Appeared an idle dream, that could not live
> Where meditation was. (*Excursion* I, lines 976-983)

Here, the associations of the individual mind have been cleared away, so that nature has become a still point, an "image of tranquility," a "meditation" and a refuge from "uneasy thoughts." This is not the dynamic, mobile nature of "Tintern Abbey" nor the brooding undermind of *The Prelude* Book XIII, but a therapeutic stillness whose closest point of reference is the slumbering "blank of things" of "Written in very Early Youth" (lines 7-10). This, then, serves as the limit of the Wanderer's apprehension of nature, and as such, the limit of what the poem can ultimately teach to its other characters.

The counterpoint to the Wanderer's philosophy is offered by the Solitary, an intellectually disillusioned recluse who appears in Book II and the possibility of whose restoration becomes the central problem of the poem as a whole. While some critics have argued that the Solitary is at least partially based on Coleridge (see, for instance, Roe 27), most scholars read him as yet another a projection of the author himself. Samuel H. Hay points out that "the Solitary's vale […] is clearly a miniature version, down to its glittering pool, of Wordsworth's home in the 'high Concave'," and concludes that this figure "probably represents what Wordsworth thought he might have become had Dorothy and Coleridge not come to his rescue" (Hay 243). Meanwhile, Kenneth R. Johnston reads the positioning of the Solitary as the "antagonist" to the Wanderer's more conventionally Wordsworthian doctrine as a more immediate form of self-criticism: to Johnston, the Solitary represents "those solipsistic and desponding elements Wordsworth recognized in himself as the main obstacles, psychologically and creatively, to the very writing of the poem itself" (Johnston 132-133). Crucially, however, the Solitary is defined not merely by his disillusionment, but by his isolation: he is, above all, "Solitary," and the favor that the speaker and the Wanderer can perform for him is a rescue from solitude that is psychosocial as much as intellectual and political. There is a sense, then, in which *The Excursion* attempts the same 'rescue' of Wordsworth himself that *The Prelude* did for Coleridge; however, without the possibility of a genuine outside referent, the central problem of creative isolation will not budge.

The outward similarity of the consolatory aims of the two poems is particularly prominent in Book IV, where the arguments by which the Wanderer seeks to overcome the Solitary's despondency are very similar to the lessons imparted to

Coleridge in Books X-XIII of *The Prelude*. Whereas the earlier books of *The Excursion* do not contain any awareness of the later steps of perceptual development as charted in The *Prelude*, here a few of its concluding lessons reappear in the form of moral instruction. The Wanderer's criticism of rational philosophy as destructive of the beauty and spiritual dimensions of the world is reminiscent of the speaker's transition out of Phase 6 in *The Prelude*, while his exhortation that the Solitary revisit the scenes of his youth and revive early memories serves a similar function as the "spots of time" do in *The Prelude* (*Excursion* IV, lines 937-991; IX, lines 36-93). There is even a brief hint of the Snowdon realization in the seashell passage, in which it is said that the soul possesses a faculty that can transmute nature's materials into new sources of strength, and in the process impart "authentic tidings of invisible things" to the enlightened observer (*Excursion* IV, lines 1058ff). Yet, there is something deflated about how the culminating message of *The Prelude*, previously positioned as the starting point of mature creative activity, is repeated back to the alter ego of the author who wrote it, and who now remains unmoved by his own words. In other words, the structure of consolation has been borrowed, but the lesson imperfectly replicated. Was this, then, not really a philosophy of life that could be internalized at all, but rather a genre of poetic expression and a rhetoric that required the context of consolation to come alive?

The feeling of creative deadlock is compounded by the inconclusive note on which the poem ends, which seems somewhat at odds with its climactic triumphalist assertion of Christian values. Russell Noyes, who takes the poem to be "a thinly veiled account of how Wordsworth achieved a victorious adjustment over the years to a series of crippling blows to his own hopes," nonetheless acknowledges the fact that, "though steps in preparation toward his recovery have been taken," the Solitary is "left unregenerated" (Noyes 141, 150). It is as if Wordsworth cannot find the resources within himself to restore the Solitary back to health, because the poem lacks the moral and psychological urgency of the real conversation that it is imitating. In the end, the 'excursion' ends up being not an excursion at all: it stays confined within the boundaries that it was meant to transcend.

Summary

In this chapter, I have argued that *The Prelude* traces the development of perception through a number of discrete phases, eventually culminating in the attainment of 'mature' creative perception. This development begins with the infant's original conception of the unseen as a benevolent, all-suffusing maternal presence, which is shattered by formative experiences of fear, gradually reshaping the unseen into a more complex and ambivalent 'other'. The next phase shifts the center of emphasis from the perceived object to the process of perception: in this phase, the importance lies less in the nature of the unseen than in cultivating the right conditions for apprehending it (the ‘how’ as opposed to the ‘what’). Phases 3 to 6 consist of gradually weaning the mind from a passive reception of sense data, with the unseen temporarily receding into the background as various substitutes for perception begin to awaken the intellectual and imaginative powers of the mind: a necessary preparation for its maturation, but also a phase that temporarily and destructively isolates it from the world. Finally, in Phase 7, the relationship between mind and unseen is repaired, so that they can now meet on more equal terms: the speaker now sees nature as a ‘mighty mind’ to commune with, which can put him in touch with corresponding inner faculties that are awakened in this encounter.

A parallel pattern sees the poem reframing the same lessons as moral-psychiatric instruction to a reader in need. Here, the development of vision is reframed as a lesson targeted toward a particular reader (Coleridge), using key Coleridge poems as illustrations of the problems to be overcome. This therapeutic trajectory is strongly poeticized and remains inconsistent in its portrayal with Coleridge’s real-life problems; thus, it might be more logical to think of The *Prelude* as a work in the genre of ‘consolatory writing’, where its success as an antidepressant is intended to be measured by the vitality of the poetry itself. The address to Coleridge adds an extroverted dimension to the project that counterbalances its introspective tendencies, giving it a moral weight and a firm connection to the world outside of itself. This dimension is missing from *The Excursion*, which attempts to replicate the lesson outside of a social context, and the subsequent failure to arrive at a convincing scene of ‘restoration’ indicates that the *Prelude* format stagnates without a genuine interpersonal and ethical dimension.

Earlier in this chapter, I contended that the ‘self’ created in *The Prelude* is in part a social creation: a way of seeing the world that is enabled through someone else’s belief in it, and maintained through a sincere attitude of ‘giving’. This is perhaps the final product of the creative synergy between Wordsworth and Coleridge: Coleridge’s long search for an ‘ideal perceiver’ to which the burden of poetic perception could be transferred may have finally found an echo in Wordsworth’s search for an ‘ideal believer’, whose faith in his abilities could activate his latent sense of himself as an oracle of nature. Whether Wordsworth actually believed that by writing the perfect poem of consolation, he could make Coleridge see the world the way he did is unclear: given the inconsistency with which he describes his friend’s problems, as well as Coleridge’s utility as a long-suffering auditor, there is some indication that this asymmetric power relationship served some of his purposes quite well. Coleridge, on the other hand, may have found the idea of merely vicariously enabling someone else to see a less satisfying role, explaining why he took up philosophical writing instead.

Like Coleridge, Wordsworth seems to have viewed the proper development of perception as the groundwork for the creation of a new quasi-religious creed. However, because he did not share Coleridge’s sense of perception as ‘broken’ on an intuitive level, Wordsworth eventually found a solution to how the mind is meant to apprehend the unperceivable that seems to have satisfied him: one that relied on a negative vocabulary of transcendence first attempted in “Tintern Abbey,” then gradually refined over the course of *The Prelude*. In order for it to become a complete creed, however, the philosophy needed an ethical component: this was supplied by the therapeutic framing of *The Prelude*, but could not be convincingly rendered in the case of *The Excursion*. Does this mean that the Wordsworthian creed is less to be understood as a self-contained philosophy than as a rhetorical mode, one that requires unique forms of situational energy to be activated? Or is the altruistic framing rather a response by the poet, stung by recurring accusations of egotism, to the growing pressure for a ‘justification’ for his increasingly ambitious self-explorations? Whichever the case, one might say that both Wordsworth and Coleridge ended up reaching for goals that ultimately eluded them: if Coleridge looked for vision and tried to close the gap with ideas, then Wordsworth may have looked for ethics and tried to close the gap with vision.

Chapter 5: True and false unities in *Biographia Literaria* and *Opus Maximum*

Overview

William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1805/1850), known to posterity primarily as his poem on "the growth of a poet's mind," began as simply "the poem to C." Arriving at the end of a period during which Coleridge had become increasingly disillusioned with the ways of feeling that had united the two poets during their glory period of 1797-1798, *The Prelude,* as discussed in the previous chapter, had offered itself as a form of corrective to Coleridge's problems. As such, *The Prelude*'s success as a poem, if defined on its own terms, would always be partially contingent on whether it succeeded in obtaining Coleridge's blessing. For this reason, it is understandable that Coleridge appears to have felt that a lot was riding on his response, not just with regard to their fraught relationship but also with regard to Wordsworth's poetic legacy.

When this response arrived two years later in the form of a poem – "To William Wordsworth" (1807) – it was a curious combination of effusive praise and lingering gloom, celebrating *The Prelude* as an exceptional work of poetry while repeatedly undermining its stated purpose to bring joy to its primary addressee. The strange swerving between adoration and resignation makes "To William Wordsworth" less clear in its argumentative structure than Coleridge's other conversation poems, at times suggesting, in the words of Ewan Jones, "a best man who forgets his toast to bewail his own woes" (Jones 185). At the same time, many critics and biographers have treated the poem's ambivalence about its subject, a quality which seems less intentional than something that intrudes upon the poem despite the speaker's best efforts to contain it, as crucial for understanding the later phase of Coleridge's and Wordsworth's relationship. It is striking that Coleridge, who had expressly requested a "great philosophic poem" from Wordsworth, and who had enthusiastically embraced the role of giving Wordsworth notes and serving as the poem's philosophical auditor, came to feel that its success offered so little in the way of validation as to feel that he had, in fact, been metaphorically murdered by it. In other words, is it enough to say that Coleridge simply picked a somewhat inopportune moment to publicly "bewail his own woes?" Or could it be that Coleridge, whose contribution to *The Prelude* had been on the level of ideas, found the solutions which he hoped would pull him out of his crisis either missing, or the problem formulations misrepresented, in the end-result?

This chapter begins with a brief analysis of "To William Wordsworth" (1807), and then moves on to discuss two texts by Coleridge that either directly or indirectly respond to *The Prelude*: *Biographia Literaria* (1817) and Coleridge's unpublished manuscripts for his *Opus Maximum* (1819-1823). The overarching argument of the chapter is that, in these two texts, Coleridge seeks to establish a categorical distinction between two ways for the mind to 'commune' with the world of objects: one which he, in various ways, associates with Wordsworth, and one which corresponds to his own ideal. By proposing that the distinction between his and Wordsworth's ways of thinking is a distinction of kind, Coleridge can be seen to reject the implication of *The Prelude* that it is a distinction of degree (namely, of health and moral development) with Wordsworth representing the more advanced position. In Coleridge's scheme, the way that is associated with Wordsworth is the attempt to achieve subject-object unity directly through sense perception; a way that is referred to alternately as "sensuality" or "despotism of the eye" (in the name of consistency, I will simply refer to it as 'eye unity'). Eye unity, according to Coleridge, is a mistake in that it leads the mind to confuse its own emotional investment in a sensory image with the identification of 'life,' so that the mind is tricked into communing with a reflection of itself. In other words, by uniting purely subjective feeling with its duplication in a sensory image, eye unity leads, in effect, to self-love. This way, finally, Coleridge can be seen to reject Wordsworth's attempt to distance himself from the "tyranny" of the eye in Book XI of *The Prelude*, continuing to implicate Wordsworth in the error that Coleridge felt he had committed in "Tintern Abbey."

Conversely, the mode which corresponds to Coleridge's own ideal is one in which subject-object unity occurs through a meeting of intuitions: an intuited 'true' subject connecting with an intuited 'real' object, bypassing sense perception (this act will be referred to as 'deep unity'). An important fact here, and one that I believe has often been overlooked by scholars, is that Coleridge is not appealing to intuition in order to advocate a withdrawal from the world, but rather the opposite: his criticism of Wordsworth's eye-mindedness consists to a large extent of accusing Wordsworth of *failing* to transcend himself. In fact, I argue that what we see in the late phase of Coleridge's and Wordsworth's relationship is in many ways a competition, spurred on by Coleridge, to put faculties like perception, imagination and intuition in service of an attitude of outwardness, in stark contrast to the long-lived narrative of these key figures in British Romanticism as architects of an 'inward turn' in culture and thought.

Although *Opus Maximum* follows *Biographia Literaria* chronologically, this chapter will discuss them in reverse order, for two reasons. Firstly, because *Opus Maximum* provides a more detailed overview of the differentiation between eye unity and deep unity than *Biographia Literaria* does, it has been placed first so as to set the stage for the philosophical territory to be discussed. Secondly, because *Biographia Literaria* can be said to constitute the end of the 'public' side of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's dispute, it has been placed last so as serve as a conclusion of sorts. Thus, the reversal of the order is done purely for the purposes of structure, and should not be misconstrued as a comment on chronology of composition.

"To William Wordsworth" (1807)

While a general mood of ambivalence can be said to permeate "To William Wordsworth," that mood does not extend to its treatment of *The Prelude,* which never comes in for anything less than glowing praise in Coleridge's poem. By addressing Wordsworth as "Friend of the Wise, Teacher of the Good," the speaker begins by vindicating *The Prelude* as a work with social and pedagogical intention, rather than – as Wordsworth feared it would be received – as a work of merely private interest (line 1). Moreover, by repeatedly using language that couples the notions of inwardness and outwardness, the speaker not only acknowledges subject-object unity (Coleridge's elusive philosophical goal) as *The Prelude*'s philosophical theme, but also indicates that the poem's success was largely a function of how well it navigated this theme. Thus, we find "tides *obedient to external force*" coupled with "currents *self-determined,* as might seem / Or by *some inner Power*"; "moments awful, / Now *in thy inner life*" coupled with "and now *abroad*"; and "When power *streamed from thee*" coupled with "thy soul *received* / *The light reflected, as a light bestowed*" (lines 15-20, italics added for emphasis).

However, when it comes to *The Prelude*'s success as a "poem to C," the speaker's wording becomes more circumspect, as though he cannot decide whether to credit it with awakening or destroying him. His reaction goes from "listening with a heart forlorn" to having "the pulses of my being beat anew" (lines 63-64), but along with this renewed sense of life come new pains:

> […] And even as Life returns upon the drowned,
> Life's joy rekindling roused a throng of pains—
> Keen pangs of Love, awakening as a babe
> Turbulent, with an outcry in the heart;
> And Fears self-willed, that shunned the eye of Hope;
> And Hope that scarce would know itself from Fear;
> Sense of past Youth, and Manhood come in vain,
> And Genius given, and Knowledge won in vain;
> And all which I had culled in wood-walks wild,
> And all which patient toil had reared, and all,
> Commune with thee had opened out—but flowers

Strewed on my corse, and borne upon my bier,
In the same coffin, for the self-same grave! (lines 65-77)

The fact that Wordsworth's recitation inspires such violent feelings of inadequacy in the speaker has read by several critics as Coleridge reacting with bitterness to a long-time rival's superior display of poetic skill.[136] His complaints that his "Genius" and "Knowledge" have been cruelly exposed as "won in vain," that his repository of memories "culled in wood-walks wild," the work of "patient toil" and all that "Commune with thee [Wordsworth] had opened out" have all been reduced to flowers on his metaphorically slain body, do indeed sound like the bitter words of someone who has lost a competition for which he had been practicing all his life. However, Coleridge had been more materially involved in the creation of *The Prelude* than with Wordsworth's previous poems, and, moreover, had already begun to think of his new calling as accomplishing in philosophical prose what Wordsworth was attempting to do with *The Recluse*. In other words, if there was one Wordsworth poem that Coleridge ought not to have viewed as competition, it was *The Prelude*. Here, different explanations have been proposed for this newfound bitterness, including the string of personal humiliations that had occurred in the years prior, most prominently the mysterious incident in 1806 which Coleridge interpreted as evidence that Wordsworth and Sara Hutchinson were having an affair.[137] This has led some critics, among them Morton Paley, to conclude that Coleridge's "feeling of being supplanted as a poet" around this time must be seen as "intertwined with his fantasy of being supplanted as a man" (Paley 48).

Nevertheless, having metaphorically laid down in his poet's coffin, the speaker concludes that further poetic attempts, given his present state of mind, would not only injure his health but also be a violation of his and Wordsworth's shared dream to be heralds of a brighter future ("That way no more! and ill beseems it me, / Who came a welcomer in herald's guise, / Singing of Glory, and Futurity, / To wander back on such an unhealthful road, / Plucking the poisons of self-harm!"; lines 78-82). By the end, the speaker seems to have sufficiently restrained his feelings of shame to offer a more grateful account of the favour received, one that retracts his litany of pains and, somewhat masochistically, gives *The Prelude* simultaneous credit as successful therapy:

And when – O Friend! my comforter and guide!
Strong in thyself, and powerful to give strength!—
Thy long sustainéd Song finally closed,
And thy deep voice had ceased—yet thou thyself
Wert still before my eyes, and round us both

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[136] Lucy Newlyn reads Coleridge as "evidently weighing himself (as he had done in the *Letter to Sara*) against the achievements of Wordsworth," concluding that "there can be no doubt that his admiration for *The Prelude* is qualified by bitterness" (Newlyn, *Allusion* 195).

[137] For more on this incident, see Holmes, *Darker Reflections* 83-84.

That happy vision of belovéd faces—
Scarce conscious, and yet conscious of its close
I sate, my being blended in one thought
(Thought was it? or aspiration? or resolve?)
Absorbed, yet hanging still upon the sound—
And when I rose, I found myself in prayer. (lines 106-116)

Wordsworth is now given full credit as Coleridge's "comforter and guide," sharing his excess of strength with one who needs more of it ("Strong in thyself, and powerful to give strength!"). However, at the end of the recitation, the speaker seems unable to express in what ways, or even if, he has been changed by the poem ("my being blended in one thought / (Thought was it? or aspiration? or resolve?)"), opting instead for a more non-committal statement of religious feeling ("when I rose, I found myself in prayer"), hardly an area where Coleridge was deficient beforehand. Fittingly, this note of cryptic, questioning ambiguity – almost as though the speaker is resisting more precise analysis out of anxiety about where it may lead – inaugurates eight years of relative 'silence' in Wordsworth's and Coleridge's relationship.

'Sensuality' in *Opus Maximum* (1819-1823)

Coleridge's long-planned *Opus Maximum* was never completed in his lifetime, although a significant portion of it was dictated in the form of manuscripts to his friend Joseph Green between the years 1819 and 1823. *Opus Maximum* had long been envisioned by Coleridge as a work that would accomplish in philosophy what Wordsworth was to accomplish in poetry with *The Recluse*, so the fact that they overlap thematically in certain places should not come as a surprise. However, the similarities run deeper than is often recognized; in fact, *Opus Maximum* contains a number of passages which are not just thematically parallel to sections from *The Prelude*, but make use of similar language and metaphors. For this reason, *Opus Maximum* is especially interesting to consider in the light of Coleridge's post-1807 interest in articulating a categorical distinction between eye unity (implicitly associated with Wordsworth) and deep unity (which Coleridge proposed as a corrective).

In *Opus Maximum*, the position of eye unity, or the habit of the mind to confuse its own emotional investment in its perceptions with a sense of responding life, goes under the name of "sensuality." Coleridge traces this habit back to formative moments in childhood when the infant is forced to alternate between perceptions of a "kindred form" possessing life (such as the form of its mother) and perceptions of non-living things, "objects from which it instantly must recoil, to the bodily sensations of the Infant like echoes from an unreceiving Rock" (*OM* 122-123). Whereas the feelings that accompany communion with the "kindred form" are reciprocated, those that accompany the perception of non-living forms are not, and so those feelings "must needs fall back upon the appetites which they are <to> gratify" (123). Through this process, the mind begins to confuse its own emotional investment in the perception with a responding sense of life, creating a "last unity in the self, which is, in truth, no other than the feeling of life, its desires, and its functions, with that image which, being always present to the senses, constitutes the sole person of which the sensual being is capable" (122-123). Although Wordsworth is not mentioned by name, this description of "sensuality" closely resembles a previous criticism that Coleridge had levelled at Wordsworth's treatment of perception. To illustrate, we may recall Coleridge's brief analysis of the communion coda from "Tintern Abbey":

> —and the deep power of Joy / We see into the *Life* of Things – ie. By deep feeling we make our *Ideas dim* -- & this is what we mean by our Life – ourselves. I think of the Wall – it is before me, a distinct Image – here. I necessarily think of the *Idea* & the Thinking I as two distinct & opposite Things. Now (let me) think of *myself* – of the thinking Being – the Idea becomes dim whatever it be – so dim that I know not what it is – but the Feeling is deep & steady – and this I call I – identifying the Percipient & the Perceived--. (*CN2* 921)

In this passage, Coleridge can be seen speculating that the type of transcendence experienced by the speaker in "Tintern Abbey" – when with "the deep power of Joy / We see into the Life of Things – is essentially a trick of the mind. Namely, a powerful exertion of feeling "make[s] our Ideas dim" and produces a diffuse sense of "Life," which is actually the speaker's awareness of himself ("this is what we mean by our Life – ourselves"). The linguistic similarities to the discussion of "sensuality" in *Opus Maximum* are very close: in both cases, Coleridge describes a mistaken identification of unity as a confused blending of the mind's own feeling of life with a mere image that can only reciprocate the perceiver's own emotional investment.

The problem of sensuality, as presented in *Opus Maximum*, is twofold: 1) by confusing images with real things, the mind loses sight of the things themselves, and 2) it confuses self-love with a response from the images, thus projecting the mind's self-love out into the world of perceptions. Here, Coleridge can be seen implicitly criticizing Wordsworth's sensuality not for its outwardness, but for being *insufficiently* outward: in other words, sensuality functions as a cover for subordinating real things to mere surfaces, and for subordinating world to private feeling. The moral damage that the sensualist incurs is the same as that which comes from egotism: "The instinct that seeks for correspondence, and would fain love itself in another, is translated to an impotent craving to verify the possession of power […] He becomes loveless as the fish, merciless as the snake that kills by poison, and cruel as the tiger that indulges its lust of destruction ere yet he appeases his thirst and hunger" (124). It does not seem wholly unlikely that he is using Wordsworth, a man he had previously called “by nature incapable of being in love,” as a point of reference here (quoted in Barth, “Ideal of Love” 127n28).

Furthermore, sensuality is criticized for leading to closed, mundane ways of thinking, producing “for the fine arts, a marketable trade; for philosophy, a jargon of materialism; and the study of nature conducted on such principles as to place it in doubtful rivalry with the art and theory of cooking” (*OM* 125). Since a preoccupation with the mundane and conventional is a telltale sign of sensuality, it is striking that this is also the charge levelled at Wordsworth’s poetry in *Biographia Literaria*. There, only a few years earlier, Coleridge had alleged that “matter-of-factness,” “laborious minuteness and fidelity in the representation of objects, and their positions,” and overreliance on conventional language, the “arbitrary marks of thought, our smooth market-coin of intercourse” were characteristic “defects” of Wordsworth’s work (*BL2* 135).

Moreover, Coleridge argues that sensuality is theologically problematic, as it is fundamentally the same as the “Brahmin Theology” of India, which Coleridge in turn views as indistinguishable in its “logical consequences” from Spinoza’s monism (*OM* 276-278). Notably, Coleridge’s summary of the Brahmin worldview, written with the same contempt as that which he appears to have read “almost all the Sanscrit philosophical and religious writing, as far as they have fallen under my notice,” resembles the stereotypical Wordsworth perspective to such a degree that it reads almost like a vicious, orientalist parody of it. The problem with the Brahmin worldview, Coleridge muses, is its combination of “the languor of a relaxing climate and the lulling influence of a deep, somber and gigantic vegetation” with a slack indistinct passiveness, “half from indolence and half intentionally by a partial closure of the eyelids,” which “when all hues and outlines melt into a garish mist, deem[s] it unity” (280-281). The key elements here, from the presence of a “gigantic” nature, verbs like “languor,” “indolence” and “lulling,” the alleged indistinctness of thinking, and a perceiving mind that mistakes “all hues and outlines melt[ing] into a garish mist” for “unity,” all seem to form a veritable laundry list of easy shots at Wordsworth.

Above all, however, Coleridge identifies the “mortal disease” of Brahminism as “an attempt to image the unimageable, not by symbols but by a jumble of visual shapes helped out by words of number – a strange conjunction of a cold and arbitrary arithmetical process with a delirious fancy which excludes all unifying imagination” (283-284). Here, the language recalls another criticism from *Biographia Literaria*, pertaining to the specific parts of Wordsworth’s work which draw from the fancy rather than the imagination: “In the play of *fancy*, Wordsworth, to my feelings, is not always graceful, and sometimes recondite. The *likeness* is occasionally too strange, or demands too peculiar a point of view, or is such as appears the creature of pre-determined research, rather than spontaneous presentation” (*BL2* 172). By holding up the “attempt to image the unimageable” as the most important mistake of “Brahmin” eye unity, Coleridge is suggesting that sensuality also violates the boundary between the seen and the unseen, forcing the unseen into the seen without any concern for its theological implications. However, the desire condemned here, the wish to make the unseen seen, very closely resembles one of Coleridge's own interests in 1796-1799, as discussed at length in chapter 1. Here, as later in *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge appears to be criticizing an attitude that he can speak authoritatively about because he once shared it, and which, in part, he appears to be externalizing in the forms of, alternately, "Brahminism," Spinoza and Wordsworth.

Having defined eye unity, Coleridge then goes on to draw up the foundations for deep unity. To do this, he begins by discussing the term 'form' with regard to objects of perception, a term which he desynonymizes into two different concepts. Firstly, there is the 'inner' form that the mind grasps when apprehending an object mentally (for which Coleridge retains the term "form"); secondly, there is the 'outer' form that is simply the sum of the object's physical characteristics (which Coleridge calls "shape"). Next, Coleridge concludes that it is in the *form* and not the *shape* that we "must place the principle both of the reality and individuality of each thing that truly is" (128-129). This, Coleridge claims, is in fact how ordinary people apprehend the world ("in point of fact, by the intuition of this form, and by its diversity from shape, we actually do determine the reality of the objects of our senses"). It is only with regards to shape that "the dictum of Berkeley is incontrovertibly true: the sole *esse* of all objects [is] in their *percipi*" (129).[138] In other words, Coleridge proposes *idealism* on the level of *shape* but *realism* on the level of *form*.

Having created a solid link between mind and world in the faculty of intuition, Coleridge proceeds to discuss how these intuitions emerge and develop, beginning in early childhood. Here, his argument shows such close similarities to Wordsworth's account of child mental development in *The Prelude* that the two must be considered parallel versions of the same example. The primal scene is the same as that of Book II of *The Prelude* – the infant's encounter with a unified unseen ('Mother') underneath a jumble of heterogeneous perceptions – a scene which Coleridge, like Wordsworth's speaker, reads as a necessary stepping-stone toward the child's understanding of God:

> The whole problem of existence is present as a sum total in the mother: the mother *exists as a One and indivisible something before the outlines of her different limbs and features have been distinguished by the fixed and yet half-vacant eye; and hence, through each degree of dawning light, the whole remains antecedent to the parts*, not as composed of them but as their ground and proper meaning, <no> otherwise than as the word or sentence to the single letters which occur in its spelling. (*OM* 131; italics added for emphasis)[139]

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[138] In other words, that the sole existence of shapes is reducible to the fact of them being perceived.

[139] Note the recurrence of the phrase "one and indivisible," which Coleridge had used in 1797 to designate the target of his inchoate longing, always unfulfilled in the act of perception: "My mind feels as if it ached to behold and know something *great*, something *one* and *indivisible*. And it is

For reference, here is the mother-babe passage from *The Prelude*, Book II:

> Nurs'd in his Mother's arms, the Babe who sleeps
> Upon his Mother's breast, who, when his soul
> Claims manifest kindred with an earthy soul,
> Doth gather passion from his Mother's eye!
> Such feelings pass into his torpid life
> Like an awakening breeze, and hence his mind
> Even [in the first trial of its powers]
> Is prompt and watchful, *eager to combine*
> *In one appearance, all the elements*
> *And parts of the same object, else detach'd*
> *And loth to coalesce*. Thus, day by day,
> Subjected to the discipline of love,
> His organs and recipient faculties
> Are quicken'd, are more vigorous, his mind spreads,
> Tenacious of the forms which it receives.
> In one beloved presence, nay and more,
> In that apprehensive habitude
> And those sensations which have been deriv'd
> From this beloved Presence, there exists
> A virtue while irradiates and exalts
> All objects through an intercourse of sense.
> (*P* II, lines 245-260; italics added for emphasis)

Since, as previously noted, *Opus Maximum* was intended to be the philosophical explication of what Coleridge expected Wordsworth to accomplish with *The Recluse*, these similarities are unlikely to be either coincidential or plagiaristic in intent. The two examples present a very similar argument, albeit with one important difference: in Coleridge's rendition, it is clear that the unseen presence (the mother's *form*) precedes the perception of the details that make up her *shape*, whereas in Wordsworth's version, the whole is constructed through a combination and coalescing of the individual parts. Coleridge even reiterates this difference through his clarification that "the whole remains antecedent to the parts, *not as composed of them* but as their ground and proper meaning" (131, italics added for emphasis). In other words, Coleridge appears to be resisting the 'sensuality' of Wordsworth's treatment of the topic, with its emphasis on surface detail (a combination of visible parts successively coalescing into a larger whole), and substituting a description that emphasizes *form* at the expense of *shape*.

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only in the faith of that that rocks or waterfalls, mountains or caverns, give me the sense of sublimity or majesty!" (*CL1* 228). Note also the recurrence of a "whole […] antecendent to the parts," which had preoccupied Coleridge during his attempts to arrive at an explanation of how the mind apprehends an unseen unity of a life (see discussion in chapter 2, page 95). Here, the religious unseen and the unseens of his philosophical speculations seem so close as to be almost indistinguishable.

The next step in the infant's development occurs when the child learns to apply its notion of the unseen to something greater than the mother: "the something, to which my [mother] looks up, and which is more than my mother" (131-132). However, this encounter with a more abstract unity, encompassing parts outside of the warmth of the mother-child bond, also forces the child to confront the idea of separation, leading on to its first understanding of nothingness:

> The same spirit which beholds the parts in the whole, which knows of no parts as self-subsisting […] finds a bewildering and, as it were, a spectral terror, a sense of sinking, resembling that which it had suffered or dreamt of as the mother's knees had suddenly given way from under it, in the contemplation of aught as severed from the whole in which it had subsisted. (131-132)

While the 'more-than-mother'-insight and the 'severed-from-the-whole'-insight are clearly connected, Coleridge claims that it is only the second insight that children struggle with, since the 'more-than-mother'-lesson only builds upon the same intuition by which the infant learned to identify its mother. In other words, children find it easy to accept that there is a form without a shape (God), but not that there could be a shape without form (something that is dead): "Many things, I saw, perplex the child, but never that there is a form to which there is no shape – O! far too often had the maternal warmth been that!" It is the opposite that the child struggles with: "that aught should be beheld that does not live" (132-133).

Once again, these two lessons parallel the next stage of childhood development that occurs in *The Prelude*, for which the boat episode serves as the primary symbol:

> […] and after I had seen
> That spectacle, for many days, my brain
> Work'd with a dim and undetermin'd sense
> Of unknown modes of being; in my thoughts
> There was a darkness, call it solitude,
> Or blank desertion, *no familiar shapes*
> Of hourly objects, images of trees,
> Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
> But huge and mighty *Forms that do not live*
> *Like living men mov'd slowly through my mind*
> By day and were the trouble of my dreams.
> (*P* I, lines 417-427, italics added for emphasis)

The similarities extend from the linguistic (compare Coleridge's "aught […] that does not live" with Wordsworth's "Forms that do not live") to the thematic (both passages describe the splintering of mother-child unity by an encounter with something darker and profoundly external).[140] However, once again, there is an important difference. The boat incident in The *Prelude* collapses the encounter with a greater whole and the encounter with nothingness into a single lesson, troubling precisely because of its destabilizing ambiguity. In contrast, Coleridge's account carefully distinguishes between the two, emphasizing that the child does not struggle with the idea of a God-like unity, but is traumatized by an inability to grapple with nothingness that it never quite recovers from. In practical terms, Coleridge's second lesson produces a similar experience to that of Wordsworth's boat-lesson, unsettling the bond between child and unseen and inspiring doubt in God: "By cutting asunder the living bond and unity in which the soul had stood with the idea of God, all the reality seems to be endangered, and the words "*Who made* God?" […] in their existing, though unevolved, contents, are the same as "Can there be nothing?" (133). However, while both accounts stress the role of this primal encounter with nothingness in progressing beyond the immature mother-child understanding of divine unity, Coleridge's account firmly emphasizes the continuity of the child's knowledge of God's form, something that is left ambiguous in *The Prelude*, where the loss of visual details leaves only a troubling, ambiguous darkness.

While these passages can be seen to revise individual assertions from Wordsworth's poem, there are other instances where Coleridge's treatment is more or less identical to Wordsworth's (hinting at the degree to which Coleridge must still have considered the 1805 *Prelude* as, on the whole, a successful part of their planned 'joint' project). Coleridge's claim that "the first three or four years of life" are "abandoned to the delusions of nature, and even for the first ten or twelve the preparations for their overthrow have been made rather than avowed an open war" (131) resembles *The Prelude*'s "auxiliar light" being "for the most / subservient strictly to the external things / With which it commun'd," but also "a forming hand, at times / Rebellious, acting in a devious mood, / A local spirit of its own, at war / With general tendency" (*P* II, lines 381-387). Certain descriptions of mental processes occur in both texts, such as *Opus Maximum*'s "the combined interests of the parent and the philosopher, where science corrects what the magnifying power of love was necessary to render visible," which echoes *The Prelude*'s "transitory qualities / Which, but for this most watchful power of love / Had been neglected," leaving "a register / Of permanent relations, else unknown" (lines 309-312). In other words, it is certainly not the case that the *Opus Maximum* rejects the overall argument of *The Prelude*, but it does offer a conspicuous number of 'corrections' on the level of the mind's relationship to the unseen.

Having concluded that transcendent subject-object unity is to be attained not through sense perception but through pre-sensory intuition, Coleridge chooses to designate this unity "life," boldly appropriating the term that Wordsworth had used for his most transcendent act of seeing in "Tintern Abbey" (line 49). In his definition of "life," Coleridge takes care to stress that this living unity is not accessible through perception, but is "antecedent" and "undisturbed" by it: "[L]ife is the immediate and proper unity of all forms, a unity antecedent in the order of thought to the perception of the forms contained or appertaining, and undisturbed by those forms" (*OM* 133-134). In other words, there will be no "seeing into the life of things," a phrase that is now, in Coleridge's view, rendered a contradiction in terms. The unity of "life," obtained through healthy childhood development, is later broken up during the "process of artificial education," at which point the faculty of understanding becomes predominant in the growing mind, so that "life itself becomes generalized into the more abstract formula of power," possibly hinting that it is this formula of power which Wordsworth misidentifies as life (134). Thus, Coleridge pits the "faith of childhood," conscious of unity, against the "austerer discipline of the understanding," which has to await the ennobling interchange with Reason to be restored to its former unity (136, 175).

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[140] *The Prelude* does not obey Coleridge's usage of the terms "shape" and "form," which Wordsworth would not have been aware of in 1798/1805; hence their seeming interchangeability here.

'Despotisms of the eye' in *Biographia Literaria* (1817)

After the eight years of relative 'silence' following "To William Wordsworth" (1807), the rivalry between Wordsworth and Coleridge finally resurfaced in 1815, first with Wordsworth's publication of his 1815 *Poems*, then, two years later, Coleridge's double publication of the career-spanning collection *Sibylline Leaves* and its more famous companion volume *Biographia Literaria*. That Coleridge's 1817 publications were a direct response to Wordsworth's *Poems* has been suggested by numerous critics, who point to evidence such as the fact that Coleridge requested *Biographia Literaria* and *Sibylline Leaves* to be printed in a typeface exactly matching that of Wordsworth's book.[141] *Biographia Literaria*, which among other things sets out to identify Wordsworth's respective "defects" and "excellencies" as a poet, has been extensively studied in relation to differences between Wordsworth's and Coleridge's poetic ideals.

The way in which *Biographia Literaria* discusses Wordsworth has been the source of some disagreement among scholars. Norman Fruman has argued that Coleridge's perspective is antagonistic on the whole, and furthermore, that *Biographia Literaria* uses a variety of strategies to indirectly undermine Wordsworth's claims to originality as a poet. For example, Fruman claims that

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[141] See, for instance, Holmes, *Darker Reflections* 390, and Class 162-163. Class takes *Biographia Literaria* to have been motivated by a long-brewing anxiety about Wordsworth encroaching upon Coleridge's niche as the philosopher of the two, finally demanding a response when Wordsworth introduced a "philosophically sophisticated distinction between the fancy and imagination" in the preface of his 1815 *Poems* (Class 162-163).

Coleridge's recollections of a particularly memorable teacher at Christ's Hospital credits the teacher with teaching types of poetic diction that would later come to be associated with Wordsworth, which Fruman reads as an underhanded attempt to convince the reader that such ideas about poetry were relatively commonplace (Fruman 293-294). Other scholars have stressed the ways in which *Biographia Literaria* seems to express a desire for reconciliation with Wordsworth, even a wish to come to his aid. Richard Holmes takes the impetus for the book as being Coleridge's "old instinct to defend his friend" following new threats to Wordsworth's literary reputation (such as Francis Jeffrey's brutal review of *The Excursion*), with this protective instinct coming to "shape the emerging *Biographia*" (Holmes, *Darker Reflections* 382).

However, while there has been disagreement with regard to Coleridge's treatment of Wordsworth, scholars have been virtually unanimous on the point that *Biographia Literaria* suffers from structural problems. Thomas McFarland calls the work "a product of Coleridge's hopeless middle years," and argues that "Coleridge was badly off his philosophical form" when he wrote it (McFarland 41). Lucy Newlyn sees the idiosyncratic form as born out of equal parts inspiration and commercial pressure: "*Biographia Literaria* is at least three things at once: an idealistic exercise in syncretism […] an experimental form of hybrid writing […] and an expedient piece of what journalists would call 'copy' – dictated at high speed, under pressure from his publishers" (Newlyn, "Introduction" 7). More recently, there have been attempts to argue that the lack of structure is deliberate, or in some other way connected to its unconventional ambitions. Sisman has made the case that the lack of structure could be a stylistic choice, pointing to the subtitle ("*Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*") as a "deliberate echo" of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, suggesting an attempt to establish Sterne's famously digression-heavy novel as its stylistic precursor (Sisman 419). On a similar note, Richard Holmes has interpreted the book's rambling structure as evidence that Coleridge approached the project as a conversational exercise, akin to psychoanalytical therapy: "Coleridge talked the *Biographia* into life, and the pattern of an extended conversation […] give[s] the book both its companionable atmosphere and its sense of intermittence. In a Freudian sense, one may think of it as a 'talking cure'" (Holmes, *Darker Reflections* 378). That conversation, Holmes argues, while initially one about exploring the origins of Coleridge's literary ideas, soon ended up becoming "essentially a long dialogue with Wordsworth […] one more re-enactment of the old power struggle between Coleridge and Wordsworth, the river breaking around the rock" (385).

Wordsworth's presence certainly hangs heavily over the entirety of *Biographia Literaria*, including its arguably most well-dissected passage, Coleridge's definition of the imagination, which is itself a reworking of a definition suggested by Wordsworth two years prior (in the 1815 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*). Coleridge's definition, which subdivides Wordsworth's imagination-fancy dyad into a triad, comes at the end of a philosophical overview which, similarly to *Opus Maximum*, traces a conflict between two categorically different ways of pursuing subject-object unity. One of these is the "despotism of the eye," a phrase only a synonym removed from Wordsworth's term "tyranny of the eye," which in *The Prelude* had been used to designate a mode of looking distorted by aesthetic conventions, such as the picturesque. In Coleridge's usage, however, the term instead refers to an interest in transgressing the boundary between seen and unseen, or what in *Opus Maximum* he would later term sensuality. "Under this strong sensuous influence," he writes, "we are restless because invisible things are not the objects of vision; and metaphysical systems, for the most part, become popular, not for their truth, but in proportion as they attribute to causes a susceptibility of being seen, if only our visual organs were sufficiently powerful" (*BL1* 108).[142]

As was the case with *Opus Maximum*'s 'sensuality', Coleridge's description of the "despotism of the eye" registers as much as a criticism of "Tintern Abbey"-style eye-mindedness as a condemnation of his own philosophical interests prior to the "Dejection"-crisis. The state of being "restless because invisible things are not the objects of vision" is a more or less exact description of his own longing to perceive something "one and undivided" beyond perception, as expressed in the 1797 letter to Thomas Poole, his own ideas about indefinitely developed perception in the years 1797-1798, and even his later attempts to prove the latent capacity of the senses to indirectly discern unseen qualities (discussed in chapters 1 and 2). In *Biographia Literaria*, however, this interest has been externalized and universalized as a constant in the history of philosophy, from which it has required periodic emancipation, beginning with the doctrines of Plato and Pythagoras (107-108). Again, this historical narrative bears similarities to Coleridge's own trajectory, from obeying what he now takes to be a Wordsworth-adjacent despotism of the eye to eventually embracing a Platonic-Jacobian doctrine of a 'mind's eye'.

On the whole, Coleridge's evaluations of individual philosophers in *Biographia Literaria* resemble the opinions expressed in his lectures and marginalia (as presented in Chapter 2). Consistently, Coleridge demands of his philosophers that they offer an *intuitive* access to things that goes deeper than the link offered by perception.[143] He criticizes Hume for reducing cause and effect to a "blind product of delusion and habit, into the mere sensation of proceeding life (*nisus vitalis*) associated with the images of the memory," the coupling of "proceeding life" and "images of the memory" once again suggesting a false unity of private emotion and sensory image (121). The treatment of Kant stands out, once again, in that Coleridge rejects Kant's formulations but argues that these are distinct from his 'true' philosophy, which Kant could only disclose in symbolic form to avoid persecution by the repressive government in his native Prussia (145-146). "In spite therefore of his own declarations," Coleridge claims, "I could never believe, that it was possible for him to have meant no more by *Noumena*, or Thing in itself, than his mere words express; or that in his own conception he confined the whole *plastic* power to the forms of the intellect, leaving for the external cause, for the *materiale* of our sensations, a matter without form, which is doubtless inconceivable" (146). As in *Opus Maximum*, Coleridge presents the idea of matter (i.e. shape) without form, and its corollary that the mind is in charge of creating the forms which we use to talk about the external world, as pernicious, constituting as it does a variant of eye unity. Thus, both Hume's philosophy and the 'naïve' reading of Kant are rejected in terms that position them as variants of the despotism of the eye.

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[142] Coleridge also discusses the "despotism of the eye" in *Logic*, where he writes that disciplining one's mind requires that one learns to "use the *language* of sight without being enslaved by its affections," and to rid oneself of "the delusive notion that what is not *imageable* is likewise not *conceivable*" (*Logic* 242-243).

[143] The main here exception is Hartley, whom Coleridge continues to blame primarily for turning the *mind* into a non-entity (once again tracking with the opinions in his lectures and marginalia). Here, it is the intuitive sense of the subjective half of subject-object unity that is violated: "Thus [in Hartley's system] the whole universe co-operates to produce the minutest stroke of every letter, save only that I myself, and I alone, have nothing to do with it, but merely the causeless and effectless beholding of it when it is done. Yet scarcely can it be called a beholding; for it is neither an act nor an effect; but an impossible creation of a *something-nothing* out of its very contrary! It is the mere quick-silver plating behind a looking-glass; and in this alone consists the poor worthless I!" (*BL1* 119)

While the comments on Fichte in *Biographia Literaria* broadly align with those set forth in Coleridge's marginalia, his attitude toward Schelling is intricately tied-up with the fact that a significant portion of his own system consists of, depending on which scholar one asks, unacknowledged quotations or barefaced plagiarisms from Schelling. The question of plagiarism will not be dealt with at length in this chapter, for two reasons. Firstly, this topic has been extensively explored in previous scholarship.[144] Secondly, the question is not of especial relevance to this thesis, which makes no claims about Coleridge's originality: what matters is that these passages were deemed sufficiently satisfactory for Coleridge's personal and intellectual purposes to be admitted into his system.

Having completed his overview of the history of philosophy, Coleridge gets down to constructing this system. As will later be the case in *Opus Maximum*, his overarching goal is to establish a unity between subject and object on an intuitive, and thus pre-perceptual, foundation. Intuition was a commonly-used concept in German philosophy at the time, especially after Kant made use of the term for the faculty that constructs, *a priori*, the categories that we use to apprehend phenomena, but which cannot project its categories upon the underlying things-in-themselves. Later, Schelling's use of the term expanded Kant's usage to also include the things-in-themselves. To do this, Schelling, in his *System des transcendentalen idealismus* (1800), proposed a three-tiered intuition which creates our empirical knowledge of the world step-by-step: a sensory intuition that posits "stuff," a productive intuition that produces "matter" and a third that produces "organization" (Schelling 126). It is notable that, despite the extreme degree to which this section relies on acknowledged borrowings (it copies many paragraphs directly from Schelling), Coleridge ends up on a course which steers clear of both Kant's idealist-adjacent definition (where the intuited categories exist 'only' in the mind) and Schelling's fully idealist definition (where the forms themselves exist 'only' in the mind). What Coleridge proposes is instead an intuitive faculty that establishes a direct link to objects that are taken to be not just epistemologically (in the sense that Schelling meant) but *ontologically* real. In other words, Coleridge proposes that intuition connects with objects that are in every sense of the word real, jettisoning all the baggage of idealism and putting intuitions firmly in the service of a kind of naïve, common-sense outwardness.

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[144] To summarize briefly: Coleridge began by pre-emptively defending himself against plagiarism in *Biographia Literaria*, and was subsequently publicly 'outed' by Thomas De Quincey in a series of articles in *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*. There are many factors to take into consideration in this complex controversy, from De Quincey's own motivations as, in many ways, Coleridge's intellectual rival, to the way that the controversy became politicized as part of a rivalry between the English and Scottish philosophical schools (Whiteley 99, 113). Assessments of the case for plagiarism range from overblown (McFarland) to serious (Whiteley) to extremely damning (Fruman).

Coleridge bases his system on a datum of intuited 'life' which constitutes the object of successful self-intuition, something that certain people possess the ability to connect with more clearly than others, forming the basis for what Coleridge calls the "philosophic imagination":

> They and they only can acquire the philosophic imagination, the sacred power of self-intuition, who within themselves can interpret and understand the symbol, that the wings of the air-sylph are forming within the skin of the caterpillar; those only, who feel in their own spirits the same instinct, which impels the chrysalis of the horned fly to leave room in its *involucrum* for *antennae* yet to come. They know and feel, that the potential works in them, even as the actual works on them! (*BL1* 244-245).

As in most philosophical traditions that make use of the term, the existence of intuition serves as its own evidence for its truth; just as the "organs of sense are framed for a corresponding world of sense; and we have it," so "the organs of spirit are framed for a corresponding world of spirit" (245). Intuition, as per the mystical tradition, is also essentially incommunicable, in that words are two steps removed from spiritual truth: firstly, there are "but the shadows of notions," and secondly, "the notional understanding itself is but the shadowy abstraction of living and actual truth" (246). Intuition is immediate and absolute: "On the IMMEDIATE, which dwells in every man, and on the original intuition, or absolute affirmation of it […] all the *certainty* of our knowledge depends; and this becomes intelligible to no man by the ministry of mere words from without" (246). This point is reiterated more forcefully later on:

> So is there many a one among us, yes, and some who think themselves philosophers too, to whom the philosophic organ is entirely wanting. To such a man philosophy is a mere play of words and notions, like a theory of music to the deaf, or like the geometry of light to the blind. The connection of the parts and their logical

> dependencies may be seen and remembered; but the whole is groundless and hollow, unsustained by living contact, unaccompanied with any realizing intuition which exists by and in the act that affirms its existence, which is known, because it is, and is, because it is known. (*BL1* 253-254)[145]

The notional understanding, then, can construct the relations in a philosophical system and make sense of them internally, but intuition alone offers the "living contact" that makes its knowledge certain. Intuition, in turn, is self-sustaining and requires no evidence other than its existence: it "is known, because it is, and is, because it is known" (254).

Upon this foundation, Coleridge goes on to assert that intuition offers the only certain pathway to a world outside of ourselves, and thus avoids the pitfalls of skepticism, idealism and all the false unities offered by the despotisms of the eye. Intuition, he argues, is the true foundation of philosophical realism, whose roots are "far elder" and lie "infinitely deeper" than the mere "hypothetical explanation of the origin of our perceptions, an explanation skimmed from the mere surface of mechanical philosophy" (261-262). Here, Coleridge appears set to avoid another route into a despotism of the eye: the mistake of beginning with perceptions and deducing the existence of underlying objects from them. The intuitive pathway to the external world, he claims, is instead that which is used by the "man of common sense": "[i]t 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 see" (262). This basic belief in a real, intuitively accessed world has been unjustly denigrated by "philosophers of the schools," who despise it as "the prejudice of the ignorant vulgar, because they live and move in a crowd of phrases and notions from which human nature has long ago vanished" (262-263). Coleridge, siding with the common man, concludes by exhorting him to "walk humbly with the divinity in your own hearts […] preserve your human nature, the depth of which was never yet fathomed by a philosophy made up of notions and mere logical entities" (263).

Here, Coleridge breaks significantly with Schelling, who, in his *System* (1800), had argued that such a grounding of objects in any assumption of an external reality cannot be made on philosophical grounds. According to Schelling, "being" or objectivity is merely an expression of a limitation imposed upon the intuiting or producing activity: "There is a cube in this portion of space, means nothing else but that in this part of space my intuition can be active only in the form of a cube" (Schelling 57-58). Thus, in stark contrast to Coleridge's conviction in the common-sense reality of external objects, Schelling reduces the thing-in-itself to fundamentally ideal activity that has overstepped an internal boundary and 'disappeared' from consciousness. In Schelling's words, "the thing-in-itself is therefore nothing else but the shadow of the ideal activity, now over the boundary, which is thrown back to the self by intuition, and is to that extent itself a *product of the self*" (68, my emphasis). Such a conclusion is unacceptable to Coleridge, who instead uses the borrowings from Schelling to anchor his own, fundamentally non-idealist, definition of intuition. Elinor Shaffer has argued that Coleridge's use of Schelling is intertwined with a "persistent attempt to incorporate certain aspects of empiricism in his philosophy," and his belief in "the importance of objects in our experience and to the immediacy of our sense in their reality" (Shaffer 309). Rather than merely adopting Schelling's views wholesale, Shaffer argues that, in part, Coleridge "conducts a criticism of Schelling's views," instead using Schelling's "exotic" formulations to "produce a screen of the marvelous, behind which he can present his own views, which, though more moderate than Schelling's, were too radical for his audience" (311).

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[145] As noted by Elinor Shaffer, this quote is a near-direct translation of a passage from Schelling's *Abhandlungen zur Erläuterungen des Idealismus der Wissenschaftslehre* (1799) (Shaffer 299).

Having argued for an intuitively granted subject and an intuitively granted (ontologically real) object, Coleridge's wraps them together into an intuited subject-object unity (borrowing Schelling's model, albeit – as we have seen – having redefined some of its terms). This is accomplished through proposing ten "postulates," upon which philosophy must proceed. The postulates, beginning with the base assumption that "Truth is correlative to being" and ending with the outer limit of transcendental philosophy in the "act of self-consciousness," are closely based on the argument of Schelling's *System*, but only insofar as it sets out to articulate an absolute "principium cognoscendi" (principle of knowing) and not an absolute "principium essendi" (principle of being). In other words, beyond the confines of transcendental philosophy, which must stop at self-consciousness, there lies a hypothetical "total and undivided philosophy," the "equatorial point" of a true natural and transcendental philosophy, where "philosophy would pass into religion, and religion to become inclusive of philosophy." "We begin with the I KNOW MYSELF, in order to end with the absolute I AM. We proceed from the SELF, in order to lose and find all self in GOD." Thus, where Coleridge founds his science of self-knowledge on the principle "sum quia sum" ("I am because I am"), following Schelling, Coleridge founds his science of being on the principle "sum quia deus est" ("I am because God is"). Through access to the "sum quia deus est," Coleridge maintains a science of being beyond the confines of transcendental philosophy (*BL1* 264-278).

So what is it that takes over where philosophy ends, the path to the infinite I AM? The next time the phrase appears is in Coleridge's definition of the imagination:

> The IMAGINATION then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still

> at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead. (Coleridge, *BL1* 295-296)

Coleridge's definition of the imagination divides the mind into three creative faculties: the primary imagination (sense perception), the secondary imagination (which reshapes the data from sense perception according to the interests of the imagination) and the fancy (the 'mechanical' principle of psychological association which Hartley based his system on). Importantly for the purpose of this thesis, Coleridge's definition is offered as a response to Wordsworth's two-part division, encompassing only imagination and fancy, as outlined in the 1815 preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. To see what Coleridge objected to in Wordsworth's definition, we will need to compare the two.

In the preface to the 1815 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth, in turn, had objected to an earlier attempt to define the imagination, by a lesser-known writer named William Taylor. Taylor's definition had positioned imagination as the faculty whereby impressions of sense are reproduced as ideas in the mind, and fancy as the faculty through which these ideas become recombined as new forms (Wordsworth, "Pf1815" xxviii-xxix).[146] Wordsworth, on the basis of Taylor's scheme, opposed his own definition, in which imagination was given a more prominent and creative role. In Wordsworth's definition, imagination does not simply copy perceived forms, but instead takes on a dominant role, functioning through independent "operations of the mind" that take perceptions as their creative materials. In contrast to Taylor's mimetic imagination, Wordsworth's "processes of imagination are carried on either by conferring additional properties upon an object, or abstracting from it some of those which it already possesses, and thus enabling it to re-act upon the mind which hath performed the process, like a new existence" (xxiv-xxv). Notably, the receptive property of the imagination is here subsumed to its productive role: the imagination either confers *new* properties upon an object or *selectively* abstracts pre-existing properties for the purpose of heightening those. In other words, whether as creator or curator of imaginative forms, the mind is elevated above the external world.

Coleridge's definition, by splitting the imagination into two separate functions, can be said to retain both Taylor's definition (now posited as the "primary imagination") and Wordsworth's (now posited as the "secondary imagination").[147]

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[146] The distinction between fancy and imagination has a long historical pedigree. Murray Wright Bundy has shown that it recurs in classical and medieval philosophy, stretching back to Plato's distinction between the two kinds of "image-making": the art of "likeness-making" and the art of making "appearances" (Bundy; Plato, "Sophist" 65-66).

[147] This is not to suggest that Wordsworth's and Coleridge's respective definitions are necessarily original. John Bullitt and Walter Jackson Bate have argued for a number of precursors in the Scottish philosophical tradition that discriminate between imagination as a creative power and fancy as a faculty of mere association, including William Duff's *Essay on Original Genius* (1767), James Beattie's *Dissertations Moral and Critical* (1783) and Dugal Stewart's *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* (1792); Bullitt & Bate, 11-14).

At the same time, Coleridge's primary imagination is placed within the context of his Schelling-derived ten postulates, so that its mental recreation of perceptions partakes in the divine or absolute foundation of those perceptions: a "repetition in the finite mind of the infinite I AM."[148] By allowing the receptive function of perception to bypass the phenomena and partake in a noumenal reality, he can be seen to elevate the primary imagination above the 'superficial' mimesis of Taylor's definition, forging a direct connection between mind and noumenon which avoids becoming a mere connection with surface (and thereby falling under the tyranny of the eye). Simultaneously, by establishing the receptive function of imagination as primary, and its subjective/creative function as secondary, Coleridge once again 'corrects' Wordsworth away from solipsistic inwardness, and toward a firm commitment to outwardness.[149] Indeed, it appears more and more as though it is the loss of the *world* in Wordsworth's worldview which, at this point in time, weighs most heavily on Coleridge.

Wordsworth's "defects" and "excellencies" in *Biographia Literaria* (1817)

So far, this chapter has focused on the ways in which Coleridge, in *Opus Maximum* and *Biographia Literaria*, can be seen to criticize 'eye unity'-adjacent models of perception, which tend to be implicitly associated with Wordsworth, and to substitute solutions that pursue 'deep unity' between subject and object. Next, I will consider whether the same trend extends to his assessment of Wordsworth's poetic "defects" and "excellencies" in *Biographia Literaria*. Sequentially, the large portion of the book devoted to Wordsworth's poetry follows directly upon the philosophical section (ending with Coleridge's definition of the imagination), leaving the impression that the latter serves almost as a build-up to, and background for, the Wordsworth section. In the following pages, I make the case that this is not a coincidence: that parts of the subsequent discussion, such as the concluding discussion of the "excellencies" and "defects," do indeed build upon the preceding philosophical points, here leveraged into a basis for Coleridge's differentiation between his and Wordsworth's modes of perception.

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[148] Critics, on the whole, have read this phrase as literally implying a divine act; Abrams: perception "repeats" the divine act of creation that continually creates the world (Abrams, "Diction and Figures" 15).

[149] At the same time, Coleridge retains Wordsworth's attribution of poetic activity primarily to the secondary imagination. As Lang has argued: "It is the secondary imagination which is responsible for aesthetic creativity; the primary imagination is a common possession of all mankind by virtue of their very nature, the fact of their power of perception" (Lang 396). This, in my view, only brings into further relief that his disagreement with Wordsworth is very narrow, and concerns specifically perception.

Of the five “defects” of Wordsworth’s poetry listed in *Biographia Literaria*, two concern weaknesses on the level of poetic technique, while the other three can be seen as variations on a particular criticism: that Wordsworth chooses materials – whether in the form of language, ideas or objects – that are unworthy or inadequate given the ambitions of his poetry. In other words, Coleridge can be seen as consistently sanctioning Wordsworth’s intentions, but questioning whether the *chosen* words, ideas or objects are conducive to realizing those intentions. As the following pages will show, the arguments for the inadequacy of these materials closely resemble Coleridge’s arguments for the problems with the eye unity-model of perception.

The first “defect,” the claim that Wordsworth has a tendency to alternate between an “original” and an “undistinguished” poetic register, relates primarily to style and might therefore seem less immediately relevant to this thesis (*BL2* 134). However, if taken in connection with a charge leveled at Wordsworth earlier in *Biographia Literaria* – that Wordsworth attributes too much value to the everyday language of “rustics” – it gains a more philosophical dimension (50-52). The latter charge has sometimes been cited as evidence for Coleridge’s case against Wordsworth being founded on ideological and intellectual elitism, for instance by Marilyn Butler.[150] However, it is important to note that Coleridge’s position in this case follows naturally from a commitment to the primacy of intuition, which demands introspection as the first step of poetic creation, and conversely as total a rejection of conventional language as possible. That it is the *conventional* aspect of ‘rustic’ language that Coleridge criticizes here, rather than its rural or class origins, is supported by his claim that the language of peasants, if traced back further in time, would once have been the language of universities and schools, which spread to common life via the pulpit (51). In other words, it is the derivative or second-aspect of such language that Coleridge deems to be problematic in a poetic context, not the background of its speakers. Furthermore, Coleridge suggests using the term “ordinary” in place of Wordsworth’s “real,” clarifying that the use of “ordinary” language is “no more to be found in the phraseology of low and rustic life than in that of any other class” (54). With this in mind, it becomes clear that Wordsworth’s first “defect” is at its root a philosophical criticism: by departing too much from his “original” style, Wordsworth neglects the work of introspection – a prerequisite for making use of his intuitions – and instead defaults to “arbitrary marks of thought, our smooth market-coin of intercourse” (135).

The second “defect,” charges Wordsworth with “matter-of-factness,” or a tendency toward relying on excessive, unnecessary and trivial detail. Unlike the other defects, this charge is not a post-“Dejection” critique of Wordsworth, but one that dates back to the prime days of their collaboration, with Hazlitt citing Coleridge as having used the phase “matter-of-factness” to describe flaws in Wordsworth’s poetry as early as 1797 (quoted in Bate 173). This defect is subdivided into two categories: 1) a “laborious minuteness and fidelity in the representation of objects, and their positions, as they appeared to the poet himself,” and 2) “the insertion of accidental circumstances, in order to the full explanation of his living characters, their dispositions and actions” (*BL2* 139-150). This criticism of Wordsworth’s tendency toward unnecessary particularity is important for contextualizing Coleridge’s subsequent question: “is there one word, for instance, attributed to the pedlar in THE EXCURSION, characteristic of a *Pedlar*?,” which Butler interprets as a nakedly classist response to the very idea of “putting overly intellectual lines in the mouth of a pedlar” (Butler 63). However, Coleridge’s objection is not that “pedlars” talking philosophy is a problem on its own, but that it is unusual enough to require clarification, and thereby bogs down the poem in quotidian webs of poetically uninteresting context. “Need the rank have been at all particularized,” he asks, “where nothing follows which the knowledge of that rank is to explain or illustrate? When on the contrary this information renders the man’s language, feelings, sentiments, and information a riddle, which must itself be solved by episodes of anecdote?” (*BL2* 149-150). In other words, unnecessarily providing information like a character’s occupation, particularly if the occupation becomes unusual in context, requires more context to explain how such an unusual character came to be, which in turn requires more information to contextualize that narrative, with each layer of prosaic clutter obscuring more and more of the poem’s heart.

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[150] Butler claims that Coleridge was ideologically opposed to the way that Wordsworth’s Preface “took the common people, their experience and language, as its proper standard,” and instead sought to promote the example of German philosophy because it was exclusive, “so exalted that it is meaningful only to a small educated élite” (Butler 63)

Leaving aside the third defect (an “undue predilection for the *dramatic* form”) as it relates primarily to style, Wordsworth’s fourth defect is said to be “an intensity of feeling disproportionate to such knowledge and value of the objects described, as can be fairly anticipated of men in general, even of the most cultivated classes; and which therefore few only, and those particularly circumstanced, can be supposed to sympathize” (151). Here, Coleridge essentially accuses Wordsworth of having his poetic speakers react to the world in a way that is either too eccentric or too reliant on private associations to be representative of humanity at large, with the implication that the best poetry describes the emotions in a way that aspires to universality. It is presumably the charge of eccentricity that explains the surprising inclusion of “prolixity,” “repetition” and “eddying […] of thought” in this category; in other words, the logic seems to be that the private and inaccessible logic of such emotional reactions naturally makes them long-winded, repetitive and circuitous to someone whose natural reaction to the same object is more neutral. Here, the claim that Wordsworth’s speakers invest objects with eccentric levels of emotion follows the pattern of accusing Wordsworth with pursuing eye unity, since it accuses his speakers of responding to their own eccentric feelings rather than the objective situations in which they find themselves. Moreover, there may even be a slight hint of personal rejection in this criticism, harking back to an earlier stage of the two poets’ relationship, during which Coleridge often felt himself barred from the closed world of Wordsworthian joy. Indeed, Coleridge's objection that such feeling cannot be "fairly anticipated" even from members of "the most cultivated classes" sounds almost like the complaint of someone protesting the rules for admittance to an exclusive society on the grounds that it is being granted not to the most qualified ("the most cultivated") but based on accidental circumstances, of birth or otherwise (those "particularly circumstanced").

Finally, Wordsworth's fifth defect, that his most characteristic poems contain "thoughts and images too great for the subject," gives Coleridge the opportunity to engage his rival's poetic method on a more philosophical level. In other words, while the fourth defect was described as disproportionate *feeling*, here the problem is disproportionate *thinking*, or what Coleridge calls "mental bombast" (*BL2* 151). The significant amount of space devoted to the fifth defect (most of it taken up by his analysis of "Ode: Intimations of Immortality"), including its climactic end-place in the sequence, suggests that Coleridge viewed this as the most important of the five (similarly to how the sixth and "foremost" of the excellencies is also placed last). Here, Coleridge, while never explicitly rejecting the idea of Wordsworthian perception as a vehicle for transcendence, comes very close to doing so, by introducing the possibility of Wordsworth as a confabulator of thoughts. In other words, while fifteen years earlier, Coleridge could be seen poring over the intricacies of individual lines of Wordsworth's poetry, meticulously assessing his word choices for insights into the outer limits of the experience described, he now introduces the variable of exaggeration: the idea that descriptions of experiences could be dismissed for simply being excessive for the occasion. Coleridge, once again charging Wordsworth with 'eccentricity' of response, may here be deriving authority from his newfound belief in the absolute objectivity of intuition: descriptions that he previously took for granted on account of the power and vitality of their language, can now be evaluated against standards of correctness (in this case, proportionality) that were not available to him before.

The first example that Coleridge cites to support his criticism is the final four lines of "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," noting the unworthiness of moving from a sublime description of "that inward eye, / Which is the bliss of solitude" to the more mundane sight of a cluster of daffodils.[151] Here, it should be noted that it is specifically the thinking and not the language that Coleridge criticizes (he even adds the clarification that he means "mental" and not "verbal" bombast); in other words, it is the *idea* of joining an experience of this type to the appearance of daffodils that is being held up for criticism. In other words, Wordsworth is once again deemed guilty of joining eccentric thought to a mundane sensory surface, once again pursuing a form of eye unity. After a brief discussion of "Gipsies" (1807), Coleridge then turns the charge of mental bombast upon the central thesis of "Ode: Intimations of Immortality":

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[151] "They flash upon that inward eye, / Which is the bliss of solitude! // And then my heart with pleasure fills, / And dances with the *daffodils*" (quoted in *BL2* 152, with Coleridge's italics; Wordsworth, "Cloud," lines 21-24).

> In what sense is a child of that age a Philosopher? In what sense does he read "the eternal deep?" In what sense is he declared to be "for ever haunted" by the Supreme Being? or so inspired as to deserve the splendid titles of a Mighty Prophet, a blessed Seer? By reflection? by knowledge? by conscious intuition? or by any form or modification of consciousness? These would be tidings indeed; but such as would pre-suppose an immediate revelation to the inspired communicator, and require miracles to authenticate his inspiration. Children at this age give us no such information of themselves; and at what time were we dipped in the Lethe, which has produced such utter oblivion of a state so godlike? There are many of us that still possess some remembrances, more or less distinct, respecting themselves at six years old; pity that the worthless straws only should float, while treasures, compared with which all the mines of Golconda and Mexico were but straws, should be absorbed by some unknown gulf into some unknown abyss. (Coleridge, *BL2* 154-155)

As with "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," Coleridge once again takes aim at the claim that transcendence can be authentically experienced through everyday perceptions. Here, Wordsworth's "mental bombast" consists in attributing transcendental significance to perceptions experienced in childhood, with Coleridge asking ironically what happened to these "treasures," given that the only perceptions that survived as memories into adulthood appear to be little more than "worthless straws." The unusually sarcastic edge in Coleridge's language suggests that what is said here has a slightly more personal dimension than he lets on, and indeed, the quoted passage could, perhaps, be seen as offering a late, sharply-worded contribution to the "Ode"-"Dejection"-debate. With Wordsworth having had the previous last word in counseling Coleridge that mid-age dejection is a natural response to the decline of childhood feeling, Coleridge now seems to undermine the foundation for Wordsworth's position by rejecting the sanctification of childhood feeling altogether. This way, Coleridge can be seen to clarify that *his* dejection always concerned something that he had never possessed at all, something for which he now claims a metaphysical dimension; something that, if experienced in childhood, would not be possible to forget, since no "Lethe" could produce "oblivion of a state so godlike" (155).

The critique of Wordsworth's sanctification of childhood is interesting to compare to Coleridge's later discussion of this period in *Opus Maximum* (see discussion on pages 211-214), which, as previously observed, not only attributes a fair number of religious insights to natural infant development, but also establishes a comparable narrative of life as declining after childhood. Likewise, given *Biographia Literaria*'s definition of the primary imagination (i.e. sense perception) as "the creation in the finite mind of the infinite I AM," it seems odd that Coleridge would take issue with Wordsworth's attributing quasi-prophetic powers to children, given that children, in Coleridge's view, already possess the semi-divine "primary imagination" as their birthright. The probable explanation for this discrepancy, as I see it, is that it is the sensory focus of the descriptions in the "Ode" that Coleridge objects to, and which Coleridge senses carries troubling theological implications.[152] In other words, the childhood "lessons" described in *Opus Maximum* (and *The Prelude*) are symbolic rather than transcendent in their own right, averting the danger of eye unity. Likewise, the activities of the primary imagination partakes in the noumenal dimension of the world, as opposed to attaching subjective emotional value to individual perceptions, and thus also averts the danger of eye unity. However, the powerful memories of childhood are simply, Coleridge seems to suggest, intoxications with individual perceptions, and therefore can only be called divine at the price of choosing eye unity over deep unity.

Moreover, Coleridge argues that the "Ode"-philosophy of childhood comes perilously close to making a claim for pantheism (another variant of eye unity, as we have seen). In other words, Coleridge claims, since the child does not exercise these powers consciously, then something else must be unconsciously philosophizing through the child, suggesting something akin to a world-soul:

> In what sense can the magnificent attributes, above quoted, be appropriated to a child, which would not make them equally suitable to a bee, or a dog, or a field of corn: or even to a ship, or to the wind and waves that propel it? The omnipresent Spirit works equally well in them, as in the child; and the child is equally unconscious of it as they. (Coleridge, *BL2* 157)

As for the reference to children's immortality, Coleridge finds the only reasonable interpretation of this claim to be that it refers to children's ignorance of death, so that the "Ode" is essentially restating the argument of Wordsworth's poem "We are Seven" (1798), in which a child denies the death of her siblings because, to her, a burial simply means continuing one's life underground. However, Coleridge counters, this is not an advantage that children have over adults, since no adult has successfully grappled with the reality of "a thing's becoming nothing," making adults equally naïve in this regard (158). Coleridge ends up concluding that Wordsworthian unity has a foundational mysticism that threatens to dissipate in a diffuse blur, but that it is kept in check by his "strong sense": "[W]ithout his strong sense, his *mysticism* would become *sickly* – mere fog, and dimness!" (159).

Having offered his pointed five-point critique of Wordsworth, Coleridge then proceeds to list Wordsworth's six "excellencies," which, as critics have noted, do not always corroborate the portrait given by the defects. In fact, Paul Hamilton goes so far as to say that the excellencies are the downright "reverse of the defects and nothing more," and that Coleridge "does not feel threatened or puzzled by his surfacing antimony, and fails to sense the paradoxes and tensions in his own thought" (Hamilton 163). This is perhaps a fitting bookend to Coleridge's post-*Prelude* attempt to come to grips with whether Wordsworth realized their shared ambition or not: ten years after "To William Wordsworth," he still does not seem to know if he is really accepting or rejecting his friend's greatest accomplishment. In the following analysis, I suggest that most of the tensions between the defects and the excellencies are not contradictions per se – while not obviously compatible, they tend to be technically so – but that they represent two conflicting views, both held by Coleridge, of Wordsworth's ultimate potential. Thus, while the Wordsworth of the defects is something of a straw man, one artificially narrowed to Coleridge's disagreements with where he ended up philosophically (and stylistically), the Wordsworth of the excellencies is something of an ideal, a restatement of what Coleridge *wants* Wordsworth to be capable of, and what his poems feel like when read in the spirit of hope and with an eye to future growth. For example, it is notable that Coleridge ends the section describing Wordsworth's potential to one day produce the "FIRST GENUINE PHILOSOPHIC POEM," skipping over the fact that Wordsworth had already, to the best of his ability, completed one third of that poem (*The Excursion*), and Coleridge had not liked it.

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[152] That it is the overly metaphysical language in the "Ode"-s description of childhood that Coleridge takes issue with is strongly suggested by the specific phrases that Coleridge singles out for criticism: the term "philosopher," to childhood experiences "reading the eternal deep," to calling children "for ever haunted" by the Supreme Being, to calling a child a "prophet" and a "seer" (*BL2* 154-155).

The first excellency, "an austere purity of language both grammatically and logically; in short a perfect appropriateness of the words to the meaning," sits uneasily next to the first three defects, which had criticized Wordsworth for mixing styles, for occasional prolixity and repetitiveness, and for resorting too often to dramatic idioms. However, it does not contradict them, as long as it is taken as a description of Wordsworth at his best, as opposed to a holistic assessment of his language. Indeed, praising Wordsworth's best passages for "austere purity of language" only sharpens the fifth criticism (the accusation of "mental bombast"), since it further clarifies that the bombast manifests itself on the level of ideas and not language. Next, Coleridge praises Wordsworth's "blameless style" on the grounds of its "*untranslatableness* in words of the same language without injury to the meaning," with meaning defined as including "not only its correspondent object, but likewise all the associations which it recalls […] not the object alone, but likewise the character, mood and intentions of the person who is representing it" (*BL2* 159-161). Here, the statement sits uneasily next to Coleridge's fourth and fifth defects, alleging feeling and thought that are disproportionate to the situation, but only insofar as a reader rejects the somewhat artificial separation of style from content: in other words, insofar as the reader rejects the idea that words that summon up excessive feeling and excessive thought could ever be praised for "austere purity." However, logically speaking, the two are fully compatible: Wordsworth's style could be a perfect match of words to meaning, while there is a mismatch between the different elements of meaning (between feeling or idea on the one hand, and object on the other). In short, the first excellency is compatible with the defects – it just *seems* to describe a different poet.

Likewise, the second excellency – “a correspondent weight and sanity of the Thoughts and Sentiments” – appears to conflict with the fifth defect, “thoughts and images too great for the subject,” only insofar as it is read as a holistic assessment and not a description of Wordsworth at his best (*BL2* 164). Coleridge, however, clarifies that this holds true whenever Wordsworth’s “muse” is “in her strength of wing, and when she hovers aloft in her proper element,” i.e. this is true *except* where Wordsworth succumbs to the opposite problem, which Coleridge has already admitted happens very rarely (158-159). Furthermore, the claim that these thoughts and sentiments have been “won, not from books; but – from the poet’s own meditative observation,” that they are “*fresh* and have the dew upon them,” strongly indicates that this is a description of what the first defect had identified as Wordsworth’s original, and not his derivative, style (164). However, when Coleridge praises Wordsworth’s sentiments for being “brought into the full day-light of every reader’s comprehension,” it is difficult not to read it as a straightforward inversion of the fourth defect, where the same quality (the uniqueness of Wordsworth’s emotions) was presented as obstructing the understanding of much of his audience.[153] Mid-section, he reverts to discussing Wordsworth’s emotions as inaccessible, although now that is suggested to be a good thing, since much of his poetry is intended for a small audience: “If Wordsworth is not equally with Daniel alike intelligible to all readers of average understanding in all passages of his works, the comparative difficulty does not arise from the greater impurity of the ore, but from the nature and uses of the metal. A poem is not necessarily obscure, because it does not aim to be popular. It is enough, if a work be perspicuous to those for whom it is written…” (166-167). At this point, Coleridge is expressly inverting his own criticism, and so overtly that one is left with the impression that he is, on some level, arguing with himself. He simply seems unable to decide if he is more sympathetic toward the prosecution or the defense, so he performs both parts.[154] Moreover, one part of him may have felt compelled to defend his old friend against what he takes to be unjust criticisms, made by people whom he felt were not qualified to judge his best poetry. The point of inaccessibility is made again regarding the metaphysical passage in the “Ode,” and here it seems to be a way to protect a poem often misread as heretical in its Christian doctrine. Thus, asserting that those passages are “intelligible, to but a limited number of readers” becomes a way to shield it with a reputation of being difficult, and thus easy to misunderstand (176).

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[153] Full quote: “an intensity of feeling disproportionate to such knowledge and value of the objects described, as can be fairly anticipated of men in general, even of the most cultivated classes; and with which therefore *few only, and those few particularly circumstanced, can be supposed to sympathize*” (*BL2* 151, emphasis mine).

[154] Alternately, Coleridge could be discussing two different forms of inaccessibility in the two passages, but, if so, he evidently does not feel that this needs to be spelled out: the fourth defect’s “intensity of feeling” and the second excellency’s “sentiment” seem close enough to be interchangeable to me.

As if to further the impression of arguing with himself, Coleridge cites the same material that he had criticized for its philosophical implications in his discussion of the fifth defect ("mental bombast"), namely, the metaphysical passages from "Ode: Intimations of Immortality":

> "[T]he ode was intended for such readers only as had been accustomed to watch the flux and reflux of their inmost nature, to venture at times into the twilight realms of consciousness, and to feel a deep interest in modes of inmost being, to which they know that the attributes of time and space are inapplicable and alien, but which yet can not be conveyed, save in symbols of time and space. For such readers the sense is sufficiently plain, and they will be as little disposed to charge Mr. Wordsworth with believing the Platonic pre-existence in the ordinary interpretation of the words, as I am to believe, that Plato ever meant or taught it." (Coleridge, *BL2* 167)

In other words, Coleridge concurs with later critics who read the "Ode"-s afterglow as metaphorical rather than literal, but only because its true subject is fundamentally inexpressible. Instead of referring to pre-existence, Coleridge takes the shadowy recollections as designating something that exists deeper than consciousness, "modes of inmost being" at the other side of "twilight realms of consciousness," and which does not precede our temporal existence as much as exist outside of it, "the attributes of time and space" being "inapplicable and alien" to it except as "symbols." Thus, Coleridge's reading seems to be not that platonic pre-existence is too mystical, but that it is not mystical *enough*.

The third and fourth excellencies, "the sinewy strength and originality of single lines and paragraphs" and "the perfect truth of nature in his images and descriptions as taken immediately from nature" relate to specific qualities in Wordsworth's writing that lie outside the scope of this inquiry. Beginning with the fifth excellency, however, Coleridge returns to defending his old friend, this time vindicating Wordsworth's interest in transcending his own egotism: Wordsworth is credited with "a meditative pathos, a union of deep and subtle thought with sensibility; a sympathy with man as man; the sympathy indeed of a contemplator, rather than a fellow-sufferer or co-mate." To Wordsworth, "no difference[s?] of rank conceals the sameness of the nature; no injuries of wind or weather, or toil, or even of ignorance, wholly disguise the human face divine. The superscription and image of the Creator still remain legible to *him* under the dark lines, with which guilt or calamity had cancelled or cross-barred it" (170).

Finally, Coleridge goes some way toward clarifying the overlap between defects and excellencies, by bifurcating Wordsworth's talents into those that relate to the fancy and those that relate to the imagination:

> "In the play of fancy, Wordsworth, to my feelings, is not always graceful, and sometimes recondite. The likeness is occasionally too strange, or demands too peculiar a point of view, or is such as appears the creature of pre-determined research, rather than spontaneous presentation […] But in imaginative power, he stands nearest

> of all modern writers to Shakespeare and Milton; and yet in a kind perfectly unborrowed and his own." (Coleridge, *BL2* 172).

Thus, the sixth excellency is that Wordsworth possesses "the gift of Imagination in the highest and strictest sense of the word." A number of qualities associated with Wordsworth's defects, his eccentricity ("too peculiar a point of view") and excessive particularism ("appears the creature of pre-determined research, rather than spontaneous presentation"), are now categorized as mistakes on the level of *fancy*, while the workings of Wordsworth's *imagination* are unaffected.

To summarize, the assessment of Wordsworth's poetry in *Biographia Literaria*, especially when considered in conjunction with the philosophical discussion that precedes it, can be seen to participate in Wordsworth's and Coleridge's 'conversation' about perception in two ways. Firstly, Coleridge can clarify the intrinsic differences between the two poets' perceptual habits, reversing the gains that Wordsworth won between 1798 and 1807 when he pathologized the difference between the two habits, thus restoring the equilibrium of their relationship. Secondly, having done the former, Coleridge can vindicate his own perceptual habits by anchoring them to the unassailable authority of intuition, and clarify his objections to the eye unity which he deems Wordsworth guilty of. Notably, in his condemnation of eye unity, Coleridge can be seen repeatedly turning against many of the conclusions of a number of his own pre-"Dejection" poems. This, I argue, strongly indicates that Coleridge was beginning to think of his pre-1803 poetry as, on some level, "belonging" to Wordsworth (by virtue of Coleridge having treated Wordsworth as a model to emulate for his powers of perception). This, in my opinion, to some extent corroborates Norman Fruman's thesis that Coleridge's "Dejection"-crisis was, in large measure, a crisis of faith in Wordsworth as his guiding star (see discussion on page 46).

Finally, however, Biographia Literaria also opens up for reconciliation with Wordsworth, ending as it does by painting an ideal of Wordsworth as he could be, with an eye to the future. By the end, Coleridge is offering Wordsworth an olive-branch by offering him entry into the canon of Imagination, and even into the rarefied domain of philosophy, Coleridge's jealously-guarded niche. Wordsworth is now elected as someone who can once again speak for both of them, Wordsworth the poet and Coleridge the philosopher, and write "the FIRST GENUINE PHILOSOPHIC POEM" (*BL2* 178).

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have argued that a complex and deeply personal conversation about sense perception, one that can be described as a form of dance between two fundamentally opposed perceptual habits, permeates Wordsworth's and Coleridge's works on multiple levels.

I have argued that Coleridge's habit is to perceive the world as traumatically divided between a relatively meaningful seen and an absolutely meaningful unseen. This predicament can only be solved through the future attainment of some state of unified 'higher' perception, but because this state remains a mere hypothesis, Coleridge, for most of his career, remains in a state of indefinite searching that yields ever diminishing returns. It is only once he begins to reinterpret his problem as a predicament involving intuition, and true seeing (in the form of an inner eye) as a half-ideal activity, that he can claim to have found a unity of sorts.

In comparison, Wordsworth's habit lacks this unsettled quality of self-division, and instead finds satisfaction in powerfully concentrating on a single point of focus: a gap or absence in the sensory fabric. From Coleridge's vantage point, this way of seeing seems both foreign and somewhat magical, with some of the apparent hallmarks of the type of unified perception that could resolve Coleridge's dilemma. For this reason, Coleridge finds it easy to defer to Wordsworth in matters of perception, and to interpret Wordsworth's ability to find relief in his senses as a promise of a future 'method' of possible transcendence that Coleridge too may be able to acquire. However, the emotional foundation for Wordsworth's seeing remains inaccessible to Coleridge, and so Coleridge must rely on the minutiae of how Wordsworth describes his perceptions in poetry. Consequently, we see Coleridge showing signs of becoming both aesthetically and intellectually dependent on Wordsworth's "accounts" of transcendent perception, and that his attitude to Wordsworth's seeing fluctuates between belief and skepticism based on whether he finds these accounts to be authentic or not.

Seen this way, the respective challenges experienced by both parts, and the poignant co-dependency of their relationship, becomes clear. Coleridge is at a natural disadvantage in that his way of seeing constitutes *itself* as a problem: since it is defined by its own constitutive state of division, it cannot go beyond it, and therefore must reenact the self-fragmentation that Coleridge finds so intolerable. To achieve resolution of any kind other than the aborted resolution of Romantic irony, Coleridge must either backpedal from the possibility of a future state of unified seeing and fall back on idealism, or transfer the burden of 'ideal perceiver' to someone else, whose capacity for unified perception is then essentially accepted on faith. Thus, it is easy to see why someone who sees the world like Coleridge would be attracted by the strong, assertive claims for perception made by Wordsworth, and why Wordsworth would become the natural recipient of the role of 'ideal perceiver.'

Conversely, Wordsworth is at a disadvantage in that its claim to success (i.e. transcendence) can only be validated on a personal, subjective basis. In other words, no amount of description can make the transcendence at the end of the communion coda from "Tintern Abbey" the *necessary* result of concentrated seeing; at some point, poetic technique has exhausted its possibilities and the reader must fill in the blank with a memory of an equivalent experience, or simply accept it on faith. Furthermore, just as Coleridge comes to depend on Wordsworth for a better way to see, so Wordsworth comes to depend on Coleridge to supply a philosophical framing to a process of seeing which, to Wordsworth, is simply seeing. Therefore, just like Coleridge rediscovers himself as a perceiver through vicarious identification with Wordsworth's seeing, so does Wordsworth rediscover himself as a metaphysician through vicarious identification with Coleridge's *interpretation* of his seeing. However, this makes the legitimacy of Wordsworthian transcendence dependent on Coleridge's belief that it is legitimate, which Coleridge will do only as long as he believes that Wordsworth's poetic formulations are authentic records of introspection, and not when he suspects that the mechanics of Wordsworth's seeing is the product of eccentric or arbitrary "mental bombast." Thus, the conversation between these two habits of seeing very much resembles Wordsworth's and Coleridge's working relationship in real life; they deplete as much as they complete each other.

In the preceding chapters, I have speculated that "Tintern Abbey" constitutes a watershed moment in the conversation. More specifically, it represents the point where Wordsworth directly appropriates the role of 'ideal perceiver', filling the role that Coleridge had drawn up for Hartley in "Frost at Midnight," and proposes a solution to Coleridge's dilemma which violates the boundary between seen and unseen, and purports to see straight into the unseen "life of things." Having crossed this boundary, Wordsworth subsequently established a high-water mark that their work with perception could not exceed without coming up against the limits of language itself. The subsequent trajectory of this conversation, I would argue, is closely bound up with Coleridge's inability to follow where Wordsworth went in "Tintern Abbey." This prompts a major turning point in the conversation, in that Coleridge's speculations about the philosophical meaning of Wordsworth's seeing increasingly give way to investigations of its psychology.

Why does this change occur? Here, I should note that there are multiple biographical factors that have been left out of this thesis because they do not relate to the conversation in question, but which will have effected the psychologization of Coleridge's disagreements with Wordsworth. Coleridge's belief in Wordsworth as possessing the requisite "joy" to adequately perceive the world, of course, also had to do with Wordsworth's marital success, Wordsworth's poetic productivity and

Coleridge's own personal tragedies, all of which contributed to a feeling that Wordsworth was somehow 'blessed' in a way that he could never be. However, there is enough evidence to suggest that there is a self-contained conversation where perception is the issue at heart, and in this conversation, Coleridge gradually comes to think of the difference between their two habits of perception as qualitative and neurological, rather than quantitative and related to development. Meanwhile, Wordsworth does the opposite: he retains the idea that his way of seeing represents a higher developmental stage, and that Coleridge can be induced to catch up with him.

This conversation continues through two different strands, in one of which Coleridge continues to defer to Wordsworth's idea that the two of them occupy different positions on the same developmental track, with Wordsworth a bit further ahead and serving as Coleridge's 'teacher'. This strand runs through "Dejection: An Ode" and Coleridge's other poems about loss around the same time, includes Wordsworth's attempted interventions in "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" and *The Prelude*, and concludes with "To William Wordsworth." This strand, which predominates in the period 1801-1807, likely reflects a general attitude of deference to Wordsworth's success, intensified by the passing of Coleridge's special access to Wordsworth and Dorothy after Wordsworth's marriage in 1802. In the other strand, which only emerges in full after Coleridge's return to health around 1816, Coleridge can be seen insisting on a qualitative distinction between their perceptual habits, and in various ways trying to discredit Wordsworth's seeing as a trick of the mind, as self-love dressed up as transcendence. This branch of the conversation stays confined mostly to Coleridge's notebooks until it emerges more explicitly in *Biographia Literaria* and the manuscripts for *Opus Maximum*. This phase of the conversation turns, on Coleridge's end, into a need to establish a final difference between the subject-object unity attained in Wordsworth's perceptual model and the hard-won subject-object unity Coleridge felt that he had defined through his philosophical investigations.[155]

In short, it seems safe to say that the challenge posed by Wordsworth's poetic account of "see[ing] into the life of things" hangs like a cloud over the post-1798 conversation between Wordsworth and Coleridge on multiple levels. It looms over Coleridge's nagging doubts about being able to perceive the world as a poet ought to perceive it, and over each of Coleridge's examples of hungrily gazing at natural sights which obstinately refuse to reciprocate (as well as his recurring use of the term 'life' for what is missing). It hangs over his prolonged quest to prove "sensuality" and all "despotism[s] of the eye" false, as well as his long struggle to construct an intuitive ‘bridge’ between the mind and real, verifiable objects that bypasses the broken lane of perception, culminating in his doctrine of the “mind’s eye.” Yet, crucially, by taking care to anchor all his proposed solution to ‘objective’ faculties like intuition and Reason, Coleridge avoids a retreat into solipsistic subjectivity. Until the end, he persists in seeking to restore a pathway back to the external world, insisting that its reality and objectivity can be established on intuitive grounds, while simultaneously seeking to expose Wordsworth’s ‘eye-mindedness’ as a species of inwardness, of self-love in disguise.

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[155] Here, it is perhaps up to the sympathy of the reader to determine whether Coleridge's subsequent 'corrections' of *The Prelude* are due to a genuine philosophical objection or an expression of a desire to restore balance in the relationship. This also goes for Coleridge's appeals to Reason and intuition, which can also be seen as reframing the debate in terms that will neuter Wordsworth's advantage in poetic feeling, and anchor Coleridge's increasingly isolated view to the unassailable, 'objective' bedrock of intuition and Reason.

Overall, the interest in finding a solid philosophical basis for outwardness remains a notable feature of this conversation. While Wordsworth and Coleridge both show a clear interest in elevating the power of imagination as an important participant in the experience of reality, this thesis has shown that a major disagreement in their conversation revolves around how the mind can be restored to a connection with real and tangible *things*. Against this background, one could make the case that the first generation of British Romantics, especially if made to include the overwhelmingly vision-oriented William Blake, are not entirely well-served by the conventional categorization of their ideas as part of an intellectual ‘inward turn.’

Here, it needs to be admitted that the consensus of Romanticism as an inward turn has not constrained critical work on Wordsworth and Coleridge per se, since the range of positions taken up by scholars on this topic has long been fairly diverse. For example, a number of scholars, among them Stephen Prickett and M. H. Abrams, have argued that Wordsworth and Coleridge sought a synthesis of inward and outward faculties rather than a wholesale elevation of mind over world (Prickett, *Romanticism and Religion* 5; Abrams, *Supernaturalism* 370-371). However, I would argue that the degree to which these two key members of the first Romantic generation often treated inwardness as the *greater* problem of the two, and, conversely, to think of a correction toward outwardness as *more* necessary than the reverse, has tended to be underemphasized in scholarship. Moreover, the deeply-rooted assumption that the Romantic movement as a whole constituted an inward turn still tends to set the tone for collective assessments of the Romantics, and tends to slot figures like Wordsworth and Coleridge into the same ideological and philosophical categories as their various Romantic successors. For this reason, I believe that a renewed debate on the topic of Romantic inwardness, in which concepts like ‘inwardness’ and ‘outwardness’ are reexamined in a more philosophically expansive way, would in many ways be beneficial for our understanding of the movement.

Here, it is worth noting that the notion of an inward turn in the sense that M. H. Abrams used the term (a turn from objective observation or description of the world toward subjective self-expression) is sometimes conflated with, or taken to be related to, the idea of a sociopolitical inward turn (a turn from political engagement toward political quietism). If understood in the latter sense, it would be broadly accurate to say that Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s interests in the 1800s represent an ‘inward turn’ compared to, for example, their interests in the early 1790s.

However, the case weakens if extrapolated beyond the extreme reference point of the French Revolution: it is not clear, for example, why Wordsworth's *The Excursion* or Coleridge's "Dejection: An Ode" would be *less* politically engaged than pre-revolutionary poems written in solitude, such as Edward Young's *Night-Thoughts* (1742-1745) or Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (1751). Moreover, there is little correspondence between where individual works fall on the mirror-to-lamp spectrum and where they fall on the politics-to-quietism spectrum. For instance, many of the most explicitly political poems of the Romantic era were written in the apocalyptic genre (such as Blake's Prophecies), while some its least politically engaged poems, such as Wordsworth's bird-and-flower poems, were written in an unadorned, descriptive style. Therefore, I see no reason why the idea of an inward turn-narrative in the Abrams sense should be conflated with changes on the level of political consciousness.

Moreover, I would like to suggest that post-Romantic readings of Romanticism sometimes appear constrained by a kind of 'blind spot,' particularly in its treatment of the mystical orientation of the movement. Specifically, there appears to be a tendency in the secular, broadly materialist tradition of literary scholarship to treat the language of mysticism and spirituality, in whatever form it appears in history, as essentially indistinguishable from the language of fantasy and dreams. This has resulted in a constructed binary which tends to define 'outwardness' as an emotionally neutral, essentially materialist sensibility and 'inwardness' as anything that deviates too much from the former. Thereby, appeals to faculties like intuition tend to be misread as covert or misunderstood appeals to the imagination. Having established that deviations from a secular and proto-materialist norm represent variations of the same interest, any prolonged period of such deviations will consequently be diagnosed as a single, largely uniform 'inward turn.'

This tendency, in my opinion, is both reductive and anachronistic, and fails to take into account a long tradition in Western thought which is simultaneously outward-oriented and mystical in its intellectual coloring. Early examples include St. Francis, described by G. K. Chesterton as someone for whom, after a millennium of sensory penance during the Dark Ages, "flowers and stars recovered their first innocence"; indeed, Chesterton argues, "all those things that nobody understood before Wordsworth were familiar to St. Francis" (Chesterton 12). In the twentieth century, it is exemplified by twentieth-century theologians like Pierre Teilhard de Chardin when he argued that the meaning of existence lies in learning how to see; "to see is to become more," since man, by being the "centre of perspective" in the cosmos, is also the universe's "centre of construction" (Teilhard de Chardin 31-36). Among literary figures, it is common among writers straddling the boundary between modernism and late Romanticism, such as D. H. Lawrence, who described the "religious way of knowledge" as "accept[ing] our sense-impressions, our perceptions, in the full sense of the word, complete" (Lawrence 190). It has another strain in psychedelically-inflected spirituality, including the 19th-century Benjamin Paul Blood's description of the "anesthetic revelation" brought on by nitrous oxide, and Aldous Huxley's mescalin-induced "gratuitous grace," in which introspection, music and language were all deemed hollow compared to the infinite wonder of ordinary visual information (Blood 33-35; Huxley 45, 49-52, 73).[156] In this tradition, accurately replicated sense information and belief in transcendence confirm each other, rather than work against each other.[157]

As discussed in the background chapter, Romantic studies has also seen a long-term trend toward treating the type of thought and feeling that was for a long time deemed prototypically Romantic as suspect, even contaminated. The interest in saving Romantic works from the types of assumptions out of which they were born has led to something analogous to what Susan Sontag, in "Against Interpretation," argues happened to art near the end of the classical era. In late antiquity, Sontag argues, commentators had to find a way to rescue culturally significant art from its dependence on what was by then "discredited myth," and so the method of "interpretation" came into being, so as to make mythic art reconcilable to the demands of "post-mythic consciousness" (Sontag 5-6). Over time, interpretation began to take precedence over art itself, becoming a perspective that "excavates, and as it excavates, destroys," which "tames the work of art" and "makes art manageable, conformable" (7-8). This, to my mind, describes many of the efforts to divorce Romantic poetry from its intricate understructure of thought and feeling, which contemporary critics are often too quick to treat as "discredited myth." Doing so strikes me as counter-productive in that some Romantic ideas cannot be meaningfully separated from this understructure – they *are* the understructure – and treating this entanglement as a Gordian knot to be cleanly severed rather than as a productive source of creative friction risks turning living poems, in the long run, into little more than floating signifiers.

Finally, there is one question which this thesis has not yet attempted to answer, but which may be at the forefront of the minds of readers who do not find Romantic thought to be quite so interesting as to deserve this much scrutiny. In short: why *should* we attribute so much importance to the ways in which these two men described the minutiae of their perceptions two centuries ago, perceptions which most people today would acknowledge as having no meaning beyond what the brain projects upon them?

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[156] To clarify, Blood and Huxley wrote about chemically induced episodes in which they experienced intensified perceptions of everyday sights, as opposed to psychedelic hallucinations. In Blood's case, the wonder lay in nitrous oxide defamiliarizing the sensory tableau of the everyday, that "tasteless water of souls" (Blood 33-35). In Huxley's case, it consisted of making trivial details, particularly intricate ones such as the folds of a drapery, as stimulating to look at as though the mind was seeing them for the first time (Huxley 33-34).

[157] That said, intellectual mysticism needs to be kept distinct from medical conditions which produce patently bizarre behaviour. For example, the neurological condition called "temporal lobe personality", typically caused by epileptic seizures in the limbic system, has been described as a permanent "feeling of divine presence and the sense that [patients] are in direct communion with God." Temporal lobe personalities see "cosmic significance in trivial events", are claimed to be "humorless" and "full of self-importance", and "maintain elaborate diaries that record quotidian events in elaborate detail" (Ramachandran & Blakeslee 180-182). There is, as always, room for nuance.

Firstly, I would point to the argument from influence. The combined influence of Wordsworth and Coleridge on the development of Western (and, indirectly, non-Western) thought is immense. John Stuart Mill, after a joyless and authoritarian upbringing, attributes his discovery of a freer and more fulfilling way to live to having his eyes opened by Wordsworth's poetry, less for its content than for its capacity to convey "states of feeling, and of thought coloured by feeling, under the excitement of beauty […] they seemed to be the very culture of the feelings, which I was in quest of" (Mill 103-109). Thus, one could draw a direct line from Wordsworth's rarefied "states of feeling" and the chain of events which led to Mill's subsequent articulation of the tenets of modern liberalism. Likewise, the tradition of American transcendentalism, crucial to the formation of American high culture, is saturated with Wordsworth's influence to the degree that, particularly in the case of Emerson and Thoreau, it can be considered a direct off-shoot.[158] As for Coleridge, he has been alternately credited with being the single most importance influence on the Victorian theological tradition, the man who virtually set the terms of Anglo-American literary criticism for the first half of the twentieth century, a forerunner of symbolist and decadent poetry, and an important precursor in psychoanalytical thought.[159]

Finally, this is before one even considers the complex question of the afterlife of British Romanticism, the vast outgrowth for which the 1798 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* has long been regarded, somewhat reductively, as the seed, and whether or not we still live in it.[160] The fact that large parts of it may have emerged from the knotty roots of a single human relationship does not in any way relativize the legacy of Wordsworth and Coleridge, but it does suggest that some of these inherited ways of thinking and feeling have a tinge of unmistakable individuality, even eccentricity, to them. Some of the parts that we have inherited from Coleridge still wear the gloomy cast of his gut problems and anxious attachment style, while some of the parts that we have inherited from Wordsworth bear the traces of his dogged insistence on personal independence at all costs. Furthermore, while it is difficult to argue that something *akin* to a Romantic movement would not have occurred in Britain without Wordsworth's and Coleridge's contributions, it would unquestionably have been something different. Even among the most conservative guesses, one could imagine an alternate movement in which philosophy or religion or sense perception did not play an important role, or one that was more French or Italian in its orientation, or more ironic, or more nihilistic, or simply a late flowering of Neoclassical sentiment petering out into mannerism before wilting into its own alternative version of decadence. In short, Wordsworth's and Coleridge's impact on the history of Western literature and thought is vast and diverse.

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[158] See, for instance, McSweeney 7.

[159] For a discussion of Coleridge's influence on French symbolism and modernism, see Abrams, "Coleridge, Baudelaire, and Modernist Poetics," 114-144.

[160] Of all British Romantic writers, William Wordsworth arguably did the most to establish the ideas and practices at the heart of the movement. It is not for nothing that William Hazlitt described "Wordsworth's genius" as essentially of a piece with the moment in which he lived, a "pure emanation of the Spirit of the Age" (Hazlitt 117).

Secondly, I think there is also a case to be made for the opposite: a kind of universality. One thing that I have tried to foreground in the preceding pages is that, for all the ways in which Wordsworth and Coleridge's habits of perception are highly individual, there are also processes at work that seem almost archetypal. What we see in this conversation, at least in my eyes, is something like a meeting between neurological *types*, which are, in their own ways, as rigidly defined as distinct schools of philosophy.

Thirdly, there is an argument which is unlikely to convince everyone, but it deserves to be mentioned. To paraphrase Thomas McFarland, there may be something inherent in the poetic attitude to the world which is essentially a mystical response to the fact of perception, and which in the realm of ideas often trends toward a diffuse pantheism (McFarland 119-122). Likewise, Merleau-Ponty has theorized that "every theory of painting is a metaphysics" and that "the actions most proper to [the painter] […] seem to emanate from the things themselves, like figures emanating from the constellations" (Merleau-Ponty 261-265). To those who think in this way, there is something self-evidently meaningful in the way that certain slants of light or wind-swept trees at evening appear to the eye, something that cuts through any attempt to explain it and which impels the mind with minimal resistance toward various forms of obsessive, focused, instrumentally useless labor. Poetry, like all art, is a map of some of the most interesting of these sensory-cognitive coordinates, standardized and enhanced by certain adventurous perceivers for posterity. The instrumental value of scrutinizing long-dead people's recorded sense-experiences this way is admittedly slight, but the intrinsic value is incalculable, particularly to those whose belief-system somewhat resembles Thornton Wilder's lines, in *Our Town*, that "everybody knows in their bones that *something* is eternal, and *that* something has to do with human beings" (Wilder 52).

That, I believe, is why artists look, and why we choose to look through their eyes.

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