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‘Radical Difference’: Wordsworth’s Classical Imagination and Roman Ethos

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.
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Abstract

The subject of this thesis is the character of William Wordsworth, who is widely held to be both a poet of the imagination, and an ‘exemplary’ Romantic. His greatest poem, *The Prelude* had as its subject matter the growth of his own poetic mind; something that can also be understood as the growth of his ‘imagination’. His friend and fellow poet, later turned philosopher, Samuel Taylor Coleridge developed a novel and romantic understanding of ‘the Imagination’ in the early years of his friendship with Wordsworth. He identified Wordsworth’s genius, as a poet, as the product of a particularly gifted imagination, something he conceived of as an innate ability.

In this thesis I challenge this ‘Romantic’ representation of Wordsworth’s genius, one that has become canonical, largely as a result of Coleridge’s treatment of Wordsworth, Poetry and Imagination in *Biographia Literaria*. In making a more detailed analysis of Wordsworth’s own claims about his identity, his poetic art, and imagination, I develop an argument that proposes a very different ethos to the one still largely considered normative in English Studies. The argument depends on a better recognition of Wordsworth’s Classical Republican sympathies in the 1790s, and the extent to which the example of the famous Roman statesman, orator, philosopher, and poet, Marcus Tullius Cicero captured Wordsworth’s imagination. Contrary to those who would romanticise Wordsworth’s genius, I suggest his best work was the product of a theory of poetry based on principles that defined a very classical ideology.

My argument builds on the work of recent, more detailed, representations of Wordsworth as a historical subject whose ideas were defined by particular historical circumstances, and whose identity developed out of those experiences. In addition to paying more attention to the ‘historical’ Wordsworth, I have also made a detailed analysis of his language, discovering the existence of a particular idiom. Wordsworth’s vocabulary reflects, not only a classical humanist ideology, but also strong Stoic sentiments and an attitude of Socratic, Academic Scepticism. I trace the source of this characteristic idiom back to the influence of Cicero whose works, along with Marcus Quintilian’s *De Institutione Oratoria* defined key aspects of Wordsworth’s poetic theory in the late 1790s and early 1800s.
Dedicated to the Memory

of

Robert Woof
Preface and Acknowledgements

In concluding his study of Wordsworth’s poetic powers in *Biographia Literaria*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge challenged for Wordsworth ‘the gift of imagination in the highest and strictest sense of the word’. Although, as Coleridge’s previous chapters had demonstrated, there were a number of problems with Wordsworth’s mistaken poetic theory, he was rescued from these faults by his ‘imaginative power’. This, enabled him to stand ‘nearest of all modern writers to Shakespeare and Milton’. ‘If’, Coleridge wrote, ‘I should ever be fortunate enough to render my analysis of imagination, its origin and characters, thoroughly intelligible to the reader, he will scarcely open on a page of this poet’s works without recognizing, more or less, the presence and influence of this faculty’ (*BL* Ch XXII).

This thesis challenges Coleridge’s challenge, and aims to free readers of Wordsworth’s poetry from the claims about his imagination made by Coleridge here. Given that Coleridge never did fulfil the promise he had made earlier (in Chapter XIII), to complete his analysis of imagination and make it ‘thoroughly intelligible’, his readers have had to fall back on statements in *Biographia* – incomplete as they are – to assist them in their reading of Wordsworth. This thesis argues that this has led to a substantial misreading of Wordsworth’s imagination, something that I too was trained to do in my undergraduate years. Having, myself, been a pupil at Christ’s Hospital, I was inevitably inducted into the Coleridgean tradition by Reginald Watters, Head of English at the time. The school celebrated Coleridge’s bi-centenary in 1972 with an Exhibition, and a series of lectures given by John Beer, Kathleen Coburn, David Newsome and William Walsh. I was, for many years, a committed Coleridgean, and as an undergraduate in the late 1970s I was a romantic believer in Coleridge’s representation of Wordsworth. Although I attended University in Britain, it was the ‘visionary company’ of North American High Romantic critics, Meyer Abrams, Harold Bloom and Geoffrey Hartman, whose works captured my romantic imagination in my youth. It was only in the mid 1990s, when undertaking research for a Masters thesis, that I later learnt of ‘theory’ and became engaged in the debate taking place in the academy then about the role of history and ideology in the study of the literary.

In acknowledging those who have contributed, especially, to the production of this thesis I am obliged to think back to my Christ’s Hospital education, *not* ‘pent mid cloisters dim’,¹ and to acknowledge a Mr Cornish, an eccentric (to our minds), Australian exchange teacher who taught at Christ’s Hospital for a year. He had the audacity to decide that his ‘O’ Level students should study *Coriolanus* and *The Poems of Keats*, rather than the far more popular choices of *Macbeth* and *Homage to Catalonia*. This introduction to Keats sealed my fate as a Romantic, something that was compounded by Watters’ lessons on Coleridge. Where Coleridge had James Bowyer to contend with, I was inspired by David Newsome’s lectures to the Grecians in which he was drawing on materials

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¹ The school moved out of London at the beginning of the twentieth century, to an impressive and expansive rural setting near Horsham in Sussex, and coincidentally, a mile from Shelley’s birthplace.
from the book he had been working on at the time, Two Classes of Men: Platonism and Romantic Thought.

In my current research for this thesis I have been fortunate to have had two years of scholarship funding from the University of Auckland, and I would like to thank my Supervisor, Associate Professor Joanne Wilkes and Professor Michael Neil, for supporting my scholarship application. I have also had funding from the University of Auckland Graduate Research Fund that enabled me to travel to the United Kingdom to present papers at a couple of conferences. It has been a very solitary activity working on a poet who wandered lonely as a cloud in Aotearoa, the land of the long white cloud. Few New Zealanders have much reason to get excited about a long-dead, white, European, male poet who wrote about dancing daffodils. I have, therefore, greatly appreciated the possibilities offered by attending such conferences. Personal circumstances – the extended terminal illness of my father in Britain – led to me visiting Britain annually for a further three years, and I timed those visits to coincide with the summer conference season.

Through participation at several more conferences I was able to discuss my own research with a number of specialists whose works I had been studying, and I was also able to appreciate current debates in literary studies. But although this study had originally included some debate with certain key figures in both Romantic studies and the study of Wordsworth, I had to cut that section, in order to focus on the more important matter of Wordsworth’s theorising. I am however very grateful for the conversations that I was able to have with several scholars, some of whom I can be seen to disagree with here, in their interpretation of Wordsworth, but whose scholarship I have relied on in my own research. I trust that my disagreements will be seen in the light of the argument I offer here, which suggests that their own work relied too heavily on Coleridge’s representation of Wordsworth. I have dedicated this thesis to the memory of Robert Woof with whom I discussed the earlier stages of its development on my several visits to Grasmere. I was especially grateful to Robert for his hospitality, his conversation, and his genuine concern for the matters of the human heart that were so important to Wordsworth. He had also introduced me to Richard Clancey, who was eager to see how my research developed. Sadly these Grasmere acquaintances, and my father, all died before I was able to complete a project that kept expanding in its scope.

I offer particular thanks to John Williams for support and for helping me identify the nature of Wordsworth’s classical republican sympathies; to Theresa Kelley who was able to appreciate where my argument was going and offered her support; to Bruce Graver for telling me to read Tusculan Disputations; to James Chandler for a discussion about High Romanticism; to Marilyn Butler for her questions about a paper I presented on Wordsworth’s debt to Thomson; to Pamela Clemit for responding to my queries about Godwin; to Keith Hanley and the Centre for Wordsworth Studies at Lancaster University for offering generous support when I had hoped to get research funding; to Alan Liu for taking time to discuss Wordsworth on a visit to Auckland. Thanks are also due to Nicholas Roe for suggesting I attend the Coleridge Conference, and to Paul Davidson and the organising committee, for the award of a Bursary. The Coleridge Conference, in particular provided the possibility of discussions with a number of distinguished academics, including Paul Sheats – whose
representation of Wordsworth I follow closely here – and Paul Magnuson who, like Robert Woof, was
genuinely interested in listening to my argument.

I have also been honoured to have received two Stephen Copley Awards from the British
Association for Romantic Studies, to assist me in research at the Wordsworth Trust Library at
Grasmere, Bristol University Library and the British Library, and I thank the various BARS
committee members over the past few years for their work. Thanks also to the librarians at the above
institutions, and especially to Jeff Cowton at the Jerwood Centre. The Wordsworth Trust has been
generous in allowing me access to original manuscripts, notebooks, and books from Wordsworth’s
library. Thanks are also due to Joanne Wilkes again, this time for her enduring patience in supervising
a project that seemed like it would never end.

Lastly I need to thank my family, whose support for my work has been tested to the limit. I
thank Susanne and Matthew most especially, for their patience, and my daughter Tara, though no
longer at home, has also experienced my ‘absence’. I also thank my sisters Alice and Catherine, my
brother James, and my mother Pamela for their support during my visits to Britain. To my father I owe
a more serious debt, since his illness served to justify the expense of my annual trips to Britain, which
enabled me to add further detail to my research project.
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Abbreviations

BL  Biographia Literaria or Biographical Sketches of my Literary Life and Opinions, S.T.C. Coleridge. Ed. George Watson


MLB  Lyrical Ballads. Ed. Michael Mason. In references, page numbers are followed by line numbers.


WR I & II  I. Wordsworth’s Reading 1770-1799. II. Wordsworth’s Reading 1800-1815 Ed. Duncan Wu
Introduction

I. Representing Wordsworth

Wordsworth had no intention of liberating poetry from its tradition. Quite the contrary, his program seems to have been one of liberating poetic tradition from the museum where it had been encased in all its pastness, of breathing new life into what had been assumed to be dead…[This] principle can be discerned in every form Wordsworth adapts to his use.¹

I shall concentrate here on Wordsworth…because his works – like his position in the Romantic Movement – are normative and, in every sense, exemplary.²

This thesis argues that a major misrepresentation of the poet William Wordsworth’s identity or ‘ethos’ occurred in the development of ‘the critical tradition’ in ‘traditional’ literary studies, and that this was due, primarily, to the influence of Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s representation of his poetic genius. Although contemporary professors of literature in the specialised disciplines of Romantic studies and the study of Wordsworth recognise aspects of this misrepresentation, I maintain that much of their criticism of Wordsworth still remains under the shadow of Coleridge’s influence. I argue here that, despite the recent re-evaluations of the critical tradition in the turns to ‘theory’ and ‘history’ – and the consequent devaluation of Coleridge’s particular authority – the study of Wordsworth remains committed to defining a Romantic representation of his ethos that is entirely ‘out of character’. In this study I propose that the ‘exemplary’ Romantic Wordsworth, as described by Jerome McGann – and earlier by Meyer Abrams – is a figment of Coleridge’s imagination. It is an identity Coleridge passionately believed Wordsworth should have been, and which he represented to the public in Biographia Literaria. The development of English Literary Criticism in the Universities owed much to Coleridgean concepts, and its founding members were pre-disposed to accepting Coleridge’s Romantic representation of Wordsworth. This is not a study of Wordsworth criticism or Romanticism, however. It is primarily a study of Wordsworth, focussing on his poetic and moral imagination and concerned with providing a better appreciation of his ethos. My thesis paints a radically different representation of Wordsworth to the one that has been, in the words of McGann, ‘incorporated into our academic program’.³

In referring to the ‘critical tradition’ here, I have in mind the concept entertained by Meyer Abrams in his influential study The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition. Abrams played a significant role in endorsing and institutionalising Coleridge’s representation of Wordsworth in his own work, effectively establishing it as ‘canonical’ in his

² Jerome McGann. The Romantic Ideology p 82. In The Historicity of Romantic Discourse, Clifford Siskin also justified his ‘extensive use of Wordsworthian texts’ because he found them ‘in Jerome McGann’s words normative and in every sense exemplary’ (196).
³ The Romantic Ideology, p 91. McGann famously argued that ‘the scholarship and criticism of romanticism and its works are dominated by a Romantic ideology, by an uncritical absorption in Romanticism’s own self-representations’(1). In Chapter 8, he specifically asserted that the core values of this ‘Romantic ideology’ were essentially ‘Wordsworthian’.
influential studies that re-invented the identity of ‘British Romanticism’. Central to this representation of Wordsworth is the belief that he was a great poet by virtue of his ‘imagination’, a term that Wordsworth used most notably in his greatest poem *The Prelude*, and which Coleridge defined, with Wordsworth very much in mind, in *Biographia Literaria*. I revisit the once popular topic of imagination here, and argue that Wordsworth’s understanding of the term differed, *radically*, from that of Coleridge, a fact that ‘traditional’ readings of Wordsworth have failed to recognise. Most contemporary studies of Wordsworth remain committed to representing his ethos as that of an ‘exemplary’ Romantic poet. They also tend to read *The Prelude* as the ‘exemplary’ Romantic text that Abrams described in *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*. It is this ‘Romantic’ representation that I question here as I argue instead, that Wordsworth’s theory of poetry, and his understanding of imagination, represent a distinctively classical ethos – an argument first voiced, with some precision, by Klaus Dockhorn in an influential essay in 1944.4

In this study I trace a connection between concepts of imagination and self-representation, or ethos. I use the latter term here to stress my interest in Wordsworth’s concept of self-identity, which should not be confused with modern or postmodern concepts of self as defined in the Freudian and post-Freudian world’s preoccupation with ‘psychological man’.5 I have deliberately avoided applying twentieth-century concepts about the mind, to my reading of Wordsworth here, since my primary concern is to come to a better understanding of Wordsworth’s interest in what he described as ‘the growth of [his] own mind’ and to attempt to interpret his writing on his terms, not ours. I am therefore not concerned to debate or argue with the representations of contemporary critics; my primary concern is to get a better understanding of Wordsworth’s arguments and his theory. I suggest that readings of Wordsworth that attempt to understand the ‘mind of the poet’ by drawing heavily on *The Prelude* to define that understanding, tend to misread Wordsworth’s intentions in the poem, as well as his own understanding of imagination. This is due to the development of a critical tradition that has come to privilege Coleridge’s reading of Wordsworth as a poet of imaginative genius, and to interpret Wordsworth’s use of the term ‘imagination’ according to Coleridge’s ‘superior’ wisdom. Although Coleridge’s famous definition of ‘The Imagination’ in *Biographia Literaria* is notoriously obscure, it captured the imaginations of literary critics looking for an ‘authoritative’ description of the workings of the poetic or ‘creative’ imagination. I revisit Coleridge’s famous differentiation between ‘Fancy’ and ‘Imagination’ here. But rather than representing the Coleridgean side of the argument that he had with Wordsworth on the matter, I present a reading of what Wordsworth’s argument might sound like if he were given the opportunity to represent himself. I have, therefore, largely ignored the smokescreen that Coleridge produced in writing *Biographia* as I focus, initially, on the early debate on the topic that caused Coleridge to refer to a ‘radical Difference’ of opinion over poetic theory in letters to William Sotheby and Robert Southey in July 1802.6

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6 CL II 808-813; 828-834
In producing an analysis of Wordsworth’s work that does not accept, or follow, Coleridge’s authority I have aimed to produce a far more ‘critical’ study of the historical circumstances that led to the development of Wordsworth’s mind. I have paid far greater attention to Wordsworth’s own eloquent language and his knowledge of classical rhetoric rather than studying the ‘rhetoric of romanticism’. I also argue that the original version of *The Prelude* in its guise as an ‘Address to Coleridge’, addressed a specific argument to him: one that explicitly refused his discrimination between ‘Fancy’ and ‘Imagination’. It has also been necessary to recognise that, as a classical theorist, Wordsworth was concerned to ‘hide his art’, as Horace had suggested (*ars est celare artem*). This thesis sets out grounds for helping the contemporary reader recognise that Wordsworth’s ethos was that of a classical humanist ‘gentleman’, whose theory of poetry was based on ideas about imagination originating in a set of principles that defined a very classical ideology. In looking for someone who might have had a significant influence on Wordsworth’s thinking in the later 1790s I argue that the mind of Marcus Tullius Cicero was of greater importance in shaping Wordsworth’s ethos than even that of Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

In using the term ‘ethos’ here I am referring to the notion of ‘character’ or ‘mind’, or even ‘soul’, and I use the word in the classical sense that Wordsworth would have understood. Although the term can now be used to refer to a modern notion of character, a unique sense of individual selfhood or ‘self-consciousness’ (the sense of ‘I am’), it originally implied a notion of character that was a social construct, something formed ‘by habit’. In referring to ‘ethos’ rather than ‘character’ or ‘identity’ I am also invoking another cluster of associations to do with the use of the term in classical rhetoric. Both meanings also ascribe an ethical or ‘moral’ value to the term, something that Wordsworth would have appreciated as a classically educated ‘gentleman’, concerned with success in ‘painting [the] manners and passions’ of his characters. The Greek term ἡθος can be translated as ‘character’ or ‘habit’. In Greek the word was stressed to distinguish the different meanings; but subsequent usage has led to a blurring of that distinction. In Roman times a further metamorphosis in meaning occurred as *ethos* was translated from Greek into Latin, as mores – and ‘ethical’ concerns became ‘moral’ ones. But Greek and Roman concepts of ‘morality’ differed, and the term *ethos* was used in novel ways when translated into Roman as *mores*. It was also used by the Roman orator Marcus Quintilian to refer to mild or well-mannered expressions of feeling, representative of good character, or good manners, as distinguished from more vehement expressions of emotion or passion – *pathos*. Quintilian was concerned with defining technical terms referring to appeals to the emotions of an audience in the practice of forensic rhetoric, and was drawing on the work of both Cicero and Aristotle in making his own distinctions as he wrote his mammoth treatise on the education of the orator, *De Institutione Oratoria*. Wordsworth was aware of Quintilian’s particular use of the term, as

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7 As exemplified in Geoffrey Hartman’s influential study *Wordsworth’s Poetry 1787–1814*.
8 See, specifically, Wordsworth’s comments in the Advertisement to *Lyrical Ballads* on the need for genuine poetry to portray ‘a natural delineation of human passions, human characters and human incidents’, and his reference to ‘our elder writers and those in modern times who have been the most successful in painting manners and passions’.
well as its usage in the work of Cicero and of Aristotle. Wordsworth exploited the techniques of classical rhetoric in his theory of poetry as set out in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, and he makes more particular reference to Quintilian in the additions of 1802. In the final section of this study I discuss Quintilian’s influence on Wordsworth’s eloquent art in ‘The Ruined Cottage’, and on his theory in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. But my initial focus is on the more significant influence of Cicero, whose philosophical writings provided Wordsworth with the philosophical grounds for his argument with Coleridge over ‘imagination’.

It is not possible to discuss Wordsworth’s life, or his poetry, in the late 1790s and early 1800s without also discussing the influence of Coleridge. But in this study I argue against the beliefs of those critics who celebrate the close friendship of Wordsworth and Coleridge as an event that saw Wordsworth profoundly indebted to Coleridge’s intellect. I accept that Wordsworth was greatly indebted to Coleridge for his friendship and love in 1797 – but not for his philosophy. Those scholars who accept that Coleridge was the most significant and necessary influence on Wordsworth at this time base their opinions on Coleridge’s own testimony. This can hardly be said to be a ‘critical’ stance and exemplifies the kind of ‘uncritical assumption’ that McGann railed against in *The Romantic Ideology*. I suggest here, however, in asserting my disagreement with McGann’s thesis about Wordsworth: that the scholarship and criticism of Wordsworth and his works are dominated by a Romantic ideology, by an uncritical absorption in Romanticism’s own self-representations. I argue that it was Coleridge’s representation of Wordsworth’s ideals, rather than Wordsworth’s own ideals, that was drawn on by later critics to define the core values of the ideology that McGann saw as having been ‘incorporated into our academic program’.

My argument asserts that many of the values that are taken to be specifically ‘Wordsworthian’ are actually based on Coleridge’s idealised characterisation of Wordsworth in *Biographia Literaria*. Coleridge’s representation of Wordsworth’s ethos has, indeed, been taken as normative by many Romanticists, for whom such a representation allows Wordsworth to be fitted neatly into the category of a ‘European Romantic’, especially by North American scholars who entertain such idealised visions of literary history. Marilyn Butler’s work has offered a necessary corrective to those romantic visions, though several British Wordsworth scholars also find it necessary to celebrate Wordsworth as an exemplary Romantic poet, even though a careful ‘critical’ reading of his actual work shows that this representation is highly questionable. We only have to read Shelley’s and Byron’s comments on Wordsworth’s character to appreciate the nature of the problem. However I cannot address the complexities of the argument about defining Romanticism here. As David Punter noted in his essay on ‘Romanticism’ in the Routledge *Encyclopaedia of Literary Criticism*, ‘The notion of joining, or even rehearsing, the many arguments concerning the meaning of the term ‘Romanticism’ is one calculated to strike fear into the heart of the most hardened scholar’ (106).

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9 Brad Sullivan has recently discussed Wordsworth’s debt to Quintilian in his study, *Wordsworth and the Composition of Knowledge: Refiguring Relationships Among Minds, Worlds, and Words.*

10 In addition to *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries*, see Butler’s essays: ‘Against Tradition: the Case for a Particularised Historical Method’ in *Historical Studies and Literary Criticism*. Ed. Jerome McGann, and ‘Repossessing the Past’ in *Rethinking Historicism*. Ed. Marjorie Levinson.
II. Romantic Invention versus Romantic Genius

Klaus Dockhorn’s essay ‘Wordsworth und die rhetorische Tradition in England’ argued that Wordsworth should be recognised as a classical rather than a romantic writer due to his classical manners, his use of classical rhetoric, his concerns with morals and his Horatian desire to ‘instruct’ as well as ‘delight’ his readers. Dockhorn also proposed that Wordsworth made striking and deliberate use of a particular rhetorical device, the ‘ethos-pathos formula’, which originated in Book VI of Quintilian’s De Institutione Oratoria. Quintilian had distinguished between two different types of emotion or passion as he adopted Cicero’s adaptation of Aristotle’s terms to suit his own teachings about the role played by appeals to the emotions in oratory, and Dockhorn had discovered Wordsworth’s use of these distinctions in his work in the late 1790s.

In On Wordsworth’s Prelude, Herbert Lindenberger drew attention to the fact that when, in The Prelude, Wordsworth, records that he ‘grew up / Fostered alike by beauty and by fear’ (I 305-6), he was using those terms to describe a particular dichotomy. He notes that behind Wordsworth’s usage stood a whole century of discussion on the nature of the ‘beautiful’ and the ‘sublime’ (23), and he refers to earlier studies that had already discussed the nature of this dichotomy before turning to Dockhorn’s essay. In the essay Dockhorn had argued that Wordsworth’s understanding of this dichotomy owed less to Edmund Burke’s famous treatment of the sublime and the beautiful, and more to Wordsworth’s ‘training in the ancient rhetorical tradition which distinguishes between pathos and ethos as the opposing types of emotion which poetry seeks to depict, or which possesses the orator at alternate moments’ (25). Quintilian had described a dynamic art that the orator needed to exploit as he made appeals to pathos, (to the passions), and appeals to ethos, (to the ‘manners’) in his delivery of an argument. Sometimes ‘vehement’, states of emotion needed to be raised in the minds of an audience for powerful (sublime) effect to help ‘persuade’ them of a particular cause. But at the same time the orator had to know how to calm and placate a hostile audience, and restore a more balanced mood by making appeals to ethos, to the audience’s kinder, and gentler, natures. The best orator had to know how to play on the emotions and control the feelings of his audience by utilising this ability to stir up and then calm their passions. Wordsworth shows evidence of knowing Quintilian’s description of this technique in writing The Borderers, and his later assertion in the Lyrical Ballads that ‘poetry is passion’, was based on his understanding of Quintilian.

Lindenberger found Dockhorn’s thesis useful and illuminating, using it in his own study of The Prelude and pointing out how Wordsworth applied the two terms, which not only modify and offset each other, but were also used to illustrate a transition, a development from pathos to ethos. ‘In the three major philosophical poems of the Great Decade - ‘Tintern Abbey,’ the ‘Immortality Ode,’

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12 See Wordsworth’s note to ‘The Thorn’: ‘For the Reader cannot be too often reminded that Poetry is passion: it is the history or science of feelings’ (MLB 38: 55-6).
and _The Prelude_ — we can distinguish in each a transition from the realm of _pathos_ to that of _ethos_’ (32). Having quoted several examples of the way that Wordsworth uses this controlling structure, Lindenberger also observed that:

The progress from _pathos_ to _ethos_ is Wordsworth’s image of the history of his own life, and as such provides a pattern of organisation for _The Prelude_. The mature Wordsworth is, as it were, a synthesis of the two principles, with an emphasis on _ethos_ (36-7).

I follow Dockhorn and Lindenberger in recognising Wordsworth’s use of Quintilian’s understanding of _ethos_; I also place Quintilian’s particular understanding in a broader context, taking into account the influence of Cicero’s earlier representation of a similar dynamic, one that I propose to have played an equally significant role in the growth of Wordsworth’s own mind, or ‘ethos’.

Dockhorn concluded his essay by arguing that because of Wordsworth’s extensive use of classical concepts and his well-mannered classical ethos, it made little sense to class him as a Romantic poet.

One could, with a further strengthening of our thesis, conceivably arrive at a Wordsworth picture that does not put him as much at the beginning of the modern, i.e., subjective-romantic, poetry in England (that sees in the confession of the poet’s personality, in the expression, and in the symbol the essence of poetic expression), but rather at the end of the objective-classical writings based, in the last analysis, upon the classical attitudes which, while postulating the excitement of the emotions as the poet’s greatest task, attribute to him an essentially moral function in guiding the soul, the psychagogy, which, considered in its intellectual and stylistic development, belongs with its manifestations for the continuation of Antiquity to the Renaissance and the Baroque era and therefore not to the romantic one. Nor would the poet then belong to the Romantic category of the natural genius, but in a very specific sense to that of the consciously creating artist who, finding himself under the influence of critical thought processes, adjusts his writing accordingly and who, when writing, wants to give these critical outlines conscious poetic expression. (my emphasis)

Dockhorn’s thesis has recently been revisited by critical scholarship – the salient parts of his original essay were published for the first time in English in _Rhetorical Traditions and British Romantic Literature_, edited by Don Bialostosky and Lawrence Needham (265–278). The essays in _Rhetorical Traditions_ all challenge the traditionally held view that the British Romantic poets had abandoned the rhetorical tradition as they established a distinctively new, ‘expressive’ form of poetry – later defined as ‘Romantic’. In the opening sentence of their Introduction Bialostosky and Needham stated: ‘That rhetoric declined as Romanticism rose is the commonest of common places, a story strongly agreed by all parties’ (1). Their statement, a demonstration of the figure of irony, underlines the controversial nature of the collection. The essays all demonstrate the fallacy of this commonplace, as they reveal the extent to which the ‘British Romantic’ writers exploited the rhetorical tradition. None of those poets

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13 For an influential ‘commonplace’ representation of this belief see P.K.W. Stone’s _The Art of Poetry 1750-1820_. Brian Vickers, unfortunately, endorsed Stone’s reading of the Romantic displacement of rhetoric in his _Classical Rhetoric in English Poetry_, agreeing with Stone that, ‘The Romantics completely disengaged rhetoric from poetry’ and approving of Abrams’ representation of this ‘complete change of direction’ in his thesis in _The Mirror and the Lamp_. (Vickers 58). Vickers revised his opinions on this matter in his later, more significant study, _In Defence of Rhetoric_.

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was more reliant on classical rhetoric for his theory of poetry than the ‘exemplary’ Romantic poet William Wordsworth.

Two essays, those by Theresa Kelley and Bruce Graver, are particularly relevant to my argument here. In ‘The Case for William Wordsworth: Romantic Invention versus Romantic Genius’ Kelley stresses the fact that:

Wordsworth’s poetic practice, said to be exemplary (for good or ill) of Romantic poetics, is complexly bound to the exigencies of traditional rhetoric...beneath the brilliantly arrayed display of the most patently self-absorbed Romantic speakers, including Wordsworth’s, there exists a pattern of citation that is cumulative, historical and social. This poetic invention is, moreover, less original or sublimely “Romantic” than it is classical and rhetorical (*Rhetorical Traditions* 124).

Kelley’s essay draws on her more detailed analysis of Wordsworth’s art in her earlier study, *Wordsworth’s Revisionary Aesthetics* and identifies that the ‘hiding places’ of Wordsworth’s poetic power often originate in the commonplaces, the *topoi*, of the rhetorical tradition. Her work clearly reveals the extent to which Wordsworth ‘invented’ arguments in his poetic works, especially in *The Prelude* and *The Excursion*, utilising topics and a form of rhetorical argumentation defined by Cicero.14 Kelley’s work sets out many of the grounds for my argument here though in this study I discuss Wordsworth’s ethics rather than his aesthetics as I argue for the need to discover his ‘moral imagination’.

Bruce Graver, who edited Wordsworth’s translations of Virgil for the ‘Cornell Wordsworth’ has also written several essays on Wordsworth’s classical voice, while his more recent work has focused on defining Wordsworth’s debt to Stoic philosophy, something central to my argument here.15 Graver opens his essay on ‘The Oratorical Pedlar’ in *Rhetorical Traditions* by sympathising with Francis Jeffrey’s attack on the ‘absurdity’ of Wordsworth’s representation of the Wanderer’s character in *The Excursion*, as that of a ‘wordy rhetorician’ capable of ‘learned, abstract and logical harangues’ (94).16 Graver suggests Wordsworth’s model to have been the ‘ideal orator’ as described by Cicero in *De Oratore* and Quintilian in his *De Institutione Oratoria*. He explains the connection between poetry, rhetoric, and philosophy that informed Cicero’s and Wordsworth’s thinking, and he also covers the important ethical concerns that both Cicero and Quintilian voiced in their representation of the ideal orator. Graver’s essay was written with a specific focus on the later representation of the Pedlar, as the Wanderer, in *The Excursion*, and his essay does not discuss Wordsworth’s original text – ‘The Ruined Cottage’ of March 1798 (Ms B) which I will be focussing on here in my concern to explore the

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14 Kelley’s essay in *Rhetorical Traditions* should be read in tandem with “‘Fantastic Shapes”: From Classical Rhetoric to Romantic Allegory’ *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 33.2 1991 225-260 Her commentary in ‘Fantastic Shapes’ provides a more detailed description of the finer, more technical, aspects of rhetorical representation that readers of Wordsworth need to know if they wish to get a better appreciation of the ‘turnings intricate’ of his verse.

15 See Graver’s essay on ‘Romanticism’ in *A Companion to the Classical Tradition*. Ed Craig W Kallendorf. I have also been indebted to the work of his wife, Margaret Graver, in *Cicero on the Emotions: Tusculan Disputationes 3 and 4* and *Stoicism and Emotion*.

original context for Wordsworth’s decision to produce such a character. Part of the import of my own argument here lies in asserting that Wordsworth was committed to a Ciceronian ethos before writing the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, and that his poetic theory reflects those values.

All the essays in Parts I and II of Rhetorical Traditions and British Romantic Literature have a bearing on the argument I present here,17 and other studies by some of the essayists that have been particularly useful include Douglas Kneale’s Monumental Writing: Aspects of Rhetoric in Wordsworth’s Poetry, published in the same year as Kelley’s Wordsworth’s Revisionary Aesthetics. Both writers owe a debt to Frances Ferguson’s Wordsworth: Language as Counter-Spirit, and both incorporate aspects of Paul De Man’s concerns with rhetoric.18 Richard Clancey subsequently published, Wordsworth’s Classical Undersong: Education, Rhetoric and Poetic Truth, a work that has also been extremely useful in underpinning my argument about Wordsworth’s ethos. Clancey does not focus on either Quintilian’s or Cicero’s influence, but he does stress the importance of Wordsworth’s rhetorical cast of mind. Wordsworth, like Coleridge, Shelley and Byron had a grammar school education that focussed on teaching the classics and stressed, in particular, language skills. The goal of such an education was to provide a firm grounding in classical knowledge and an ability to put that knowledge to use in a proficient way. It was intended to produce lawyers, priests, and public servants grounded in a practical knowledge of the artes liberales, and it stressed the traditional values of classical decorum. Clancey points out that Wordsworth’s grammar school education had shaped his thinking according to classical models of disputation: ‘A classical education was heavily rhetorical, Oratory, Demosthenes, Cicero, et al, were at the heart of the curriculum. The other genres studied - epic, drama, history, literary epistles, moral essays - all had a powerful rhetorical cast’ (xvi).

Clancey argued that The Prelude’s success, as a great poem, can be explained by Wordsworth having studied Aristotle’s Rhetoric and its discussion of what Aristotle called the ethical proof - ‘the means whereby the authority of the rhetorical voice is established by its demonstration from the very text itself that it is knowledgeable, honest and generously disposed towards its audience’ (xx). Clancey was concerned to show ‘that the grandeur, beauty and success of Wordsworth’s poetry, particularly The Prelude, benefited handsomely from his enlightened classical education which inspired the development of his powerful rhetorical ethos’. Wordsworth’s use of the Aristotelian ethical proof, ‘is not just one dimension of his artistic achievement; it is at its core. Wordsworth’s education in a special way embodied this core’. Clancey’s investigations into Wordsworth’s education were intended to find evidence for Wordsworth’s direct study of Aristotle, in order to provide proof for his argument that Wordsworth must have studied Aristotle at school or university, and my own research also suggests that Wordsworth had a good appreciation of Aristotle. But after a detailed investigation, Clancey had to concede that he had found no evidence that Wordsworth studied Aristotle in any detail as part of his formal education (68-9). Instead he suggests that Wordsworth could have appreciated Aristotle’s use of ethical proofs via his readings in Horace. Horace’s Ars Poetica was a handbook for any University man wishing to discuss ‘Poetry’, and his Odes and Epistles, like the Oratory and Letters of Cicero,

17 A description of the contents of Rhetorical Traditions is provided in Appendix A.
18 See, also, Kneale’s Romantic Aversions: Aftermaths of Classicism in Wordsworth and Coleridge.
were standard fare, to be read in Latin, and serving to simultaneously teach both language and the manners of the Romans.

Clancey makes several important points about Wordsworth’s classical education and the effect that it had on his ethos, and he makes a particular point of taking Ben Ross Schneider, author of *Wordsworth’s Cambridge Education*, to task for suggesting that ‘Horace’s classical and critical doctrine is identical with eighteenth century critical doctrine’. Clancey had a particular concern that Horace be conceived of as the classical writer he was, and not as a neo-classical one; and it is on these finer points that Clancey’s study has its merits. He stresses that there is a ‘significant difference between classical critical doctrine and eighteenth century neo-classicism’. It is a view I support as being crucial to an understanding of Wordsworth’s poetic theory – which is not a ‘Romantic’ reaction to neoclassicism, but is instead concerned with re-establishing an ethos based on traditional, classical, Aristotelian values and methods of enquiry.19 One of the distinguishing aspects of Wordsworth’s manner of thinking is his use of Aristotelian forms of ethical argumentation. Clancey’s thesis was unfortunately limited by the fact that he wrote under the influence of Meyer Abrams’ interpretation of Wordsworth as a Romantic ‘Prophet-poet’, and this meant that he was predisposed to overlook Wordsworth’s emphasis on the poet’s role as ‘a man speaking to men’. I suggest here that Wordsworth gained his knowledge of Aristotle’s ethical proofs, and other aspects of his philosophy via Cicero rather than Horace.

**III. High Romantic Argument.**

Despite the ‘considerable interest’ shown towards Dockhorn’s work at the time, his argument was soon to be overshadowed by the rise of High Romantic readings of Wordsworth, and the advent of the ‘new criticism’. Meyer Abrams’ concern with defining poetic composition in terms of his thesis about ‘mirrors’ and ‘lamps’ excluded any serious consideration of the rhetorical tradition, as he argued his case for Wordsworth as a visionary Romantic. Wordsworth’s debt to classical authority was specifically denied by Abrams as he set out the grounds for his own reading of Wordsworth. In an early essay, ‘Wordsworth and Coleridge on Diction and Figures’, Abrams justified ignoring the rhetorical tradition, asserting that:

> To Wordsworth, at least in his earlier years, all art – in the basic neoclassical sense of the proportioning of diction and ornament to sentiment, and of these, ultimately, to the response anticipated by the reader – was in his phrase ‘the adversary of nature’. And in rejecting this art for reliance in composing on the natural, or spontaneous, flow of feeling into words, Wordsworth rejected the long-enduring rhetorical understructure of poetic theory.20

In *The Mirror and the Lamp*, Abrams was forced to incorporate some study of the rhetorical tradition into his argument after an earlier draft of the book was scrutinised, and the absence of a more

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19 See Stuart Curran’s comment in the quotation at the head of this chapter.
detailed commentary on the influence of the rhetorical tradition was questioned. But the main focus – which is still represented in the title – remained the argument that a primarily ‘mimetic’ form of classical poetic expression was replaced by a new ‘expressive’ form, in a revolution in literature led by Wordsworth and Coleridge. As a pioneer of a new school of poetry, Wordsworth was seen to have abandoned classical authority. Abrams admitted his hypothesis was not without problems, and described a conflict between Wordsworth’s supposedly ‘Romantic’ poetry and his apparent reliance on eighteenth-century theory:

Wordsworth...the first great romantic poet may also be accounted the critic whose highly influential writings, by making the feelings of the poet the centre of critical reference, mark a turning point in English literary theory. It is nevertheless remarkable that Wordsworth was more thoroughly immersed in certain currents of eighteenth-century thinking than his contemporaries. There is, for example, almost none of the terminology of post-Kantian criticism in Wordsworth. Only in his poetry, not in his criticism, does Wordsworth make the transition from the eighteenth century view of man and nature to the concept that the mind is creative in perception, and an integral part of an organically inter-related universe...(103-4)

Abrams’ representation of Wordsworth as a poet whose works belie his theory of poetry reproduces Coleridge’s representation of Wordsworth in Biographia Literaria. Wordsworth himself was explicit in his rejection of Kantian philosophy and thought that Coleridge’s interest in German metaphysics had contributed to the degeneration of Coleridge’s mental health and his character. But Abrams’ took Coleridge’s point of view on the matter for granted; it is necessary for the thesis he develops in The Mirror and the Lamp that Wordsworth’s poetry be identified as the product of a ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling’. Abrams interpreted Wordsworth’s ‘spontaneity’ as an expression of romantic expressivity, something based on enlightenment concepts that had displaced those of the classical authorities:

Wordsworth incorporates in his poetic theory eighteenth-century speculations on the emotional origin of language, prevalent ideas about the nature and value of primitive poetry, together with the results of a century of developments in Longinian doctrines, and substitutes this amalgam for neo-classical theories, which had been based more substantially on Aristotle, Horace, Cicero, and Quintilian. (104)

W.J.B. Owen also supported Abrams’ claims about Wordsworth’s intentions and the origins of his theory. In his Introduction to his ‘Notes and Commentary’ on the Preface to Lyrical Ballads Owen wrote:

The Preface to Lyrical Ballads is Wordsworth’s best-known critical work, and his most original essay in aesthetics, in the sense that it often appears to be the result of his introspective examination of his own poetic processes. It is less original than has sometimes been thought, however, in that many of its aesthetic, psychological, and sociological presuppositions are quite commonplace, especially in the numerous writings on aesthetics in English which appeared during the eighteenth century, based on the associationist psychology of Locke and Hartley or on the primitivistic theories of culture and literature which are
characteristic of the Scottish ‘Common-sense’ philosophers. It is only rarely possible to point to specific sources, but our Commentary makes clear Wordsworth’s general debt to the eighteenth century. (PrW I. 112)

Owen does, however, give a limited critical acknowledgement of Wordsworth’s debt to Quintilian in his notes when he identifies Wordsworth’s borrowings in the lines that follow on from Wordsworth’s question, ‘What is a Poet?’ in the 1802 additions (PrW I. 176-7). When Wordsworth describes the Poet’s particular ‘disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present’ he is directly echoing a passage in Quintilian, and Owen provides three more references to Quintilian before turning to Hugh Blair and citing Blair’s reproduction of Quintilian in his Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres. Then, in keeping with his editorial principles, Owen proceeds to trace the later representation of Quintilian’s views, and to comment on other examples of imaginative identification, as they appear in a number of eighteenth-century texts. Quintilian’s own work is abandoned as Owen turns to the eighteenth century in an effort to find Wordsworth’s sources, as have a number of well-argued critical studies, from Arthur Beatty to Alan Bewell. 21 I do not deny that Wordsworth had an interest in eighteenth-century thinkers, and that he would have been well informed about their ideas in conversations with Coleridge in the late 1790s. But I argue here for the very specific influence of Cicero’s philosophical works on the development of Wordsworth’s attitude of mind and his theory of poetry, which I am not aware of having been credited with the detailed influence I suggest for them here.

Don Bialostosky had earlier discussed the topic of Quintilian’s influence on Wordsworth in Wordsworth, Dialogics and the Practice of Criticism as his focus on ‘Dialogics’ there had led to an appreciation of the neglected classical tradition, with its Aristotelian form of rhetorical dialectic; one that had also been dialogical. 22 In his chapter on ‘The Revival of Rhetoric and the Reading of Wordsworth’s Prelude’, Bialostosky expressed his hope that his findings would ‘indicate possibilities for digging deeper into the remains of the rhetorical tradition, thinking harder about it, and looking further into Wordsworth in the light of it’ (206). After providing the evidence for Wordsworth’s debt to the rhetorical tradition he then ventured the suggestion that ‘for the reading and teaching of Wordsworth’s poetry (as opposed to the history or theory of his critical thought), Book IX of Quintilian’s Institutio Oratoria would be a far more fruitful assignment than Book II of Coleridge’s Biographia Literaria’ (231). His study also explored the on-going dynamic in Wordsworth Studies that has seen Coleridge’s representation of Wordsworth become normative; and he identified John Danby, Stephen Parrish, Paul Sheats and Robert Langbaum as critics who he saw as allied with his own concern to displace Coleridge’s influence.

I am sympathetic to many of John Danby’s insights into Wordsworth’s character in *The Simple Wordsworth*, and note, especially, his comments about Wordsworth’s sense of irony.

It is unfortunate that Wordsworth’s irony has not been much remarked. If irony, however, can mean perspective and the co-presence of alternatives, the refusal to impose on the reader a predigested life-view, the insistence on the contrary that the reader should enter, himself, as full partner in the final judgement on the facts set before him – then Wordsworth is a superb ironist in *Lyrical Ballads*. (37-8)

Danby also asserted that ‘Wordsworth…was the last great representative in English Poetry of the renaissance tradition. Though he is a mutation within the tradition he is still in the same line as Chaucer, Spencer, Sidney, and Milton’. In this tradition ‘Poets’ were public servants:

They were the voices of those sanities and wisdoms they conceived as necessary for the public welfare. They wrote from their capacities, they addressed themselves to the active capacities of their audience. An implicit moral purpose (profit countenancing delight) circumscribed what they wrote. (146)

Danby’s representation of Wordsworth’s classical morals fits very closely with that of Dockhorn.

In *The Art of the Lyrical Ballads*, Stephen Parrish developed Danby’s discussion of mixed modes of dramatic-narrative and also acknowledged Wordsworth’s concerns with rhetoric as he explained that he was writing, ‘Against the notion that *Lyrical Ballads* represented a triumph of Nature over Art’ and that in doing so:

it seemed important to focus, first, on Wordsworth’s conscious artistry, his tireless commitment to the poet’s craft, and to emphasise that his poetic theory was not so much ‘expressive’ as ‘rhetorical’. Second it seemed important to bring out the meaning and the consequences of his partnership with Coleridge, which looks in long perspective hardly more fruitful than destructive for them both’. (ix)

In focussing on Wordsworth’s ‘art’ Parrish was concerned to argue against claims made by earlier critics that he was primarily a ‘nature poet’ – claims largely influenced by Coleridge’s portrayal of Wordsworth as ‘a poet of nature’. While sharing Parrish’s recognition of the importance of Wordsworth’s art, I will also be arguing that ‘Nature’ was an extremely important concept for Wordsworth at this time; though not in the sense that Coleridge conceived the term. Nature, as Wordsworth understood it, worked in alliance with Art; to oppose Nature and Art is to set up a false dichotomy that obscures the actual workings of Wordsworth’s artistic genius.

In *The Making of Wordsworth’s Poetry*, Paul Sheats argued that Wordsworth’s classical education at Hawkeshead provided him with the values that later defined his poetic career, as he also cautioned critics who followed more Romantic readings of Wordsworth works:

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23 I would suggest that the subtly ironic attitude of mind that Danby describes as characteristic of Wordsworth was a direct result of Cicero’s influence. It is definitive of Cicero’s ethos as an Academic Sceptic, and also demonstrates ‘Socratic’ irony. See also Richard Gravil’s essay ‘*Lyrical Ballads* (1798): Wordsworth as Ironist’, *Critical Quarterly* 24. 4 (1982): 39-57.
As inheritors of a romantic individualism that elevates the unique above the typical, we are apt to forget that the categories within which Wordsworth understood his own life, in prospect and in retrospect, were bequeathed to him by his age, and that his greatest poems confront moral and psychological problems that he regarded as representative. In the Hawkeshead poems we find the assumptions made about the growth of the individual mind that dominate his career; that the normal course of human life involves a crisis of transition from naturalism to orthodox dualism; that the crisis threatens spiritual and psychological decay; and that the task of man and poet is to survive it, to relinquish youthful vision without loss of hope.

Virtually all the poets the young Wordsworth imitated make such assumptions, and they do so in a particular form: the belief that the power of ‘fancy’ is dominant in youth, and that maturation involves a transition to a mature reason and the truths it reveals. (32-3)

In my own reading of Wordsworth I argue that Wordsworth did not appreciate the values of his classical education until some time after he left school and university. It was only later, when he went through the ‘crisis of transition’ that Sheats outlines as something of a rite of passage, that he gained his mature and ‘manly’ appreciation of such values. I argue that the narrative of *The Prelude* was quite deliberately structured to represent such a ‘crisis of transition’ – something that occurs in Book X when Wordsworth ‘Yielded up moral questions in despair’ (*Prelude* X 901). In his revisions to the poem Wordsworth later uses the word ‘crisis’ to make this turning point more explicit (*Prelude* 1850: XI 306). 24 I follow Sheats’ reading of Wordsworth closely in this study, finding his representation of Wordsworth to account for the evidence provided by Wordsworth in his personal and poetic writings, far more convincingly than the speculations of more influential critics. 25

In following Bialostosky’s suggestions in *Wordsworth, Dialogics and the Practice of Criticism* I soon discovered it was necessary to read far more extensively in Quintilian, since it seemed to me that that was what Wordsworth had done. (It was also something that Hugh Blair had recommended to his readers). 26 It was only through reading Quintilian that I began to realise the full extent to which Wordsworth’s mind was shaped by classical concepts, and his poetry by classical commonplaces. He appears to have made a careful reading of Quintilian’s *Institutes* in the later 1790s as he made a conscious and determined effort to carry off his poetic work ‘with eloquence’ (*EY* 212).

Having read Quintilian I made a more comprehensive study of classical rhetoric as I developed a more detailed argument for recognising Quintilian’s influence. This led, in turn, to the growing realisation that behind Quintilian’s classical voice there was another, even more significant influence on the growth of Wordsworth’s mind – the imposing voice of Marcus Tullius Cicero. As I read Cicero’s philosophical works I began to trace the origins of distinctive concepts in Wordsworth’s writings that

24 All references to *The Prelude* will be to the 1805 text unless otherwise stated.
25 Sheats is quietly critical of both Meyer Abrams’ and Geoffrey Hartman’s readings of Wordsworth, as well as the more psychologised readings provided by Herbert Read and, more controversially, by F.W. Bateson. He gives the grounds for his differences with these critics in his Preface.
26 See Lecture XXXIV ‘Means of Improving Eloquence’, in which Blair recommends the study of Cicero, and then adds: ’But of all the ancient writers on the subject of oratory, the most instructive and most useful is Quintilian. I know few books which abound more with good sense, and discover a greater degree of just and accurate taste, then Quintilian’s *Institutions*...he has digested into excellent order all the ancient ideas concerning rhetoric, and is, at the same time an eloquent writer...I would not advise the omitting to read any part of his *Institutions*...Seldom has any person, of more sound and distinct judgement than Quintilian, applied himself to the study of the art of oratory’ (417).
seemed to be idiomatic, and thus to provide a surer representation of the actual ‘character of the poet’. My reading led me to appreciate the extent to which Wordsworth’s mind, in the late 1790s, was cast in a Ciceronian mould, and that Cicero had had a very definite influence on Wordsworth’s identity as a poet – as a wise ‘man speaking to men’.

In Part 1 of this study I focus on the nature of the ‘radical Difference’ of opinion over poetic theory in 1802, and show it to be related to the topic of imagination. In presenting Wordsworth’s side of the argument I discuss his use of terms and concepts that originate in the philosophy of the early Stoics. In particular I discuss concepts of ‘Joy’ and of ‘Nature’ that I suggest originated in Wordsworth’s reading of Cicero’s philosophical works. In tracing the development of this argument over imagination I argue that Wordsworth’s ‘Address to Coleridge’ contained a very specific rebuttal of Coleridge’s claims about ‘the imagination’. I present a reading of the final Book of The Prelude that sets out my argument, and I conclude the first section by providing something of a reception history of The Prelude. This reference back to the critical tradition shows the extent to which traditional studies of The Prelude took it for granted that Wordsworth was reproducing Coleridgean ideas about ‘the imagination’ in the poem. The first part of the thesis therefore challenges the widely accepted view that The Prelude is a narrative of poetic election in which Wordsworth represents himself celebrating Imagination as Coleridge’s transcendental power of the mind.

Having asserted, in the opening section, that Wordsworth had gained his understanding of early Stoic philosophy from his reading in Cicero’s works, I then present the grounds for such a claim. In Part Two I discuss Wordsworth’s record of his engagement with the French revolutionaries and then with the works of their earlier British counterparts. I use the ‘French Books’ of The Prelude to justify my claims, presenting a reading that recognises Wordsworth’s need to confess his involvement in ‘terrorism’, and shows him presenting an argument in defence of his actions. In doing so he appeals to notions of ‘equity’ as well as reason, and argues for mitigating circumstances. I propose that both his manner – his rhetoric – and his matter – his knowledge of political philosophy – provide evidence of his debt to Cicero. In the ‘French Books’ he seeks to excuse his actions by maintaining that his overly enthusiastic support for the French revolutionaries was evidence of a diseased state of mind, a form of madness. Once he was able to identify this ‘strong disease’ as a ‘sickness of his mind’, rather than as evidence of some prophetic insight, he was able to cure himself of his ‘disease’ and develop a new identity. I propose that it was while reading Cicero’s philosophical works at Racedown that he fully understood the significance of Cicero’s comments, in Tusculan Disputations, that philosophy acted as a cure for a mind troubled by excessive emotional distress. Passages in Wordsworth’s poetry, comments he makes to Coleridge, and attitudes of mind that he represents in the latter 1790s all suggest a strong Ciceronian influence.

In the third and final part of my argument I present a reading of ‘The Ruined Cottage’ in which I also comment on the influence of Virgil, and on Wordsworth’s need to distance himself from the work of James Thomson. It is at the time of writing ‘The Ruined Cottage’ that Wordsworth makes the discrimination between natural representations and supernatural ones that Coleridge later
commented on in Chapter XIV of *Biographia Literaria*. Many critics have focussed on Coleridge’s comments in their attempts to make better sense of Wordsworth’s reasons for wanting to focus on natural subjects and dismiss the supernatural. My argument here casts further light on Wordsworth’s reasons for making that discrimination. In my discussion of the character of the Pedlar I show how the growth of his mind follows the descriptions of human intellectual development described by the Stoics and represented most clearly in Cicero’s *Academica*. It is also important to recognise that Wordsworth took his description of the growth of the Pedlar’s mind and used it to describe the growth of his own in *The Prelude*. In this final section I also discuss Wordsworth’s particular debt to Quintilian’s description of ‘imagination’ in *De Institutione Oratoria*, as I account for the technical aspects of Pedlar’s eloquence. In concluding I briefly discuss the 1802 additions to *Lyrical Ballads* and comment on the Ciceronian ethos of Wordsworth’s ideal poet. It was this section that had so disturbed Coleridge, causing him to voice his concerns about his ‘radical Difference’ of opinion with Wordsworth to Southey and Sotheby.

**IV. Placing Language in History: Methodological Considerations**

My argument against reading Wordsworth as an ‘exemplary Romantic’ obviously opposes McGann’s reading of Wordsworth in *The Romantic Ideology*. I do not intend to rehearse McGann’s argument about the illusions, elisions, evasions and displacements that he found in Wordsworth’s work as he discovered it to be a ‘paradigm example of the dynamism of Romantic displacement’. But I do provide alternative readings to the works McGann discussed in his chapter on Wordsworth: ‘The Ruined Cottage’, ‘Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey’, and the ‘Ode. Intimations of Immortality’. I have, however, studied McGann’s broader argument in his series of works dedicated to ‘restoring a historical methodology to literary studies’ and although I am not sympathetic to the arguments of his or Marjorie Levinson’s North American Marxist-orientated criticism, I have largely followed the methodological suggestions set out in the opening chapter of *The Beauty of Inflections* in my own research. In attempting my own ‘new’ historical reading of Wordsworth I have found Marilyn Butler’s British challenge to North American High Romantic criticism in *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries* more useful.

In *The Politics of Romantic Poetry*, Richard Cronin stressed the significance of Butler’s work as a ‘pragmatic’ critic (rather than a ‘theorist’), who had quietly ‘reversed the understanding of Romanticism that had held sway from Arnold to Abrams – a critical tradition that prized above all else

27 *The Beauty of Inflections* p. 335.

28 I am more sympathetic to the more applied ‘British’ Marxism expressed in the writings of E.P Thomson, Raymond Williams, John Barrell and David Simpson. In *Wordsworth’s Great Period Poems* Levinson argued that, in these representative poems, the factual or material base, the situation in history, has been erased, transcended or idealised as a means of evading Wordsworth’s distress. This negative appraisal of Wordsworth’s actions I find quite contrary to the demonstration of will that he both exemplified and argued for in his life, and represented in his poetry.

29 For a discussion of McGann’s and Butler’s differing approaches see David Chandler’s essay ‘One Consciousness’, Historical Criticism and the Romantic Canon.’ *Romanticism on the Net* 17 (February 2000) [1-9-09]: http://users.ox.ac.uk/~scat0385/17ideology.html.
the movement from public engagement to the meditative inwardness that it represented…as a
development towards spiritual and aesthetic maturity’(4). I follow Butler’s appreciation of the fact that
the so-called ‘British Romantic poets’ never thought of themselves as such, and that the recognition of
their apparently unified Romantic identity came from the beliefs of critics writing a generation, or two,
later. 30 Butler’s brief discussion of the theory of the Preface to Lyrical Ballads acknowledged its
essentially classical humanist values, its strong moral focus on virtue, and its particular use of
language as a tool (57-61). She also skilfully dismissed the popular belief, established by Abrams’
thesis in The Mirror and the Lamp, that the Preface had ‘something of the aspect of a romantic
manifesto’(100). In discussing Wordsworth’s famous declaration of poetry as, ‘the spontaneous
overflow of powerful feelings’ she asserted that the sentence ‘has Wordsworth, like a true son of the
Enlightenment, putting rational thought, moral intention and social utility above the subjective,
emotional side of the mind, and above the claims of self-expression’ (60). 31 I follow Butler’s reading
of ‘spontaneity’, though I argue for Wordsworth’s classical, rather than neoclassical voice. As Richard
Clancey asserted, the distinction between neoclassical and classical values is an important one, and I
develop my argument by acknowledging Wordsworth’s strong identification with those classical
values, as well as recognising his knowledge of Renaissance and Elizabethan ideas about imagination,
and imagery. These I see as playing a greater part in defining Wordsworth’s imagination than the
Enlightenment values that characterise Butler’s Wordsworth. 32

In further broadening my own sense of the history of Wordsworth’s time I have also drawn
extensively on the work of Carl Woodring, Leslie Chard, E.P. Thompson, Nicholas Roe, John
Williams, and Kenneth Johnston who have all attempted to further define the exact historical details of
the period during which Wordsworth was engaged in revolution politics, a focus of my argument
here. 33 Their historical studies have attempted to ‘explain what happened in the past by providing a
precise and accurate reconstruction of the event as reported in the documents’. 34 Their ‘explanatory’
work reveals the extent to which Wordsworth’s representation of the history of his life in The Prelude
was at odds with what their ‘historical research’ suggests to have actually happened. Such studies are

30 Butler summarises George Whalley’s excellent discussion of the question in his essay on ‘England’ in Hans
Eichner’s, Romantic and its Cognates: The European History of a Word.
See also, David Perkins’ more recent analysis of the question in ‘The Construction of the Romantic
31 Abrams had made ‘the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings’ something of a leitmotif in setting out his
thesis. Butler follows an earlier critique by Paul Magnuson in ‘Wordsworth and Spontaneity’ in The
32 Rosemond Tuve’s classic study Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery (1947) is helpful in defining the logic
of Wordsworth’s rhetorical poetics, and his debt to Elizabethan and Jacobean examples. Geoffrey Hartman
had written that ‘English Romanticism is, from a certain point of view, a renaissance of the Renaissance; a
return to the spirit of Spencer and Milton, to their redemption of imaginative thought wherever it is found’. Wordsworth’s Poetry 1787-1814, p 191.
33 Carl Woodring, Politics in English Romantic Poetry; Leslie F. Chard, Dissenting Republican, Wordsworth's
Early Life and Thought in their Political Context; E. P. Thomson, The Romantics: England in a
Revolutionary Age; Marilyn Butler, Romantics Rebels & Reactionaries. Nicholas Roe, Wordsworth and
Coleridge: The Radical Years; John Williams, Wordsworth: Romantic Poetry and Revolution Politics;
34 Hayden White gives this description of such work in his essay ‘Interpretation in History’ where he defines it
as the work of the ‘proper historian’ in contrast to that of the ‘metahistorian’. Tropics of Discourse: Essays in
Cultural Criticism, p. 52.
complemented by the work of James Chandler, David Simpson, Alan Liu, Richard Bourke, Terence Hoagwood and David Bromwich, who have all engaged in a more ‘metahistorical’ approach, as they have attempted to define the manner in which Wordsworth constructed his own sense of history, in order to better understand what he was *doing* in his poetry.\(^{35}\) Such studies also overlap with those that focus on language. And both the language of politics, as discussed by James Boulton, and the politics of language as treated by Olivia Smith, have an important bearing on interpretations of Wordsworth’s history. Ronald Paulson’s study of representations of the revolution also combines matters of language and politics, as well as contributing a chapter on *The Prelude*.\(^{36}\) The earlier studies of Harold Parker and Zera Fink, on the English and French Republicans have also been of significant importance in helping to define the nature of Wordsworth’s republicanism.\(^{37}\)

But it is the work of two more recent historiographers, John Pocock and Quentin Skinner, that has been most useful in helping me to identify Wordsworth’s republican ethos and his involvement in ‘politics’. Because of his commitment to classical republican ideals, Wordsworth understood his own interests to be inextricably bound up with the affairs of the state. His own ethical position closely followed that of Aristotle as set out in the *Nichomachian Ethics*, a work that Aristotle described as a study of ‘political science’ and which led, in turn, to his study of the state itself in his *Politics*. Both these studies were linked with a third work, his *Rhetoric*, to form a comprehensive understanding of human nature.\(^{38}\) The language and the concepts Wordsworth uses to describe ‘Man, Nature, and Human Life’ in his work in the early 1800s suggest a strong Aristotelian influence that, I argue, was mediated by Cicero. These ties in with the reading of history explored by Pocock and Skinner in their study of civic humanism; and in defining their new approach to the study of history both men had made a point of exploring the role that language plays in creating history.

My approach to producing a more critical historical reading of Wordsworth was directed initially by Pocock’s study of the influence of classical republicanism on seventeenth and eighteenth-century political thought in England in *The Machiavellian Moment*. His argument helped me to make sense of Wordsworth’s actual political allegiances as I came to realise the significance of his identification with the English Republican cause after the French cause had degenerated into the Reign of Terror. Pocock’s discussion of the concepts of ‘Virtue, Fortune and Corruption’ in his introductory chapter, and his comments on the eighteenth-century debate on the topics of ‘Virtue, Passion and Commerce’ in the last, helped me identify the particular classical humanist idiom that

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\(^{38}\) Wordsworth had all three of these works in the library at Rydal Mt.
Wordsworth was using to express his republican beliefs in the late 1790s. Skinner describes his methodology, one he shares with Pocock, in the Introduction to *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*. By identifying the use of a particular vocabulary, a particular idiom, or ‘rhetoric’, he was able to trace the origin of the ideas that produced a particular discourse, one that shaped the formation of a particular ‘history’. One particular influence that he emphasised was ‘the remarkable extent to which the vocabulary of Renaissance moral and political thought was derived from stoic sources’. He also alerted Pocock to the significance of Cicero’s influence in transmitting, and adapting the classical philosophy of Aristotle to produce the characteristic concepts that inform classical republican discourse. In discussing Pocock’s work ‘on the contribution of Aristotelian doctrines to the formation of ‘civic’ humanism’ he also added, ‘I do not think it has been fully appreciated how pervasively the political theorists of Renaissance Italy, and of early modern Europe in general, were influenced by stoic values and beliefs’ (xiv). In this study I also find stoic values and beliefs to have had a significant influence on Wordsworth’s thinking.

In a retrospective essay on the significance of *The Machiavellian Moment*, Pocock presents a useful summary of his and Skinner’s joint interests:

We have both been associated with a program of remodelling the history of political thought as the history of political language and discourse; it seems to us that history in this field can better be written if we focus our attention on the acts of articulation and conceptualisation performed by thinkers as agents in the world of speech, and on the matrices of language and rhetoric within which they are constrained to speak but which they modify by the speech-acts they perform. A ‘history of ideas’ thus gives way before a history of languages, vocabularies, ideologies, paradigms, and so forth; and the study of a particular thinker may focus upon establishing the particular language or languages in which he wrote as a prelude to discovering what he actually said, intended, or conveyed. This procedure often yields startling and stimulating results, as new or hitherto ignored levels of meaning are brought to light. (50)

In studying Wordsworth – my ‘particular thinker’ – I have also focussed ‘upon establishing the particular language or languages in which he wrote as a prelude to discovering what he actually said, intended, or conveyed’. My reading of *The Prelude* has also yielded ‘startling and stimulating results, as new or hitherto ignored levels of meaning’ were ‘brought to light’ as I discovered Wordsworth’s

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39 John Barrell has also made good use of Pocock in his study of James Thomson in *English Literature in History: 1730-80*, and Thomson was a major influence on Wordsworth’s earlier work.

40 Skinner’s early work had focussed on the philosophy of language, the work of Wittgenstein, and on the ‘Speech Act’ theory of John Austin. In his more recent concerns with classical rhetoric he has produced a brilliant synopsis of the workings of civic humanist political rhetoric in his study *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*. His presentation of key concepts and his detailed footnotes make the work an excellent introduction to Quintilian’s and Cicero’s rhetoric.

41 The quotations here are taken from Skinner’s Preface to *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (iv-xiv), in which he sets out his methodology. Both Skinner and Pocock are critical of Marxist interpretations of history and ideology, which would limit the scope of their own new historical approaches. Pocock provides an excellent summary of the complexities of his and Skinner’s position in ‘Texts as Events: Reflections on the History of Political Thought,’ in *The Politics of Discourse*. Ed. K. Sharpe & S. N. Zwicker. Skinner also notes his debt to Alisdair MacIntyre in his Preface to *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (x).

Roman, rhetorical voice, and levels of meaning that were not identifiable, unless Wordsworth’s classical humanist ethos is recognised as such.

In his provocative and sophisticated argument in *Wordsworth: The Sense of History*, Alan Liu was concerned to displace Geoffrey Hartman’s ‘landmark work in Wordsworth studies’, and to discuss and explore the possibilities offered by new historicist, and deconstructionist theory. Liu’s complex agenda, which comprised ‘a critical stance, a philosophical approach and a practical analytic’, meant that his study of Wordsworth was to be far more highly theorised than Hartman’s earlier phenomenological approach. His argument about Wordsworth’s ‘denial’ of history demonstrated a comprehensive appreciation of Wordsworth’s works as he also grappled with the problems of defining and representing history in the ‘New Historical’ moment in which his study was written. As he defined the parameters of his particular approach, Liu made the point that ‘Difference is especially desirable in the field of Wordsworth studies, which has tended to be extremely familiar with its objects of study’ (36).

In this study I present a different reading of Wordsworth to the one familiar to many in the field of Wordsworth Studies. In doing so I initially focus on the nature of the ‘radical Difference’ between Wordsworth and Coleridge as described by Coleridge in 1802, and suggest a different appraisal of that difference, to the one provided by Coleridge on Wordsworth’s behalf. I take a far less sophisticated approach to the question than Liu has done as I explore Wordsworth’s theory rather than contemporary theory. But the conclusions that Liu drew about ‘the promise of the New Historicism’ in his essay ‘The Power of Formalism: The New Historicism’ suggest that he may have been working towards a very similar aim to the one I pursue here in my focus on Wordsworth’s use of classical rhetoric:

In its implicit rewriting of [Aristotle’s] *Poetics* the New Historicism should not ask which is the more philosophical, poetry or history, but instead how both poetry and philosophy engage history. The New Historicism thus requires a method or “language” of contextualisation founded upon some historically–realized philosophy of discourse – i.e., some notion of rhetoric, or more broadly, of language as historically situated event. The ultimate rationale of the proliferating paradigms of the New Historicism, I submit, exists in an uncanny relationship of sameness/difference with the de Manian and deconstructive impulse to reinvent a classical rather than Romantic or dialectical concept: the notion of rhetoric…The promise of the New Historicism, perhaps, is to develop the philosophy of allegory into a true speaking in the agora: a rhetorical notion of literature as text-cum-action performed by historical subjects upon other subjects. That, which needs to be un-thought in other words, is the very concept of “text” itself. (756) 43

When Wordsworth defined ‘the Poet’ as ‘a man speaking to men’ in the 1802 additions to the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, he had in mind something very similar to Liu’s later description of ‘a rhetorical notion of literature as text-cum-action performed by historical subjects upon other subjects.’ But Wordsworth did not need to engage in the complex theoretical positions that late twentieth-century thinkers need to invent for their arguments. His own arguments were based on a classical form of invention originating in Aristotelian principles that were later developed by Cicero. Wordsworth’s

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rhetoric was not the rhetoric of romanticism, but was based on classical principles that betrayed his allegiance to classical forms of argument, of invention, and of eloquence.

I do not engage with Paul de Man’s concerns with ‘rhetoric’ in any detail here because my primary focus is on understanding Wordsworth’s theory and his rhetoric, which was closely tied to that of the Roman rhetoricians, Cicero and Quintilian. Their rhetoric was an applied art, and was concerned with matters of ethics, not aesthetics. De Man was not interested in the dynamics enacted by the ‘speaker’ in classical rhetoric – limiting his concerns with ‘rhetoric’ to the ‘play’ of language. By divorcing his concerns with rhetoric from the activities of the rhetor, he dismissed the activity of ‘speaking’, crucial to Wordsworth’s understanding of classical oratory, which relied upon the activity of ‘men’ who had to be in control of their language. For de Man, and for other deconstructionist theorists, language is considered to act autonomously, an idea totally alien to Wordsworth’s classical understanding. He did not imagine that language could somehow ‘perform’ by itself without a mind to conceive its activities and define its meanings, and he was aware that an eloquent speaker could put language to use with potentially devastating effects, as his famous description of the power of language in the third of his ‘Essays on Epitaphs’ demonstrates.44

For all his insights, in his discussions of the rhetoric of romanticism, de Man was blind to the emphasis that Wordsworth placed on the pragmatic use of classical rhetorical strategies. Wordsworth’s concern with rhetoric was old-fashioned, pragmatic, and political in its engagement with the world of men. De Man’s resistance to ‘history’ limited the scope of his arguments, which remained focussed on a purely theoretical appreciation of language, disconnected from its actual usage by speakers who, in Wordsworth’s theory, are specifically in contact with ‘flesh and blood’ realities and speak a ‘real language’ that reflects their embodiment in a historical human situation. De Man would have argued that his ‘rhetorical’ approach affords a better understanding of the ‘mystery of words’; the ‘visionary power’ that ‘exists in works of mighty poets’ and in the ‘turnings intricate of verse’ (Prelude V 608-629), than that provided by High Romantic critics. I acknowledge de Man’s influence in questioning the mystifications of High Romanticism, and challenging the philosophical rigour of the arguments of Abrams, W.K. Wimsatt and Earl Wasserman in particular, in his widely read essay ‘The Rhetoric of Temporality’.45 He has also made several contributions to the study of Wordsworth, including ‘Autobiography as Defacement’46 and ‘Time and History in Wordsworth’.47 But he was more concerned with the finer points of his sophisticated arguments about language, than

44 ‘Words are too awful an instrument for good and evil to be trifled over: they hold above all other external powers a dominion over thoughts. If words be not (recurring to a metaphor before used) an incarnation of thought but only a clothing for it, then surely will they prove an ill gift; such as one of those poisoned vestments, read of in stories of superstitious times, which had the power to consume and to alienate from his right mind the victim who put them on. Language, if it do not uphold, and feed, and leave in quiet, like the power of gravitation or the air we breathe, is a counter spirit, unremittingly and noiselessly at work to derange, to subvert, to lay waste, to vitiate, to dissolve’ (PrW II 84-5).
45 Published in the 2nd edition of Blindness and Insight, pp. 187-228.
contributing to a better understanding of Wordsworth’s own concerns with the power of the word; and he understood Wordsworth to be a Romantic writer.

Rather than keeping concerns with ‘language’ and ‘history’ and ‘philosophy distinct from each other, as de Man insisted, I have been concerned to place ‘language’ in ‘history’, as well as attending to the history of language, and I identify Wordsworth’s particular philosophical principles. Kenneth Burke’s work on rhetoric in *A Grammar of Motives* and *A Rhetoric of Motives* also does that, and gives some idea of the complexity of the traditional teaching about ‘language’ in the grammar schools that both Wordsworth and Coleridge attended.48 The historical background that Burke includes in his approach is most useful for placing Wordsworth’s classically educated mind within its historical context, acknowledging his education at a grammar school whose curriculum was still based on the traditional *Trivium*.

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48 See, in particular, the section on ‘Traditional Principles of Rhetoric’ in *The Rhetoric of Motives*. 21
Part One

TO WILLIAM WORDSWORTH
TRUE PHILOSOPHER AND INSPIRED POET
WHO BY HIS SPECIAL GIFT AND CALLING OF ALMIGHTY GOD
WHETHER HE SANG OF MAN OR OF NATURE
FAILED NOT TO LIFT UP MEN’S HEARTS TO HOLY THINGS
NOR EVER CEASED TO CHAMPION THE CAUSE
OF THE POOR AND SIMPLE
AND SO IN PERILOUS TIMES WAS RAISED UP
TO BE CHIEF MINISTER
NOT ONLY OF SWEETEST POETRY
BUT ALSO OF HIGH AND SACRED TRUTH
THIS TRIBUTE, SLIGHT THOUGH IT BE, IS OFFERED
BY ONE OF THE MULTITUDE WHO FEEL EVER INDEBTED
FOR THE IMMORTAL TREASURE OF HIS SPLENDID POEMS
IN TESTIMONY OF RESPECT, AFFECTION, AND GRATITUDE.
Chapter 1

Introducing Wordsworth and Cicero

I. Wordsworth: Philosopher, Poet, and Politician

The Wordsworth memorialised on a plaque in Grasmere church represents him to the public as both a true philosopher and an inspired poet; a minister of sweetest poetry and of high and sacred truth. He not only lifted up men’s hearts to holy things, but also championed the cause of the poor and simple. He is represented as a philosopher, a poet, a man of God and, in championing the cause of the poor, something of a ‘politician’. The actual nature of his politics has been a cause of some confusion given his early ‘radicalism’ and his later ‘conservatism’. It is difficult for the twenty-first century reader to square the Wordsworth who wrote the 1793 ‘Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff’, in which he justified regicide and quoted Rousseau, with the Wordsworth who wrote the ‘Addresses to the Freeholders of Westmoreland’ in 1818. But it is not impossible to do so once his classical republican political principles have been established. The inscription in Grasmere church that I use as an epigraph for this chapter, and which served as something of an epitaph for Wordsworth (who considered that his works should serve that purpose), was written originally by John Keble, in Latin, as a tribute to the living Wordsworth, in his De Poeticae Vi Medica: Praelectiones Academicae Oxonii Habitae, published in 1844.¹ It provides a later representation of Wordsworth’s ethos. He was, by then, Poet Laureate, able to rest on his laurels as the ‘sage of Rydal Mt’, his fame and reputation ensured for posterity. But in this study I focus on Wordsworth’s political and philosophical beliefs in the later 1790s and early 1800s, as I explore the part played by imagination in ‘The Ruined Cottage’ (later the first book of The Excursion), his poetic theory in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, and in the original text of his greatest work, The Prelude. It was in these years that he was consciously defining his identity both as a man and as a poet, and the classical humanist ethos that he established at this time remained fairly consistent for the rest of his life.

Wordsworth’s concerns with ‘politics’ meant something quite different from our own contemporary appreciation of the word, and terms that are used in political discussion today cannot be readily applied to the political world of the late eighteenth century.² The eudaemonist philosophical principles by which he lived his life in the 1790s and early 1800s obliged him to think and act ‘politically’. His classical republican sympathies meant that he saw his own life as necessarily engaged with that of the ‘commonwealth’, since concerns for society came before the concerns of the individual. And by living his life according to the system of virtue-ethics set out by Aristotle, he believed that he was acting in the best social (or political) manner open to him. Few twentieth-century

¹ Translated in 1912 by E.K. Francis as, Keble’s Lectures on Poetry.
² For a cautionary discussion of this question see J.C.D. Clark’s comments in his Chapter ‘Keywords’ at the beginning of the second edition of English Society, 1660-1832: Religion, Ideology, and Politics During the Ancien Regime, pp. 1-13.
critics appear to have appreciated the extent to which Wordsworth’s manner of thinking, at the end of the long eighteenth century, was profoundly indebted to classical humanist ideals as they have focussed, instead, on Coleridge’s later, more Romantic, representation of Wordsworth’s genius in *Biographia Literaria*. Wordsworth’s classical ideals are described as a form of ‘false consciousness’ in recent Marxist orientated criticism that sees Wordsworth ‘evading’ history. But that criticism is judging Wordsworth from a historical vantage point that fails to take into account his differing moral philosophy, and misreads his idealism as ‘Romantic’. I argue that a critical, historical study of Wordsworth must recognise the importance of the actual philosophical, political, and moral principles that framed Wordsworth’s theory of poetry and which were representative, also, of his character or ethos. Wordsworth may have been engaging in hyperbole when he stated that he ‘had given twelve hours thought to the conditions and prospects of society, for one to poetry’, but his poetry was also intended to be ‘political’, and I aim to show how Wordsworth’s poetic theory was a product of his political experiences in the 1790s.

In addition to stressing the political nature of Wordsworth’s poetics, I am also concerned to recognise and acknowledge Wordsworth as a ‘philosopher’, as Keble asserted. I argue that his ‘philosophy’ came from the same source as his political knowledge, from a man who has rarely been linked with Wordsworth or his theory of poetry – the great statesman, orator, poet, philosopher, and moralist, Marcus Tullius Cicero. I believe that Cicero’s example captured Wordsworth’s imagination during the time he spent in retirement at Racedown Lodge in Dorset, and that during his period of study there he not only read widely in Cicero’s philosophical works, but was so greatly impressed by the scope of Cicero’s thinking, that he also decided to emulate Cicero’s ideals. My hypothesis that he made this close identification with Cicero’s ethos at this time is made to account for several aspects of Wordsworth’s character that are distinctive of both his mind and that of his ideal poet, as defined in the poetic theory of the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. This led him to adopt the same philosophical principles that Cicero held as an Academic Sceptic – a follower of the ‘New Academy’ founded by Arcesilaus – and who was also sympathetic to many aspects of early Stoic philosophy. I argue that this close identification with Cicero’s manners and morals defined Wordsworth’s ethos in the crucial formative years of his poetic career, and that Marcus Tullius Cicero be considered a greater influence on Wordsworth’s mind than even Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In fact it was Wordsworth’s adherence to the classical humanist ideals defined by Cicero that initially impressed Coleridge when he first spent time with Wordsworth and declared himself to be in awe of his great intellect.

At the same time I argue that Cicero’s works on oratory, especially his *De Oratore*, provided Wordsworth with key ideas and concepts that would inform his poetic theory in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, and that Wordsworth’s deliberate focus on matters of ‘eloquence’ in 1798, was also strongly indebted to another famous Roman writer on the art of rhetoric, Marcus Quintilian, who provided him

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3 F.M Todd, *Politics and the Poet: A Study of Wordsworth* p. 11. In 1851 Coleridge’s daughter Sara remembered, ‘How gravely and earnestly used Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth and my Uncle Southey also to discuss the affairs of the nation, as if it all came home to their business and bosoms, as if it were their private concern!’ *Memoirs and Letters of Sara Coleridge*, Ed. Edith Coleridge. 2 vols. I. 19.

4 Cicero would have referred to the New Academy; modern historians of philosophy refer to the Middle Academy
with a very particular understanding of the role of ‘imagination’. Quintilian had described Cicero as the greatest orator the world had known, and had drawn extensively on Cicero’s example, referring to his speeches, and his written works on oratory and philosophy throughout De Institutione Oratoria. I argue that these two great classical authorities provided Wordsworth with the secrets of a rhetorical poetics that he used to establish his poetic career in the early nineteenth century – and behind their works on rhetoric lay the pervasive influence of Aristotle.⁵

Cicero had made the point of combining philosophy with oratory, ratio with oratio, and was particularly indebted to Aristotle’s Rhetoric in defining the more philosophical approach to Roman oratory that is discussed in his De Oratore. Cicero had studied with philosophers in Greece, and had, from the time of his youth, read widely in Greek philosophy before composing his own philosophical works, which were written in an attempt to make the works of the Greek philosophers available to the Roman mind. Those works, translated into Latin, summarised his knowledge of Greek thought from the perspective of the New Academy, but with a particular focus on the ethical ideals of the early Stoics. In combining the knowledge of philosophy with his rhetorical skills Cicero was concerned to address ‘moral questions’, and the need to get as close as possible to the absolute truth of a matter, rather than relying solely on sophistry. As an Academic Sceptic, a follower of the Socratic tradition, Cicero recognised that appreciation of the absolute truth was beyond mortal comprehension; he also believed, as did the Stoics, that the pursuit of virtue was an end in itself. He recognised Plato’s authority as a great philosopher, though he did not follow his dogmatic, idealist position, being more strongly drawn to Aristotle’s ethical teachings and the Peripatetic tradition.

Quintilian had also argued that the orator should be a ‘good man’, famously defining the best orator as ‘a good man speaking well’, bonus vir dicendi peritus,⁶ and believing that his ‘goodness’ would be assured if he were also a philosopher, a follower of ‘virtue’ in the Socratic tradition. For both men ‘goodness’ was achieved through the deliberate pursuit of the good life (beata vita), the aim of the ‘wise man’ whose wisdom consisted in defining and ‘following the course of Nature’. Cicero believed that the universe was subject to divine laws – natural laws – that determined the way things are. The wise man’s pursuit of virtue meant learning how to discover those laws through the development of the power of reason, and to live a life in accordance with the Highest Reason to be found in Nature – the divine logos. Such a philosophy of life was absolutely ‘logocentric’; the laws of the universe were fixed, and the ‘good life’, the life of ‘happiness’, eudaemonia (the goal of the ‘wise man’) consisted in following those laws of Nature. Cicero’s political philosophy, as set out in De Republica and De Legibus was premised on the belief that all just human laws had to originate in the laws of Nature. But at the same time that he accepted the existence of a divine logos, he was also sceptical (as an Academic Sceptic) that the human mind could ever come to know the true nature of divine Nature; his belief in Nature was a matter of faith. While he explored many of the arguments for

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⁵ Lane Cooper, a Wordsworth scholar, and also one of the founders of the modern study of rhetoric, is quoted by Edward Corbett in his Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student, as stating: ‘The rhetoric not only of Cicero and Quintilian, but of the Middle Ages, of the Renaissance, and of modern times, is, in its best elements, essentially Aristotelian’ (Corbett 543-4).

⁶ De Institutione Oratoria XII 1.1.
the necessary existence of a divine being – whether named Zeus, Fate, Destiny, Providence or simply Nature – he never claimed to have been able to prove the matter philosophically.\(^7\)

As part of his teaching, Quintilian stressed the need for the orator to keep his art a secret, and in this he was following Aristotelian lines, who, in discussing prose composition and matters of style and choice of language for persuasive purposes, had stated:

Authors should compose without being noticed and should seem to speak not artificially but naturally (The latter is persuasive, the former the opposite; for [if artifice is obvious] people become resentful, as at someone plotting against them, just as they are at those adulterating wines)...The ‘theft’ is well done if one composes by choosing words from ordinary language (like Euripides).\(^8\)

The distinctions Aristotle makes were later repeated by Horace in his *Ars Poetica*, and can be related to Wordsworth’s claims about ‘ordinary language’ in the much-misunderstood argument about the ‘real language of men’ in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. By blurring the distinction between the language of prose and the language of poetry in the Preface, Wordsworth was ignoring a formal distinction between prosaic and poetic language enforced by critics concerned with neoclassical rules about art and allowing his own poetry to be allied more closely with rhetoric, as it had been in classical times.\(^9\) In contrast, Coleridge was particularly concerned to maintain the formal distinction between Poetry and Prose, and allied himself with Francis Jeffrey on the matter.\(^10\) But the rigid distinction between poetic and prosaic language was a representation of neoclassical pedantry. In ancient times there was no such absolute division, though poetic language was distinguished as inspired, ‘divine’ utterance, and Wordsworth’s remarks in the Preface directly address this issue.

In the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth oscillated between needing to keep his art hidden, and wanting to be appreciated for his skill – fearing that his art might be mistaken for studied simplicity or naivety (as it was by Francis Jeffrey). But he also knew it was in his interests to hide his art and, by a peculiar twist of fate, he was greatly assisted in concealing his actual skills by Coleridge’s efforts to define his poetic success along quite different lines in *Biographia Literaria*. Later critics were persuaded by Coleridge’s rhetoric into believing that *Biographia* was a ‘fair and philosophical inquisition into the character of Wordsworth, on the evidence of his published works’ (XXI 237). In setting Wordsworth right by the ‘confutation’ of the ‘arguments’ of his ‘mistaken theory’, and through the ‘substitution of more philosophical principles’ (XXII 246), Coleridge very effectively ‘hid’ Wordsworth’s art from the eyes of later critics as they accepted Coleridge’s word as authoritative and agreed that Wordsworth’s ‘mistaken’ theory was worthless.\(^11\)

My thesis discovers ‘another face’ to Wordsworth. And the lineaments of that face define a character quite different from the canonical one produced by a century and half of literary criticism. I

\(^7\) Cicero made a detailed analysis of the philosophy of religion in *De Natura Deorum*

\(^8\) Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1404a, (Book 3 Ch 2 ‘On Lexis or Style’). George Kennedy suggests that this is ‘perhaps the earliest statement in criticism that the greatest art is to disguise art’.

\(^9\) For a detailed discussion on this matter see Jeffrey Walker, *Rhetoric and Poetics in Antiquity*.


\(^11\) All references to *Biographia Literaria* here are to the everyman edition edited by George Watson.
maintain that the secrets of Wordsworth’s actual art of poetry, and his own particular understanding of ‘imagination’, during the crucial formative years of his poetic career, are to be found in concepts defined in the works of Cicero and Quintilian in which the ‘power’ of oratory is combined with the ‘knowledge’ of philosophy to produce poetic language that is intended to have ‘moral’ or ‘political’ designs on it readers.\textsuperscript{12} My argument relies on appreciating the extent to which Wordsworth committed himself to the values of the English Republicans after he returned from France and abandoned his earlier, overly enthusiastic, attachment to the French cause. Of the various recent studies of Wordsworth’s involvement in politics in the 1790s, John William’s \textit{Wordsworth: Romantic Poetry and Revolution Politics} places the greatest stress on the fact that Wordsworth’s engagement with English republican ideals also committed him to a classical humanist ideology more suited to the English seventeenth century than the eighteenth. Nicholas Roe’s \textit{Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years} treats the same period and adds further historical detail. But Roe, unfortunately, largely discounts Wordsworth’s own philosophical and political views while foregrounding the commonly held belief that he owed all his serious thought to Coleridge’s influence. Where William’s identifies Wordsworth’s classical republican sympathies, Roe identifies Wordsworth as a radical sympathetic to Thomas Paine’s understanding of ‘natural rights’\textsuperscript{13} The most detailed study arguing for Wordsworth’s debt to the English Republicans was made earlier, however, by Leslie Chard in \textit{Dissenting Republican: Wordsworth’s Early Life and Thought in their Political Context}.

Chard proposes that Wordsworth studied the works of the English Republicans on his return from France – the works of such ‘Great men’ as, ‘Sydney, Marvel, Harrington / Young Vane and others who call Milton friend’. He would have been introduced to the significance of their writings while still in France by Beaupuy and other members of the Girondists, who drew heavily on English republican political theory.\textsuperscript{14} His knowledge of these writers led, in turn, to his acknowledgement of the authority of the ‘original’ works of the Roman republicans, and a sense of history that was timeless. My hypothesis pictures Wordsworth deeply engrossed in Cicero’s works and reading his way, in Latin, into the mind of a man he imagined as someone who could be considered a contemporary – especially since he appeared to be confronting the same timeless ‘moral questions’ that preoccupied Wordsworth during his retirement at Racedown. His renewed interest in Cicero, who he would have earlier read at school, came at a time when he had rejected Godwinian philosophy and was needing to find some more certain foundation for all moral concepts – having found Godwin’s

\textsuperscript{12} Thomas De Quincey credits his later distinction between the literature of knowledge and the literature of power with an understanding of ‘power’ that he obtained from his ‘many years conversation with Mr Wordsworth’. He also suggests that Wordsworth defined a new sense of the word in 1798. \textit{Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey}. Ed. Mason. X 48.

\textsuperscript{13} For Roe’s discussion of Wordsworth’s lack of any ‘unifying philosophic intention’, his seeming debt to Paine, and his reliance on Coleridge for a ‘sustaining philosophy of the One Life’ see \textit{The Radical Years} pp. 34-6. Roe follows Jonathan Wordsworth’s belief in Wordsworth’s debt to Coleridge’s concept of ‘the One Life’ closely. ‘The One Life offered a vision of universal participation, a transcendent justification of Paine’s system of principles as universal as truth and the existence of man. It simultaneously permitted the internalization of those principles as functions of individual thought and feeling.’ Roe goes on to propose that ‘Wordsworth explores this inward translation of regenerative possibility in his description of “The Pedlar”’. While I am indebted to Roe for the historical detail that he has provided in his study, I propose a radically different reading of Wordsworth’s philosophy, his plans for his poetry, and the role of his Pedlar.

\textsuperscript{14} Brissot had been a regular visitor to England, engaging in dialogue with English republicans.
Political Justice wanting. Retiring to Racedown in the Autumn of 1795 Wordsworth embarked on a sustained period of study, and it seems that he turned to the voice of ancient authority for guidance. At this critical period in his life his classical mind was busy dreaming Roman imaginations rather than Romantic ones, as he contemplated his world through the eyes of an ‘ancient spirit’ that was not dead, but still living in the minds of true republicans. Wordsworth’s ‘sense of history’ (and of politics and society) in the formative years of his poetic career, when he was defining his theory of poetry, was defined by his classical republican, civic humanist, ideals. His imagination was inspired by classical ‘truths’ rather than engaging in Romantic dreams. Having been acquainted with Cicero’s political works on account of his republican sympathies, I argue that he extended his knowledge of Cicero’s writings to include those on oratory and philosophy while he was at Racedown.

During this period he was also working towards defining a new theory of poetry and a new poetic identity, one to replace his earlier enthusiastic belief that he might attain success as a vates poet – as some kind of bard or druid. Up until this time, he had hoped to be able to produce poetry with the aid of his ‘strong imagination’, which he thought sufficient to provide him, as a ‘chosen son’, with ‘poetic numbers’ that might come ‘spontaneously’. But after the ‘crisis’ of his ‘strong disease’ (Prelude 1850: XI. 306), when he had realised that his imagination had been too strong, he was forced to re-think his role as a bard. During his time at Racedown he worked at defining a new identity for himself as a very different kind of poet, whose activities were more political than prophetic, and based on his eloquence rather than the effusive utterance idealised by Coleridge. In a gradual process of transformation, Wordsworth’s ideal poet is represented firstly by the Pedlar in Ms B of The Ruined Cottage, whose character is described as that of a naturally eloquent Stoic. Then, in 1799, an important transformation occurs as Wordsworth decides to define his own life history in the ‘Two-Part Prelude’, according to the developmental narrative he had earlier described for the Pedlar. His separation from Coleridge enabled him to further develop ideas that had already been expressed in ‘The Ruined Cottage’, in ‘Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey’ and in the ‘Advertisement’ that he added to Lyrical Ballads shortly before leaving for Germany. By 1800 Wordsworth’s Poet has become more of a rhetor than an orator, as Wordsworth again politicised his work, having recognised the limitations of the Pedlar’s character as, primarily, that of a poet of Nature. The definition of this more moral, or political, role for ‘the poet’ is not so clear in the 1800 preface to Lyrical Ballads, but it is made more transparent (at least to classically educated readers) in 1802 when Wordsworth defines ‘the Poet’ as ‘a man speaking to men’; a man who is also endowed with exceptional abilities as both a thinker and as an orator – a ‘man’ modelled on the Ciceronian ideal of the educated orator who can combine ratio and oratio.

In De Oratore, in which Cicero described his ideal orator, he also stressed Aristotle’s fundamental appreciation, in the Politics, that it is the act of speaking that enables ‘man’ to become a

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15 Wordsworth encountered that ‘ancient spirit’ in the character of the Sailor’s Mother, whose ‘mien and gait’ was ‘like a Roman Matron’.

16 On Wordsworth and Bardism, see Richard Gravil’s Wordsworth’s Bardic Vocation 1797-1842.
He follows Aristotle’s belief that speech brought men together to establish communities, and that the best politician is an accomplished rhetorician, an eloquent speaker:

What other force could have gathered the scattered members of the human race into one place, or could have led them away from a savage existence in the wilderness to this truly human, communal way of life, or, once communities have been founded, could have established laws, judicial procedures, and legal arrangements? (1. 33)

Cicero stresses the role of the speaker as a member of community, a commonwealth that requires some form of government be established and upheld by laws, in order for society to flourish. In writing *De Oratore* Cicero imitated the model of the Platonic dialogue to present a discussion of the new forms of rhetorical practice that he was eager to develop. Two main characters, Crassus and Antonius debate the key topics while minor characters interject at appropriate moments and give the presentation a more informal conversational tone. The discussion is not about the ‘Art of Speaking’ – about technicalities; it is about the abilities required by the ideal orator and all aspects of the orator’s role are discussed. Both Bruce Graver’s and Theresa Kelley’s studies of Wordsworth understood him to have read *De Oratore* with care, and to have developed a poetic style that reflects a strong Ciceronian influence. The following extracts give some idea of the extent of Cicero’s understanding, and I have mainly chosen passages that can be seen to have been an influence on the development of Wordsworth’s own eloquence.

In presenting his case that the best orator must also be a philosopher Cicero was developing an argument in tandem with his political aims. *De Oratore* was written with the intention of providing rhetoricians with new skills, in order that they might confront the abuse of the power of the Forum by the military might of the members of the first triumvirate. Cicero’s re-organisation of oratory was carried out in the hope of bringing its better-prepared and newly-polished weapons of rhetoric into the battlefield of the Forum, in defence of the Roman republic, and his two works on political philosophy, *De Republica* and *De Legibus* followed *De Oratore* in due course. In Book 2 of *De Oratore* Cicero asserted that:

The orator should master everything that is relevant to the practices of citizens and the way humans behave: all that is connected with normal life, the functioning of the State, our social order, as well as the way people usually think, human nature, and character. (2. 68)

But Cicero was also a poet, and his concerns with eloquence inevitably incorporated the use of poetic language:

The poet...closely resembles the orator. While the former is slightly more restricted as to rhythm, and enjoys a greater licence in his choice of words, they have an almost equal share in many of the devices of style. And however that may be, the poet is certainly almost identical to the orator in this respect: he does not restrict his rights of possession by any

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18 Writing to Cato, Cicero proposed: ‘we two almost alone have brought the old authentic philosophy, which some regard as an amusement of leisure and idleness, down into the forum, into the public life, one might almost say into the battlefield.’ Cicero, *Epistulae ad Familiares*. XV 4.
boundaries that will prevent him from wandering – employing this same ability to express himself copiously – wherever he wishes to go. *(De Oratore* 1.70)

The aptly named ‘Wanderer’ in *The Excursion* can also be seen to exemplify Wordsworth’s Ciceronian ethos. As he narrates the story of Margaret’s demise he does so with such eloquence that the things he describes to his auditor, including the dead Margaret, ‘seem present’. His ability at presenting vivid descriptions that ‘make’ pictures appear in the minds of his auditors is a mark of oratorical excellence. Wordsworth demonstrated his knowledge of that power in 1797-8 when writing ‘The Ruined Cottage’, the original text for Book I of *The Excursion*, in which the Wanderer was known as the Pedlar.

Since *De Oratore* was not a technical manual, Antonius and Crassus do not relate how, specifically, to use eloquence. Their voices present hypotheses Cicero wished to rehearse in developing his main thesis for the necessary union of wisdom and eloquence (*sapientia et eloquentia*). In his ‘new’ art of oratory, he adapted key aspects of Aristotle’s original *Rhetoric*, re-introducing Aristotle’s use of the *pisteis*, the three ‘means of persuasion’ or proofs – the appeals to *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos* – that enabled more enlivened discussion to take place at a time when other Roman orators were relying only on ‘status’ or ‘stasis’ theory. Most Roman rhetoricians in Cicero’s day set out their argument according to logical formulae that defined set forms from which answers could be deduced. Genuine rhetorical disputation was being replaced by the use of set pieces of declamation and the establishment of fixed laws and codes of conduct – precedents that could be appealed to: Roman law. Cicero had recovered Aristotle’s method of argument, and had put it to use in setting out general arguments (*theses*) rather than limiting debate to set topics and specific cases (*hypotheses*). Cicero developed the understanding that a thesis be considered ‘an investigation transferred from individual people and times to a speech of the universal type: *quaesito infinita*. These *theses*, (literally ‘seats’, places on which to rest an argument) could be used and developed in the pursuit of any argument, and were not tied down to one specific instance – a *causa* or *quaestio finita*. This was a significant part of his attempt to bring philosophy and rhetoric together, so that the skilful orator could combine philosophical argument and wisdom with his skill as a speaker – and could honestly claim to know what he was talking about! Traditionally philosophers were seen as too detached from real life to be able to offer practical ‘political’ advice, while rhetoricians were known to win their cases by defining ‘truth’ according to the needs of the case.

Cicero also later composed his own *Topica*, following Aristotle’s example, if not his particular method. To his use of topical argumentation and *theses* he added his poetic abilities, exploiting the performative possibilities of language through the use of figures that were not so much decorative, but directive in their function. As a result, his eloquence was not based solely on the rules of rhetoric, but also on his knowledge of philosophy and poetry. Such knowledge also included a detailed understanding of psychology – as covered by Aristotle in his discussion of the emotions and

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19 Cicero’s use of the *pisteis* went well beyond Aristotle’s original understanding, where their use was formally restricted to the opening and closing speeches of a case.
20 See *Orator* 46.
of characters in Book II of his *Rhetoric*. Cicero also drew on Aristotle’s *Ethics* and *Politics* for his understanding of human nature, both in itself, and in the political context that Aristotle understood human beings to live within, ‘by nature’. The new possibilities given to the orator in this blending of rhetoric with philosophy were intended to make him a great statesman:

The real power of eloquence is so enormous that its scope includes the origin, essence, and transformations of everything: virtues, moral duties, and all the laws of nature that govern human conduct, characters, and life. It establishes traditions, laws, and legal arrangements, governs the State, and addresses with distinction and copiousness all questions belonging to any area whatsoever. (3. 76)

In the 1802 additions to the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, when Wordsworth describes his ideal poet as a ‘man speaking to men’, he also conceives him to be something of a Ciceronian orator, a wise man speaking eloquently, and addressing ‘political’ matters with a sense of duty. Earlier, in the original 1800 Preface, Wordsworth echoed the sentiments expressed by Cicero in *De Oratore*, though he declined from describing the full scope of the duties he would ascribe to the poet in his theory of poetry.

For to treat the subject with the clearness and coherence of which I believe it is susceptible, it would be necessary to give a full account of the present state of the public taste in this country, and to determine how far this taste is healthy or depraved; which again could not be determined without pointing out in what manner language and the human mind act and re-act on each other, and without retracing the revolutions, not of literature alone, but likewise of society itself. (*MLB* 58: 45-53)

One final quote from *De Oratore* is also highly suggestive of the fact that Wordsworth had carefully studied this work and that it influenced his poetic theory:

*The words used in conversation are no different from those we use in energetic speech, nor are they drawn from one category for daily usage, and from another for use on the stage and in other forms of display. Rather they lie in everyone’s reach.* (3. 177 my emphasis)

There is a familiar ring to this comment about the language of everyday conversation, and this sense of familiarity is uncanny as one reads through Cicero’s writings and discovers echoes of Wordsworth that are, of course, his echoes of Cicero.

I stress the *political* nature of Wordsworth’s definition of the poet as a wise orator, in the additions made to the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* in 1802. The definition, implicit in 1800, was made more explicit in 1802 when he reinforced his Ciceronian ideals with those, also, of Quintilian. The additional section draws directly on a famous passage in *De Institutione Oratoria* and compounds the very classical nature of his ‘manifesto’— that Francis Jeffrey thought to be ‘German’ and Meyer Abrams ‘Romantic’.21 In 1802 Wordsworth also made a point of adding an unattributed motto from Quintilian on a newly inserted half-title page between the Preface and the Poetry which read:

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He had earlier used the same quotation in a letter to Charles James Fox that accompanied a copy of the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, where it was used to underscore Wordsworth’s republican sentiments (*EY* 315). In the 1802 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* it offered something of a paratextual clue to his classically educated readers, one that might have helped them discover something of the true nature of his artistic genius.\(^23\)

### II. Cicero: Eloquent Rhetor, Academic Philosopher, and Poet

The provocative claim that I make here, that Cicero was a greater influence on Wordsworth than Coleridge, will seem counter-intuitive to many Romanticists and traditional ‘Wordsworthians’. But the shock that such a suggestion produces is a direct reflection of the manner in which a ‘Romantic ideology’ has indeed defined, and still continues to define, the way in which works of the ‘Romantic period’ are interpreted. Romantic scholars pursuing traditional, Romantic, readings of Wordsworth fail to perceive the influence that Cicero had over eighteenth-century classical republican minds. Cicero was still an influential figure in eighteenth-century England and, as classicist Niall Rudd points out, ‘Until the nineteenth century Cicero’s philosophical works were standard reading for any western European who wished to consider himself educated’.\(^24\) It is not at all surprising that Wordsworth was acquainted with Cicero’s philosophical works, and Coleridge also refers to distinctions made by Cicero when engaged in the discussion of philosophy, as a matter of course.\(^25\) What I wish to stress here is that my argument is not that radical. Cicero’s influence is not ‘seen’ by literary critics in their study of Wordsworth because such criticism takes place within a very specific, and Romantic, ‘interpreting community’ (to use Stanley Fish’s term). It is one that operates according to the ‘pre-established codes of decision’ that have informed the discipline ever since Coleridge’s voice was considered to be authoritative on matters relating to Wordsworth, Imagination and ‘practical criticism’.\(^26\)

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\(^{22}\) ‘For it is feeling and force of imagination that make us eloquent. It is for this reason that even the uneducated have no difficulty in finding words to express their meaning, if only they are stirred by some strong emotion’. In reading Quintilian I have mainly used H.E. Butler’s translation in the 1921, Loeb Classical Authors edition, which was superseded by that of Donald Russell in 2001, to which I have also referred. I have also compared Russell’s and Butler’s wording with the classic translation by John Selby Watson. Unless stated otherwise I quote from Butler.

\(^{23}\) For a recent discussion of Gérard Genette’s concept of the ‘paratext’ and its application in the study of Romantic criticism, see Paul Magnuson, *Reading Public Romanticism*, pp. 4-5.

\(^{24}\) Preface to *Cicero, De Legibus I*. Ed. Niall Rudd and Thomas Wiedemann.

\(^{25}\) Coleridge quotes from Cicero, in passing, in his series of letters on philosophy to Josiah Wedgwood in February and March 1801. But such references were topical, and I do not believe that he ever made the detailed reading of Cicero’s philosophical works that I suggest Wordsworth made.

\(^{26}\) Coleridge uses the expression ‘practical criticism’ at the beginning of Chapter XV of *Biographia*. 
In *The Fate of Eloquence in the Age of Hume*, Adam Potkay studies a ‘Tension between a nostalgia for ancient eloquence and an emerging discourse of polite style’ that he sees as defining ‘both the literary and political discourses of mid-eighteenth century Britain’ (1). Although Potkay’s study pre-dates the period I focus on here by half a century, his attention to that ‘tension’ is also relevant to the matter of my argument here. Potkay traces how the rise of the New Whigs led to a loss of the traditional classical values espoused by the Old Whigs and also by the Country party, and he makes the point that: 

In keeping with an assumption at least as old as Quintilian, the Country writers equate eloquence with ‘virtue’, steadfastly maintaining that only the good citizen could be a good speaker. By virtue they mean the classical political virtues: courage, magnanimity, love of justice, civic participation, and, above all, a preference for the public above any merely private good. (3)

Quintilian acknowledged Cicero to be the master of classical rhetoric; a greater speaker even than Demosthenes, and he was still held in high regard by eighteenth-century intellectuals. But as the century progressed, his style was deemed too passionate for use in polite society, and eighteenth-century etiquette demanded a better-mannered form of expression. Potkay discusses how, by the middle of the century, the exaggerated focus on classical values and virtue that had characterised the age of Walpole, had been re-defined in the age of Hume. And by the end of the century, those who indulged in the ‘excesses’ of vehement Ciceronian style tended to be politicians, of whom Edmund Burke was exemplary in his use of eloquence, to dramatic effect, in his own oratory. At the other end of the political spectrum there were also speakers like John Thelwall, whose radical republican rhetoric was truer to the Socratic principles that informed Cicero’s oratorical voice. Wordsworth was closer to Thelwall than Burke in upholding ‘the classical political virtues’, and was visited by the latter in 1797.

In March 1798 Wordsworth made a point of noting that he was especially concerned to write ‘with eloquence’ as he was developing the dramatically different style of poetry that he produced in the original draft of ‘The Ruined Cottage’. In a letter to James Tobin he excitedly relates that he considered his recent work to be suitable material for a planned epic. The letter is well known because it contains Wordsworth’s first reference to the plan for ‘The Recluse’:

I have written 1300 lines of a poem in which I contrive to convey most of the knowledge of which I am possessed. My object is to give pictures of Nature, Man, and Society. Indeed I know not anything which will not come within the scope of my plan. (*EY* 212)

These lines are often quoted by critics preoccupied with how well Wordsworth is managing to follow Coleridge’s suggestions that he write an epic. Their focus on evidence that Wordsworth has actually started the proposed ‘Recluse’, causes them to overlook other more important comments in the letter.

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27 Potkay’s study elaborates on the work of J. G. A. Pocock’s influential treatment of the history of this period in *The Machiavellian Moment*.

28 And he was much criticised for it by those who responded to him, especially Thomas Paine.
In telling Tobin something about the matter of the poem Wordsworth also finds it important to relate something about its manner.

The letter opens with Wordsworth commenting on his ‘solitude’ at Alfoxden before responding to comments Tobin must have made about the success of Monk Lewis’s play *The Castle Spectre* in London. Wordsworth puts a brave face on the fact that his own play, *The Borderers*, had been rejected for the stage, but he obviously lamented a loss of possible income as he noted that *The Castle Spectre* had netted Lewis the sum of £400. Wordsworth tells Tobin:

I am perfectly easy about the theatre, if I had no other method of employing myself Mr Lewis’s success would have thrown me into despair. The ‘Castle Spectre’ is a Spectre indeed. Clothed with the flesh and blood of £400 received from the treasury of the theatre it may in the eyes of the author and his friend appear very lovely. There is little need to advise me against publishing; it is a thing, which I dread as much as death itself. This may serve as an example of the figure by rhetoricians called hyperbole, but privacy and quiet are my delight. (*EY* 210-1)

Wordsworth – who represents himself as dismissing any possibility of despair because he is engaged in other, more meaningful work – plays with words in asserting that Lewis’s *Spectre*, clothed in the ‘flesh and blood’ of £400 must have indeed appeared a ‘very lovely’ rather than a fearful sight. He asserts a classic antithesis in which the expected ‘fear’ (*phobos*) associated with a spectre is replaced by its opposite emotion, that of ‘love’ (*eros*). He then makes a point of commenting on his further use of figurative language in the following sentence in which he uses a particular form of the figure of similitude, hyperbole, when comparing the dread of publishing with the fear of death. He does so in a manner that suggests he had been making a deliberate study of ‘rhetoric’ at the time. Then, to stress the fact that he has other methods of employing himself, he relates that he has indeed not been idle and refers to his recently completed ‘1300 lines’. Having conveyed this important information and the fact that the project is expected to take at least a year and a half, he then refers to some essays that ‘must be written with eloquence, or not at all. My eloquence, speaking with modesty, will be carried off, at least for some time into my poem’ (*EY* 212). His use of the humility *topos* here is ironic, and signifies the significance of his careful and considered use of ‘eloquence’ in his poetic work at this time.

In Wordsworth’s day the ‘art of eloquence’ was being explained to polite audiences through the medium of Hugh Blair’s famous *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, which had been published in 1783, and proved remarkably popular. By the end of the eighteenth century a new *aesthetic* sense had developed in polite society, one that replaced the *ethical* concerns of Ciceronian

29 In 1843, in his Fenwick Note to *The Borderers*, Wordsworth remarked that, although he had had little hope of success in having the play accepted, ‘a successful Play would in the then state of my finances have been a most welcome piece of good fortune’ (*IFN* 78). Tobin had been with Wordsworth in London in December 1797, when he had taken the manuscript of *The Borderers* to the managers of Covent Garden, and the two men had also called on Godwin together.

30 It may be that Wordsworth’s specific comment here suggests he was reading Cicero’s *Topica* at the time. In his discussion of using ‘imaginary examples’ in presenting similitudes between things in the production of an argument Cicero writes; ‘In this area orators and philosophers have license to make dumb things talk, to raise people from the underworld, *to speak of something which cannot possibly happen*, in order to magnify or minimize something - this is called hyperbole - and to do many other strange things’ Cicero’s *Topica*. 45. Trans. Tobias Reinhardt, p. 139; my italics.
eloquence. Although Blair’s *Lectures* are often referred to as having influenced Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s ideas about poetry, I argue that Wordsworth was learning about the art of eloquence from the original sources of Blair’s materials, the works of Cicero, Quintilian and Aristotle where it was treated, pragmatically, as a technical skill. Where Blair might describe the ‘ornaments’ of poetry, drawing on neo-classical concepts of ‘taste’, Cicero and Quintilian had written about the armaments (*ornatus*) of rhetoric, utilised as ‘weapons’ in a not-so-gentle art of persuasion that was, in Cicero’s case, a matter of life or death. As Wordsworth was learning more about the art of eloquence, he was also developing a theory of poetry that incorporated the expertise and techniques set out by these ‘elder writers’. Acknowledging the ‘power’ available to those who speak a natural language of the emotions, Wordsworth’s theory also incorporates an understanding of the need to temper that ‘true voice of feeling’, to calm its impassioned rhetoric, through the use of a poetic eloquence that knows just how to balance the emotions, and how to play on the reader’s affections. This was a skill that he learnt, most particularly from Quintilian, who had drawn much of his understanding from Cicero.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Cicero was recognised as the political spokesperson, and hero, of the English Republicans. But a century later the Victorians took delight in showing their more sophisticated manners by attacking the character of the man, and denigrating his reputation. Due to prejudices that became institutionalised in academic studies in Britain and Germany in the nineteenth century (ones defining a new ‘Romantic’ attitude of mind), Cicero’s influence was marginalised. By the middle years of the twentieth century his reputation was almost unknown, so it is not surprising that his influence is rarely noted in modern literary studies of writers of the Romantic period. In the Introduction to a book on *Cicero’s Elegant Style* published in 1979, Harold Gottoff comments on the contemporary lack of awareness of Cicero’s exceptional role in history, and in the history of ideas:

> It would be difficult to think of any other figure of Western cultural history who has suffered the eclipse of reputation that Cicero has undergone. To the humanists, he was the quintessential model for and of the Renaissance man. In our time he is generally considered to be a vain, long-winded, essentially ineffectual politician, derivative as a thinker and pretentious as a man of letters.

Neil Wood opens his study of *Cicero’s Social and Political Thought* with an equally negative appraisal of Cicero’s current status. Writing in 1988, he asked, ‘Why should anyone today be

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31 A measure of the topicality of Blair’s *Lectures* is seen in the fact that more copies were sold in the nineteenth than in the eighteenth century.

32 It was fashionable to attack Cicero, the man, in the later years of the Victorian era and Anthony Trollope made a point of defending his character in the Preface to his two volume *Life of Cicero*.

33 Harold C Gottof, *Cicero’s Elegant Style: An Analysis of the Pro Archia* p. 3. Gottof provides an eloquent analysis of the reasons for Cicero’s startling decline in popularity, treating both historical and literary aspects. The historical circumstances obviously relate to the decline of the immense authority of classical culture with the rise of scientific thinking, and a new Romantic attitude of mind. The literary causes he puts down to the focus on poetry and the novel, at the expense of all other forms of prose, and the influence of the ‘new criticism’.

34 Wood is not a classicist and writes from a Marxist political agenda. Miriam Griffin, (Editor of *On Duties* (*De Officiis*)) in the series *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought* cautions against Wood’s treatment of Cicero’s history and his analysis of Ciceronian texts, which she sees as oversimplified. I have used Wood
concerned with the social and political ideas of Cicero?’ And he echoes Gottoff’s sombre analysis—Cicero’s merit as philosopher is so deflated, and his popularity as a sage and stylist has so declined, that he may as well be dismissed as irrelevant to the modern age. And yet, Wood points out, he was the foremost social and political theorist of Roman republicanism, and was deeply admired by eminent social and political thinkers of early modern Europe. His letters, discovered in the Renaissance, gave great insights into his character and were studied for both their content and their style. For humanists he was a venerated teacher of civic virtue, a staunch republican apostle of Liberty, and a relentless foe of tyranny. His speeches, letters and philosophical works were studied in schools in England, Italy and France and influenced generations of young minds. During the Dark Ages, when original Greek and Roman texts were lost to Western Europe, Cicero’s texts provided the only source of ancient Greek philosophy. The early Church Fathers used Cicero extensively as they drew up the doctrines of the early Church, and although they were at odds with Cicero’s Academic scepticism and stoicism, they based many of their concepts on arguments set out by Cicero as they translated his pagan concepts into Christian ones, bending his logic to fit their dogma. Eloquent passages from Cicero’s works, praising the glory of the divine power behind the universe, were adopted by the Church and incorporated into Christian prayer books. As a consequence of his influence on the Church (the main conduit of learning in the Middle Ages), Cicero’s representation of Greek philosophy informed all subsequent discussions of epistemology, ethics, politics, and religion up until the time of the Renaissance.

As a politician, Cicero had a great influence on Machiavelli, and the authority of his works continued to inform Elizabethan culture. In the seventeenth century he was the guiding light for the English Republicans: James Harrington, John Neville and Algernon Sidney; and his political concepts defined the old Whig values that continued to inform the principles of eighteenth-century republican thinkers, including Wordsworth. In France Cicero was praised by Voltaire, Montesquieu, Diderot, and Rousseau—who called him the ‘Prince of Eloquence’ as he emulated his rhetorical skills. French revolutionaries, from Mirabeau to Robespierre, held him in high esteem, and Brissot, ‘the French Cicero,’ modelled his own ideal life on Cicero’s De Oratore. John Locke stated that he was deeply indebted to Cicero’s works and praised him among the ‘truly great men’, and Shaftesbury’s Characteristics drew extensively on Ciceronian principles. Both David Hume and Adam Smith read widely in his philosophical works, and Hume’s devastating sceptical attitude was based on Cicero’s representation of Academic Scepticism, a perspective that owed more to Socrates than to Pyrrho. Cicero’s manner was imitated by a number of accomplished ‘Ciceronian’ stylists and orators: Gibbon, Johnson, Pitt, Fox, and Sheridan—and Wood notes that there was no more devoted a Ciceronian than Edmund Burke whose thought has been likened to ‘a Cicero filtered through the Christian scholastic tradition’ (Wood 3). James Beattie quotes from Cicero extensively in his essays, primarily for his social commentary, which provides a useful and helpful context for defining Cicero’s place in greater history.

35 St Augustine and St Jerome both greatly admired Cicero’s philosophy. Bertrand Russell describes the two men’s struggle to turn their backs on Cicero’s divine reasoning in favour of the Church’s demands for a faith that overrode that reason. A History of Western Philosophy pp. 354-85.

still acknowledging Cicero’s authority as he outlined the key principles of his new Scottish Common-
sense philosophy. Wood’s reading of Cicero echoes the argument of J.G.A. Pocock in *The
Machiavellian Moment*, in stressing the extent to which English eighteenth-century thought was
primarily defined by the values of classical humanism:

The peak of Cicero’s authority and prestige came during the eighteenth century Enlightenment.
In terms of the enthusiastic revival of interest in classical antiquity, it was a Ciceronian century.
Unquestionably Cicero was a leading culture-hero of the age: revered as a great philosopher and
a superb stylist, hailed as a distinguished popularizer, and praised as a humanist sceptic who
scourged superstition; a courageous statesman and dedicated patriot, the ardent defender
of liberty against tyranny. (3)

Those who study Wordsworth in the twenty-first century know many of the names mentioned
in the above paragraph, but rarely do they make any note of Cicero, the man whose works inspired the
thinking of many of these influential figures. His influence is pervasive, but because so many of the
ideas that his works helped promulgate have become second nature, the debt to Cicero has gone
largely unrecognised. And while it is true (and he would have accepted) that his role was primarily
that of a messenger, his particular inflection of the information he conveyed gave it an identifiable
Stoic slant, one definitive in shaping early modern European culture, and still influential in
Wordsworth’s day. It was a perspective that was implicitly critical of, and even hostile to, orthodox
religion and therefore provided a philosophical grounding for much secular thought, as well as for
dissenting Christians whose ‘unorthodox’ beliefs were often more philosophically astute than those of
the Church of England, or Rome.

Cicero remained a highly respected thinker right up until the end of the long eighteenth
century. By the end of the nineteenth, his classical ideals had been replaced by modern, romantic ones,
in which the rights of the individual were placed before those of society. In the twentieth century
concerns about Freud’s ‘Psychological Man’, replaced those of Aristotle’s ‘zoon politikon’ before
being replaced, in turn, by the supposed renaissance of Adam Smith’s vision of ‘economic man’ –
whose fate currently lies in the balance. But in the latter years of the twentieth century, in the wake of
‘postmodernist’ philosophy, and the recent critiques of nineteenth-century historicism, a new interest
has emerged that reads Hellenistic philosophy with a far greater attention to arguments that were
formerly dismissed by nineteenth-century positivist analysis. And since Cicero’s philosophical works
were studies of Hellenistic philosophy, there has recently been something of a revival in his reputation
as a philosopher.37 Linked with this renewal of interest in Hellenistic philosophy is a new appraisal of
early Stoic philosophy, which had suffered an equally devastating decline in importance in the
nineteenth century. Recent studies have discovered that Stoic logic is, in fact, more sophisticated than
Aristotle’s, and this renewed interest has also stimulated greater interest in other aspects of early

37 In ‘Cicero’s Philosophical Works and their Background’, the Introduction to a collection of essays in *Cicero
The Philosopher*, J.G.F. Powell points out that, since the early 1980s, there has been a remarkable renewal of
scholarly interest in Cicero as a philosophical writer.
Stoicism, especially its ethical teachings – the area that most interested Cicero.\(^{38}\) But although Stoic philosophy is formally divided into three parts - the study of nature, reason, and ethics – it actually fits together in a highly integrated manner and resists abstract compartmentalisation. This makes a ‘logical’ analysis of Wordsworth’s use of Stoic concepts (one amenable to Coleridgean logic) very difficult to define. Orthodox critical studies have tended to use the term ‘mystical’ to make sense of Wordsworth’s concepts,\(^{39}\) when they can be better understood by studying their origin in Stoic philosophy, which was still an influence on eighteenth-century minds, especially those with classical republican sympathies.\(^{40}\)

My argument here proposes that Wordsworth was well acquainted with Cicero’s philosophical works, from which he took both inspiration and guidance to define his own ethos and that of his ideal poet. It is not at all remarkable that Wordsworth should have read widely in Cicero. What is remarkable, is the extent to which twentieth century literary criticism, following Coleridge, has produced such a ‘Romantic Image’ of the man, that it becomes almost impossible to perceive his true character or ethos. My concern here is not to present an argument that attempts to engage with the position of those who believe in this Romantic representation of Wordsworth. To try to argue against an attitude of mind that has, as McGann argued, assumed the status of an ideology is, by definition, to argue against unconsciously held positions; Wordsworth’s ‘pre-established codes of decision’. Many contemporary critical assessments of Wordsworth are indeed ideologically pre-determined by a nineteenth-century attitude of mind that is intrinsically ‘Romantic’ and incapable of recognising Wordsworth’s classical voice. My primary concern here is to attempt to read Wordsworth on his terms, and to recognise the influence of Cicero’s thinking, and his rhetoric, on Wordsworth’s poetic productions. An appreciation of this particular influence will help resolve some of the paradoxes and misunderstandings about Wordsworth’s work that are largely the result of a critical tradition based too exclusively on the Coleridgean reading of Wordsworth in *Biographia Literaria*.

### III. Paradoxes and Problems with Logic and Dialectic

Another study that has had an important influence of the development of my own thesis is James Chandler’s *Wordsworth’s Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics*. Chandler’s study, published in 1984, was in the vanguard of the new critical approach concerned with providing a better, more historically accurate representation of Wordsworth’s aims and motives, but his argument was also contentious. My argument here runs counter to the claims made by Chandler that argued for Wordsworth’s conversion to ‘conservative’ political values in the late 1790s. Chandler based his argument on Wordsworth having been influenced by Edmund Burke’s writings – and suggested that

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38 See Katerina Ierodiakonou’s ‘The Study of Stoicism: Its Decline and Revival’, the Introduction to *Topics in Stoic Philosophy*.

39 Coleridge was less generous in describing them as ‘misty’ in *Biographia Literaria*.

40 The recent work of Martha Nussbaum and Julia Annas (see bibliography), provides examples of the kind of new appraisals of Hellenistic philosophy and ethics that are displacing nineteenth-century classical scholarship’s over-idealistic representations of classical philosophy. Margaret Graver’s *Stoicism and Emotion* also presents an important re-evaluation of Stoic theory.
Wordsworth had recoiled from an earlier identification with Rousseauian principles in a reactionary acceptance of traditional values, as represented by Burke. Wordsworth’s own writings show clear evidence of Burke’s influence in later years, when he was obviously impressed by Burke’s grasp of political realities, as well as by his rhetoric. He also appreciated Burke’s classical appreciation of ‘manners’, and followed distinctions made in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, but I find it difficult to accept that he would have approved of Burke’s political values in the late 1790s and early 1800s.

Where Wordsworth shows himself to be voicing strong opinions about morals and manners, I suggest that his source for many of those opinions—which can also be found, expressed with great eloquence in Burke’s writings—was actually Cicero. As Neil Wood has pointed out, Burke was an avid reader of Cicero, and I suggest that the values that Wordsworth might be seen to have inherited from Burke, as Chandler suggests, were not mediated in such a manner, one that problematically tarnished them with Burke’s later anti-republican morals. In arguing for the significance of Burke’s strong precursor, Cicero, as a direct influence on Wordsworth’s mind, it is possible to circumvent the difficulties raised by Chandler’s argument about Burke’s influence. Several critics find the much earlier conversion to Burkean values that Chandler’s argument entails does not ring true, and I argue that in the late 1790s and early 1800s Wordsworth continued to support republican values that would not have squared with Burke’s beliefs.41 Rather than plot Wordsworth’s position on ‘the crucial intellectual axis represented by Burke and Rousseau’ described by Chandler, I look back past these two eighteenth-century personalities in order to define a much longer historical durée.42

I argue therefore that Cicero’s original texts were the source of much of Wordsworth’s thinking at this period in time, rather than the arguments of other, later, political theorists, who had transmitted Cicero’s works down through history in their own studies. I propose that Cicero’s particular representations of ‘philosophy’ had a very specific and very strong influence on the development of Wordsworth’s identity as a poet. Cicero’s Stoic ‘one-life’ philosophy provided Wordsworth with key elements of his poetic theory and an appreciation of ‘imagination’ grounded in Nature, in the appearances of the natural world that, at the same time, contained the divine mind. It was therefore radically different from Coleridge’s transcendentalist understanding of ‘the one-life’. Cicero’s particular influence, however, is not made explicit, and I suggest that this was due both to the fact that Wordsworth was intent on keeping his art well hidden, and because his great admiration for Cicero was coupled with a desire to secretly identify with the ethos of his ideal statesman. Like Chandler, who needed to justify Wordsworth’s early allegiance to Burke, I also find myself having to

41 One might contrast Burke’s uncomplimentary comments about the common people in his *Letters on a Regicide Peace* (Oct 1796), with Wordsworth’s remarks to Charles James Fox in his letter of 1801 (EY 315). It is hard to imagine that Wordsworth would have sent a letter to Burke with a copy of *Lyrical Ballads* had Burke still been alive in 1800.

42 Despite my disagreement with Chandler - that he would probably see as oversimplifying his case - my argument here owes a significant debt to him for opening up new avenues of interpretation and contributing to a better understanding of the ‘historical’ Wordsworth. Chandler’s final chapter, ‘The role of Coleridge’ comments on the problem of Coleridge’s misrepresentation of Wordsworth.
conclude ‘that Wordsworth’s purposes were somehow concealed’, in order ‘to explain why they have been so confusing to so many readers’ (Wordsworth’s Second Nature xix).

In a discussion of Wordsworth’s confusing representations of ‘nature’, Chandler identifies difficulties that Wordsworth posed for his reader by the acts of ‘concealment’ and ‘mystification’ that Chandler distinguishes as characterising his work. His comments might be seen to echo McGann’s concerns about Wordsworth’s supposed ‘evasions’, ‘occlusions’, ‘erasures’, ‘elisions’ and ‘displacements’. But they also repeat concerns voiced earlier by Paul Sheats in The Making Of Wordsworth’s Poetry – who was in turn echoing A.C Bradley. Sheats had also prefaced his study of Wordsworth with a discussion of the difficulties faced by Wordsworth’s interpreters:

Wordsworth’s art poses problems of interpretation that are massive and perhaps intrinsically insoluble. [His masterpieces] have exhibited a characteristic power to generate and to expose the limitations of assumptions brought to them by the critic, whether these concern his philosophy or his art. His paradoxes, as A.C. Bradley wrote nearly seventy year ago, ‘still remain paradoxes’ (xi).\(^43\)

The challenges thrown up by Wordsworth’s poems are dramatically amplified by Sheats’ rhetoric, and in discussing his own study, Sheats stresses that he doesn’t presume ‘to resolve these paradoxes systematically’, but he believes that ‘our best hope of comprehending them – of affirming their presence and value without explaining them out of existence – lies in an understanding of their origins, in poems that render them comparatively amenable to discussion’ (xii).

I, also, do not presume ‘to resolve these paradoxes systematically’, but I do suggest another means of comprehending them – by tracing Wordsworth’s deliberate use of such antinomies back to a specific source in which the ability to think in terms of paradoxes and to be able to argue both sides of a question was considered a virtue, rather than evidence of illogical thinking, or mere sophistry. That source, Cicero’s philosophical works, provided Wordsworth with a set of beliefs that might be described as ‘paradoxical’ and as generating ‘precise and lasting critical antinomies’. Cicero drew extensively on Aristotelian methods of argumentation, which sought to discuss both sides of a question in a discourse (disputatio in utramque partem) and he framed his arguments according to a rhetorical dialectic rather than a logical one. He also followed the arguments of the early Stoics whose descriptions of reality were often framed as paradoxes.

Stoic philosophers often arrived at paradoxical conclusions, after having based their arguments on ‘logical’ reasoning. Cicero’s earliest philosophical study, the Paradoxa Stoicorum, ‘On the Paradoxes of The Stoics’, had attempted to represent their views using the rhetorical form of argument that he had developed from his reading in Aristotle. By entering into a dialogue on the matter, as Plato had done in his philosophical works (and as Aristotle had also done in his lost works), Cicero believed it was possible to come to a better understanding of the issues through the use of a dialectical argument that was also ‘rhetorical’.\(^44\) Furthermore, as an Academic Sceptic who saw virtue in expressing uncertainty, he was critical of those who believed that they were capable of making

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\(^44\) As Aristotle had defined it: ‘Rhetoric is the counterpart antistrophos to dialectic’ (Rhetoric 1354a).
absolute truth claims. I argue that Wordsworth followed Cicero’s example in making a virtue out of uncertainty, discovering that the truth of many matters relating to human issues was often relative, and that the conclusions of many such enquiries ended in a paradox. Wordsworth learnt from his reading in Cicero’s works that the ‘moral questions’ of the human world are rarely amenable to simple logical solutions, and in this he was contradicting the whole thrust of Coleridge’s compulsive need to find ‘the truth’ in philosophical certainty.\(^\text{45}\)

Wordsworth’s understanding of philosophy was Classical and Aristotelian. Like Socrates, Aristotle thought that the first step to acquiring philosophical wisdom was the realisation that our received wisdom is flawed, that there are puzzles and problems implicit in what we take to be most familiar and obvious. Philosophy begins with this puzzlement, and is our natural response to this discovery of our ignorance for, as Socrates asserted and Aristotle agreed, we all have a natural desire for knowledge. But the source of the puzzlement is just the discovery that we hold views that are inconsistent, and a dialectical argument is the tool that reveals these inconsistencies to us. Thus the Aristotelian practice of ‘working through the puzzles’, using a dialectical form of enquiry, leads to an exploration of received opinions about a subject, something that is a direct descendent of the Socratic method. The early Stoics were dedicated to the Socratic tradition, and Cicero admired them for their philosophical rigour, but he also admired Aristotle’s concern to work through the puzzles using a rhetorical dialectic, in a dialogue form, in which men spoke to men, and discovered resolutions to problems that were practical. Such dialectic made no claims to attempt to define ‘the absolute truth’ of a matter, as might be pursued in logical demonstrations.\(^\text{46}\)

I therefore re-frame the ‘problematic’ aspects of Wordsworth’s work as something that twentieth-century critics have produced in their attempts at interpreting Wordsworth according to their modern and ‘romantic’ perspective on literature and history, and a later understanding of ‘dialectic’ that they inherited from their nineteenth-century predecessors.\(^\text{47}\) The sense of confusion that later interpreters ‘find’ in Wordsworth’s works is, I argue, due to changes in thinking that took place during the nineteenth century as the classical tradition was replaced by more romantic interpretations of ‘Man, Nature and Human Life’ that no longer recognised the efficacy of the rhetorical forms of argument that Cicero pursued and Wordsworth also utilised. Most significantly, twentieth century critics were largely unable to understand the workings of Wordsworth’s mind because the romantic paradigm that defined their work had replaced the classical, Aristotelian, form of rhetorical dialectic and ethical argumentation that Wordsworth used. They therefore failed to appreciate that Wordsworth’s ‘logic’ was based on ‘probable’ situations rather than clearly defined ‘first’ principles. The positivist spirit of the nineteenth century was even more antagonistic to rhetorical forms of argumentation – which it rejected in the name of science – than was the spirit of those who founded The Royal Society in the mid-seventeenth century. The latter group recognised category distinctions

\(^{45}\) Wordsworth’s obsession with attempting to understand the motives of a character like Rivers in *The Borderers* exemplifies his concern, at the time, with exploring the relativity of ethical judgements.

\(^{46}\) I have drawn on Robin Smith’s commentary in her Introduction to Aristotle’s *Topics* here (xviii).

\(^{47}\) This is especially the case with Geoffrey Hartman’s *Wordsworth’s Poetry 1787-1814*, in which he stresses his use of a dialectical method.
when ruling out the use of rhetoric in ‘scientific’ discussion; they acknowledged and feared its (dangerous) power. Nineteenth century thinkers dismissed rhetorical argumentation altogether while approving of poetic language, when used in its ‘proper’ place. The ethical aspect of poetic art was replaced by a delight in aesthetic form, something that would lead, in time, to the arguments of the ‘new criticism’.

Wordsworth has been misrepresented by traditional criticism because the critical tradition developed by Coleridge was unsympathetic to the ‘rhetorical’ forms of reasoning based on Aristotelian forms of argument from probability. Coleridge’s approach to reasoning, influenced by Kant’s ‘critical’ philosophy, was based on a method that was intended to replace the classical forms of ethical argumentation that Wordsworth continued to use, and which was not based on the logical premises that Coleridge hoped to establish. Coleridge was in the vanguard of a new ‘modern’ approach to philosophy, while Wordsworth continued to side with the ancients. The rise of ‘Romanticism’ – and the complete decline of classical rhetoric – over the course of the nineteenth-century, gradually displaced the classical paradigm that had defined the concepts expressed by Wordsworth’s late eighteenth-century mind. German academic thinking influenced by Kant led, in turn, to Hegelian forms of dialectic rather than Aristotelian ones. Romantic attitudes of mind led to the privileging of Platonic idealism in classical studies, overturning the Aristotelian values that had defined the classical humanism of the eighteenth century. Stoic philosophy, which had continued to play a significant part in eighteenth-century thinking, was perceived as secondary and derivative. As those German ideals, which had been introduced into Britain by such romantically-minded intellectuals as Coleridge, Hazlitt, De Quincey, Wilson and Crabb Robinson were taken up by the following generation, the values that had informed Wordsworth’s eighteenth-century classical humanist mind were gradually eclipsed. Most significantly the form of rhetorical or ethical argumentation favoured by Aristotle for philosophical debate, a rhetorical dialectic, was gradually replaced by more ‘scientific’, positivist, approaches, and the use of applied logic.48

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Wordsworth’s particular method of ‘doing’ philosophy by ‘inventing’ arguments that led to a detailed discussion of issues was no longer recognised as a valid form of enquiry. The discipline of Philosophy had also abandoned dialogical methods in favour of the kind of logical analysis originally proposed by Gottlob Frege, and later applied by Bertrand Russell in Britain, and then by the Logical Positivists in Vienna. Ludwig Wittgenstein is a key figure in this process of changing paradigms, managing to pursue a career that was equally influential in, firstly, defining the importance of logic, and then declaring its inadequacy as he then focussed on the role of language. As a philosopher, his life demonstrated the Aristotelian

48 Aristotle defines ‘ethical reasoning’ about ‘things that are variable and change with circumstances’ in his *Nichomachean Ethics* 1094b, as he introduces the scope of his study of ethics, which he also called a study of ‘political science’. This approach differs from that of ‘scientific reasoning’ or ‘demonstration’, which is based on premises known to be true. Coleridge set himself up as a philosopher who argued from ‘first principles’ that he claimed to be ‘proven’. Wordsworth argued from a Socratic/Aristotelian position based on generally accepted opinions (doxa) ‘held by the majority of the wise’ *Topica* 100b 22-24. See Douglas Walton, *Ethical Argumentation.*
ideal of effectively arguing both sides of the question, and he was to prove influential in restoring the fortunes of rhetoric as he helped initiate the study of the philosophy of language.49

At the time that Wordsworth’s ‘rhetorical’ manner of thinking was no longer being used, or understood, Coleridge’s approach was being developed by I. A. Richards in his *Practical Criticism*. This Coleridgean bias has been taken for granted in most twentieth-century approaches to literature and, as a result, Wordsworth’s differing form of thinking was judged as old-fashioned, illogical and confused. It was not until the late 1950s that the form of argumentation Wordsworth utilised in his own theorising was again recognised and acknowledged to be a valid method of practical reasoning; though not in literary studies. Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca re-discovered the significance of Aristotle’s rhetorical dialectic as they were searching for ‘a logic of value judgements’ in their research into forms of argumentation. Their studies engaged them in a complex study of legal arguments, and the forms of logic or dialectic appropriate to them, and led to their rediscovery of Aristotle’s method of ethical argumentation. In their findings, published in *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, they concluded that Aristotle’s method was actually the most sophisticated form of argument for the discussion of human issues, and was in fact the only really valid method of practical argumentation.

In *The New Rhetoric* Perelman argued that ‘philosophical’ arguments that follow the rules of formal logic, and which address a ‘universal audience’ cannot actually address the realities of living human situations. They therefore remain metaphysical speculations with no actual relevance to practical reality. Perelman’s mid-twentieth century enquiry into the nature of value judgements can be seen to replicate Wordsworth’s earlier search for ‘political justice’ and answers to his ‘moral questions’ in 1795. His enquiry, like theirs, led him to Aristotle and to a form of argument that takes place within the context of actual human experience and addresses the affairs of ‘the human heart’ that Wordsworth made so central to his poetics. Perelman’s work was foundational to modern studies of applied rhetoric, and the significance of his approach is described in a series of essays he published in *The New Rhetoric and the Humanities: Essays in Rhetoric and its Applications* (1979). The introductory essay ‘The New Rhetoric: A Theory of Practical Reasoning’ describes ‘The loss of a Humanist Tradition’, and traces the gradual demise of the use of the classical forms of argument established by Cicero and Quintilian, that were based on Aristotelian method.50 In contrast to Aristotle’s method, which recognised the relativity of all judgements made about human topics, Coleridge was committed to a ‘critical philosophy’ that aimed to arrive at absolute judgements that

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50 Other essays in the collection are also important to an understanding of distinctions that Wordsworth would have appreciated, but which many contemporary readers may be unaware of. See also Baumlin, J. S. & Baumlin, T. F. *Ethos: New Essays in Rhetorical and Critical Theory*. 43
might apply in all cases, as he addressed his arguments to a ‘universal audience’. Wordsworth addressed his audience in a different manner, appealing to their imaginations, through the use of a particular ‘poetic’ form of address that utilised rhetorical means of persuasion, and was intended to awaken an imaginative response in the mind of his reader.

In this thesis I argue that the canonical perception of the Romantic Wordsworth, which is indebted to Coleridge for his understanding of ‘imagination’, perpetuates a misreading of Wordsworth that makes nonsense of his theoretical claims (as Coleridge intended), and denies him the recognition he deserves for his poetic art. His fame, it should be remembered, was not won for him by what is today considered his greatest poem, *The Prelude*. His actual poetic reputation (as a historical figure) was only gained after a long and protracted battle with critics who dismissed his poetry and his theory – and those critics included Coleridge. It is a quite remarkable fact, often overlooked, that Wordsworth only came to be appreciated as a significant poet over a quarter of a century after publishing *Lyrical Ballads*. By 1861 his fame was such that Palgrave named him the representative poet of his age – that age being the first fifty years of the nineteenth century. Dividing the poems in his *Golden Treasury* into four historical periods he named ‘the Poets who more or less give each portion its distinctive character, they might be called the Books of Shakespeare, Milton, Gray and Wordsworth’.

But Wordsworth had only achieved that recognition, by sticking firmly to poetic principles that were not popular, and which were even seen to have damaged his reputation. When *Poems in Two Volumes* failed to sell in 1807, he refused to be intimidated by the critics and did not change his belief that his poems would one day succeed. His remarks, in his letter to Lady Beaumont in May 1807 in which he defends his theory, have been read by many critics as over-defensive, and suggestive of his ‘egotism’ (*MY* 145-151). I read them as evidence that he believed his theory to be based on firm ‘moral’ foundations and grounded in a genuine appreciation of human nature. I argue that his belief that he would ultimately succeed was based on a complex ethical ideal, founded on a practical understanding of human nature, and a pragmatic poetic theory that aimed to change the minds of his readers through the use of a carefully constructed and persuasive poetic language. The evidence shows that Wordsworth succeeded, against the odds, in bringing about a ‘revolution’ in poetry, but it is a misnomer to describe it as a ‘Romantic’ one since it relied, above all, on art or technique for its success. In this study I aim to define the nature of that success by showing how the influence of Cicero and Quintilian played a major role in the formation of Wordsworth’s theoretical beliefs and his particular, classical understanding of ‘imagination’.

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54 See Wordsworth’s comments on ‘human nature’ in his letter to John Wilson in June 1802 (*EY* 35).
Chapter 2

Surprised by Joy

Under every poetry, it has been said, there lies a philosophy. Rather, it may almost be said, every poetry is a philosophy. The poet and the philosopher live in the same world and are interested in the same truths. What is the nature of man and the world in which he lives, and what, in consequence, should be his conduct?1

I. Arnold’s Wordsworth

Modern readers may be surprised that Wordsworth was respected as much as a philosopher as a poet by John Keble in his 1844 Dedication, since twentieth-century criticism has largely failed to fully appreciate this aspect of Wordsworth’s ethos, in the wake of Coleridge’s appraisal of his character in Biographia Literaria. The damning statements that he made about the claims that Wordsworth had argued for in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads implied that Wordsworth was a confused thinker, and that his theory was based on misguided assumptions that displayed a lack of philosophical rigour. But equally damaging to Wordsworth’s subsequent reputation were the influential pronouncements made, later, by Matthew Arnold, in which he had famously declared Wordsworth’s philosophy an ‘illusion’, and argued for recognition of the virtues of a simpler Wordsworth.2

In his Preface Arnold made definitive statements about the ‘extraordinary power’ Wordsworth exercised over the minds of his readers, as he described the Romantic nature of Wordsworth’s genius, and denied him any status as a philosopher, or even as an accomplished artist. The Preface was originally written to rebut comments made in an essay by Leslie Stephen that had stressed the need to understand Wordsworth’s philosophy.3 Arnold notes Stephen’s belief: ‘that Wordsworth’s poetry is precious because his philosophy is sound; that his “ethical system is as distinctive and capable of exposition as Bishop Butler’s”; that his poetry is informed by ideas which “fall spontaneously into a scientific system of thought”’.4 Arnold wished to dismiss this focus on philosophy as something irrelevant to the appreciation of Wordsworth, as a poet. His distinction is a modern one, and fatal to any understanding of the mind of the poet who wrote the poetry which, according to Arnold, and other aesthetically minded critics of his day, should be read with less of a concern for what the poet intended, and more for the pure spirit represented in the words themselves.

Arnold’s actual point in criticising Stephen, and other ‘Wordsworthians’, centres on his belief that philosophy has no place in poetry. Like Coleridge, he argued for a formal distinction between two

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2 Arnold’s comments were made in the Preface to his Poems of Wordsworth (1879). James Chandler revisited Arnold’s remarks in his Introduction to Wordsworth’s Second Nature, and I follow Chandler in recognising the important influence that Arnold had on later interpretations of Wordsworth’s art, as a specifically ‘Romantic’ activity.
3 Stephen’s remarks were originally made in an article in the Cornhill Magazine in 1876.
different forms of discourse, and referred to tedious passages from *The Excursion* to underline his point. Arnold was not interested in poetry as philosophical dialogue; when readers turn to poetry they do not want to hear philosophy, and the distinction is almost put in neo-classical terms – poetry should please, not instruct. Arnold considered the ‘philosophy’ in the ‘Intimations Ode’ too intrusive; the ideas expressed ‘have not the character of poetic truth of the best kind’ (89). Coleridge had earlier expressed similar concerns about the philosophy expressed in the ‘Ode’, and was also dismayed at *The Excursion* – its Ciceronian dialogue form fell far below the expectations he had held, in 1804, that Wordsworth would produce the ‘first and finest philosophical Poem’ (*CL* II 1034). 5 He believed Wordsworth to be capable of a far more romantic blending of philosophy and poetry. But Wordsworth was following Coleridge’s rhetorical concerns very closely in believing that his poetry might also ‘instruct’, as well as ‘move’ and ‘please’ his readers.

Having dismissed Wordsworth’s ‘philosophy’ in order to rescue his poetry, Arnold then proposed that the cause of his poetry’s greatness ‘is simple, and may be told quite simply.’

Wordworth’s poetry is great because of the extraordinary power with which Wordsworth feels the joy offered to us in nature, the joy offered to us in the simple primary affections and duties; and because of the extraordinary power with which, in case after case, he shows us this joy, and renders it so as to make us share it. (91)

The repetitive use of the word ‘joy’ in Arnold’s description can be seen to echo Coleridge’s use of the word in one of his most famous poems, ‘Dejection an Ode’, where it was used quite deliberately to portray a state of rapture. But when Wordsworth used the word ‘joy’ he also used it to refer to a less exultant meaning, according to a more carefully calibrated value system based on his classical manners, and his ‘scientific system of thought’. He often used ‘joy’ to represent a more specific emotional state – a measured, ‘calm’, sense of controlled emotion – defined according to distinctions found in early Stoic philosophy, and reproduced by Cicero in Books 3 and 4 of the *Tusculan Disputations*. This distinction between a stronger, involuntary and ecstatic state of mind and one that is milder, measured and constant is adapted later by Quintilian, in Book VI of *De Institutione Oratoria* to create distinctions that are reflected in the *pathos-ethos* dichotomy discussed by Lindenberger. 6

Cicero’s translation of Stoic concepts into Latin provides two terms for ‘joy’ that discriminate two differing moods of the mind, *gaudium*, which defines a milder more inward and self-contained state of mind, and *laetitia*, which refers to a more vehement and less controlled exultant expression of

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5 See Coleridge’s later remarks in his *Table Talk* 31st July 1832. Coleridge had envisaged Wordsworth ‘should assume the station of a man in repose, whose mind was made up, and so prepared to deliver upon authority a system of philosophy’. After providing a synopsis of what Wordsworth might have covered, Coleridge concludes: ‘Something of this sort I suggested - and it was agreed on. It is what in substance I have been all my life doing in my system of philosophy’. *Table Talk recorded by Henry Nelson Coleridge (and John Taylor Coleridge)*. Ed Carl Woodring. Vol I pp. 307-8.

6 Bruce Graver’s essay on ‘Romanticism’, cited above, includes a discussion of Wordworth’s understanding and use of the term ‘joy’, attributing it to his reading of books 3 and 4 of Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations*. See also Adam Potkay’s broader study of the concept: *The Story of Joy: From the Bible to Late Romanticism*. 46
feeling. Both terms represent states of ‘joy’ or ‘gladness’, but one is considered a ‘good’ (bonus), since under the control of the mind, the other is considered ‘evil’ (malus), since it is not under control and is considered ‘excessive’. Wordsworth followed these distinctions, based on Stoic evaluations of emotional states, with some precision in his very particular pursuit of ‘manners’ and morals during this period. It is not generally understood that Wordsworth had discovered the significance of these distinctions in the later 1790s and had applied them in his poetic art, which relied upon his ‘knowledge’ of the ‘elder writers’ and his application of their ‘ancient’ understanding of the workings of the human mind which then gave ‘power’ to his work. His later novel categorisation of his Poems in 1815 reflects the importance he gave to distinguishing particular moods of the mind, and although these have been seen as the rather pedantic distinction of his later mind, they were based on an understanding he had acquired before he wrote his Preface to Lyrical Ballads.

Arnold would not have appreciated this subtle difference, having declared Wordsworth’s philosophy ‘an illusion’. Nor would he have appreciated the nature of the dispute between Wordsworth and Coleridge in 1802 in which the original text of ‘Dejection’, Coleridge’s ‘Verse Letter to Sara’ which was composed as a response to Wordsworth’s first stanzas to his famous ‘Ode’, were responded to, in turn, by Wordsworth’s poem on the Leech Gatherer. Coleridge and Arnold conceived of ‘Joy’ as an inspired enthusiastic state of mind, one associated with a feeling of being possessed by a god. Arnold located the source of Wordsworth’s joy in ‘Nature’ – though his appreciation of ‘Nature’ differed from that of Wordsworth. Coleridge, on the other hand, would have had none of this Greek pantheist belief; his ‘Joy’ comes from ‘above’, from some transcendental divine source. I return to the topic of ‘Joy’ and discuss the nature of this dispute at the end of this chapter as part of my evidence that Wordsworth’s was a very classical imagination. Keble, whose 1844 lectures were written in Latin, would have appreciated that Wordsworth’s manner of thinking was coloured by his knowledge of Latin, and that he often made distinctions according to discriminations between meanings that are clear in Latin, but which often get lost in translation. Arnold, however, does not appear to have been as much of a Latinist as Keble, or Wordsworth. 8

Arnold’s claims about the ‘simple’ Wordsworth also see him acting simply; his best work is not always within his own command:

it is within no poet’s command; here is the part of the Muse, the inspiration, the God, the “not ourselves.” In Wordsworth’s case, the accident, for so it may almost be called, of inspiration is of peculiar importance. No poet, perhaps, is so evidently filled with a new and sacred energy when the inspiration is upon him; no poet, when it fails him, is left “weak as is a breaking wave.”…Wordsworth’s poetry, when he is at his best is inevitable, as inevitable as Nature herself. It might seem that Nature not only gave him the matter for his poem, but wrote his poem for him. He has no style’. (92)

7 The Casell’s New Latin Dictionary stresses that while gaudium, can be translated as joy, gladness or delight, it especially denotes ‘an inward feeling’, while laetitia denotes ‘external expression’ as in ‘unrestrained gladness’.

8 Wordsworth was a more severe Latinist than Coleridge. Part of his response to Coleridge’s criticism of his work in Biographia, was to pencil in several corrections to Coleridge’s Latin in his own copy, which is now in the Wordsworth Trust Library at the Jerwood Centre, Grasmere.
The influence that Arnold’s pronouncements had on those studying Wordsworth in the century that followed was to prove fatal to a proper understanding of Wordsworth’s particular ‘power’. The emphatic concluding sentence to the passage quoted above was especially damaging. I argue that Wordsworth’s ‘power’ was based explicitly on his ‘style’, not his inspiration, and that the rise of Romanticism saw the creation of a paradigm that was directly opposed to Wordsworth’s rhetorical art – an art that depended on matters of ‘style’ for its effectiveness. It was Wordsworth’s eloquence, not his inspiration, that gave his work its power or ‘energy’.

But by 1879, the influence of classical humanism on a progressive and Romantic mind like Arnold’s appears to have become so marginal that Wordsworth’s actual ‘power’, the *enargeia* created through a skilful use of language, in a poetics based on rhetorical strategies, had become invisible to Arnold. The very term he used, ‘power’ (allied also with the Greek term *energeia*) was stripped of its original, literal, classical, and concrete meaning to become a more abstract term, a metaphor for a process that was once descriptive of an actual activity of the human mind – and still understood as such by Wordsworth. That Arnold failed to understand Wordsworth’s actual art, was a tribute to Wordsworth’s ability to hide his art; but it also indicated the extent to which Romantic ideals had replaced those of the classical tradition, and Wordsworth’s eloquent art was no longer recognised as such. The language of Romantic poetry as subjective, ‘spontaneous’, lyric utterance, denies the need for rhetorical skill. In the ‘Romantic’ imagination the mind is freed from the work of poetry, freed from the technicalities of language use, freed from civic duties, free to wander wherever it fancied – ‘free as a bird’ even – to use Wordsworth’s ironic description in the opening lines of the revised *Prelude* of 1850.

Wordsworth’s later concerns with ‘style’ in the revisions made to *The Prelude* after 1805 were, of course, only superficial. But when Arnold wrote of Wordsworth that ‘He has no style’, he was not simply discussing finer points of poetic diction, but what he perceived to be Wordsworth’s lack of pre-meditated art. In asserting that Wordsworth was a great poet by virtue of his inspiration he would have also failed to notice Wordsworth’s ironic treatment of the character of the inspired poet in the opening lines of *The Prelude*, just as Meyer Abrams did in *Natural Supernaturalism* nearly a hundred years later. The ‘glad pre-amble’ is in fact too glad. The poet as a ‘prophet’ to whom ‘poetic numbers came / Spontaneously. (I 60-1) may be ‘happy’ and inspired, but he is actually too happy, he is overjoyed, (*effusa laetitia*), and this state of mind is vicious, rather than ‘a good’. He is incapable of stringing his inspirations together and producing a sustained poetic work. The Romantic ‘fragment poem’ is, of course, exemplary of this state of mind. But Wordsworth, who wants to write an epic,

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9 The two terms are closely linked and often confused. Quintilian uses *enargeia* to denote a particularly vivid and imaginative form of expression in *De Institutione Oratoria* VI, while *energeia* was used by Aristotle to mean the act of actualisation of a potency or habit. For a detailed discussion of a complex topic see Theresa M Kelley, ‘Fantastic Shapes: From Classical Rhetoric to Romantic Allegory’. See also, Jean H. Hagstrum’s treatment of ‘energetic’ language in *The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray*.

10 Owen Barfield explores the manner in which the meanings of words evolve over time from original concrete meanings to metaphorical ones, in his *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning*. This shift in consciousness also occurs with the shift from oral to literary cultures, as Walter Ong has explored in *Orality and Literacy* and his other studies on the topic. See also, Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato*. 

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cannot rely on inspiration for such a work. The overjoyed poet is definitely not capable of ‘building up a Work that should endure’ (Prelude XIII 288), and his ‘harp was soon defrauded’ (I 104-5).

When Wordsworth utilises one of the ‘Figures of Emotion’ recommended by Quintilian, to open his ‘glad preamble’ in The Prelude – liberatus sum respirari – he would have expected his educated reader to recognise what he was doing. An eighteenth century translation of this passage in Quintilian reads:

The figures, which are calculated for enlivening and giving strength to the passions, are founded chiefly on a sort of pretence; for we often pretend anger, joy, fear, admiration, grief, indignation, wishes and the like. Whence those sayings: “Now I find myself quite free and at ease; now I draw breath”.11

The ‘glad preamble’ sets out a representation of the character of the inspired poet, utilising suitable topoi to do so. That the representation is intended to portray the youthful Wordsworth is also the case. Wordsworth constructs this identity knowing that this earlier portrayal of himself is – to use modern terminology – the representation of a ‘false consciousness’. In the ‘glad preamble’ Wordsworth is celebrating his youthful folly, and in his youthful state of mind he had not yet realised that his reliance on enthusiasm, and his glorification of the belief that he was ‘a chosen son’, was a hindrance to the development of any substantial identity as ‘a Poet’. In order to become a ‘capable’ poet, a true ‘Prophet of Nature’, he must first surrender his enthusiastic role as ‘nature’s priest’, take off his ‘priestly robes’ and become a Man, ‘descending’ into matter and engaging with human life in ‘this world’. He must also recognise that heaven is to be found on earth, not in some utopian concept situated far beyond this earthly existence.

Wordsworth’s figuration of himself as a youthful enthusiast in the ‘glad preamble’ to The Prelude is not what it at first seems. The whole passage employs the ultimate figure of dissembling – that of Irony (which Quintilian discusses a few pages later), but the reader does not discover the extent to which this is the case until the whole poem has been read, and its argument understood.12 Coleridge failed to hear Wordsworth’s argument, and several leading critics have also failed to recognise Wordsworth’s ironic stance as they read The Prelude as a ‘Romantic’ narrative that celebrates poetic, or prophetic, election. Many of those critics’ opinions were influenced more by what Coleridge had to say about Wordsworth’s imagination, rather than listening to Wordsworth himself and discerning the rhetorical form of argumentation that operates throughout the poem. When Wordsworth speaks as a ‘Prophet of Nature’ in the final lines he announces that through his life experience he has acquired a capability, one that will enable him to ‘speak / A lasting inspiration, sanctified / By reason and by truth’ (XIII 442-444). His confidence in his capacity to act in such a manner in 1805 is founded on his belief that he has both the ‘power’ and the ‘knowledge’ that gives him authority to do so. The Prelude

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12 In commenting on the ‘figures of emotion’ he has listed, Quintilian comments that, ‘all sentiments of this sort when they proceed from real feelings of the mind, are not figurative in the sense we now speak of; yet are so undoubtedly when feigned, and the work art’. He is making a distinction that lies at the heart of Wordsworth’s theory of poetry in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads.
itself is offered to Coleridge as a concrete demonstration of his ability. In announcing that he had brought his ‘history’ to a close he declared:

we have reached
The time (which was our object from the first)
When we may, not presumptuously, I hope,
Suppose my powers so far confirmed, and such
My knowledge, as to make me capable
Of building up a work that should endure (XIII 304-9)

This assertion, although voiced with a careful use of the humility topos, makes a substantial claim. Wordsworth is declaring himself capable of actualising his potential as a poet. He feels that his ‘power’ and ‘knowledge’ have developed into an enduring ‘capacity’, a habitual activity of his mind (a *hexis*), something that has indeed become his ‘nature’. It is this capacity or ‘capability’ that enables him to speak ‘A lasting inspiration sanctified / By reason and by truth’, and it bears little relationship to Arnold’s, or Coleridge’s, understanding of Wordsworth’s ‘extraordinary power’ to make us feel through some ‘accident of inspiration’. Wordsworth’s ‘power’ needs to be seen in technical terms, as defined by Aristotle. It is a *dynamis*; specifically an *entatative habitus*, an established ‘power’; one that enables a ‘virtue’ to operate almost automatically. This is the authority that Wordsworth is ‘humbly’ claiming for himself in these lines. The same power was defined for ‘the Poet’, as described in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, whose utterances, as ‘the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings’ are virtuous, because they are the product of long and deep thinking – recollection in tranquillity. The ‘spontaneous’ feelings expressed are therefore established ‘habits’ of mind that have become ‘second nature’; they are representations of a specific ethos.13

*The Prelude* presents a critique of emotional states of mind, and the wilder, ‘sublime’ Imaginations of the inspired poet in his frenzy have to be tempered by the milder, ‘beautiful’, Fancies of the civilised human mind. Those possessed of (or by) a strong imagination tend to lay waste the groves that might otherwise shelter the dreaming poet in his fancies.14 But the dreaming poet must also become more than an ‘idle dreamer’; his work must address the topics of ‘Man, Nature and Human Life’, not ‘evoke’ those ‘historical’ realities. Somewhere between these two opposite, traditional, representations of poetic inspiration, Wordsworth hopes to define a new ‘happy mean’, one that integrates ‘sublime’ Imaginations and ‘beautiful’ Fancies in a new art of poetry. To call this new art exemplary of Romanticism requires some justification – something that Coleridge attempted

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13 I return to the theory of the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* in my concluding chapter. Coleridge, it should be noted, acknowledges this Aristotelian understanding of the growth of a genius - one that is not purely ‘natural’- when defining the nature of Shakespeare’s genius, in contrast to Milton’s, in Chapter XV of *Biographia*: ‘Shakespeare, no mere child of nature; no automaton of genius; no passive vehicle of inspiration possessed by the spirit, not possessing it; first studied patiently, meditated deeply, understood minutely, till knowledge become habitual and intuitive wedded itself to his habitual feelings, and at length gave birth to that stupendous power by which he stands alone’(*BL* 180). But he cannot allow that this is what Wordsworth claims for himself, in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, since it conflicts with his representation of Wordsworth’s imaginative genius.

14 As Ariosto’s and Spencer’s characters act in their frenzied imaginations, and as Wordsworth represents himself doing in ‘Nutting’, as the mood of his mind shifts dramatically in the poem.
to do in *Biographia Literaria* – but only by dismissing Wordsworth’s theory rather than engaging with it.\(^{15}\)

By claiming that Wordsworth’s theory was unsound, and indicative of his inability to think philosophically, Coleridge was enforcing a distinction that elevated his own position, as a genuine ‘critical’ philosopher, while also placing Wordsworth’s intellectual abilities in a bad light. According to Coleridge, Wordsworth was not a great poet because he was a thinker; but rather because he had ‘the gift of imagination in the highest and strictest sense of the word’ (*BL* XXII 271). Coleridge’s description of the domain of pure philosophy in Chapter XII of *Biographia* makes clear this distinction between his ‘transcendental’ philosophy, and the ‘mere reflection and re-presentation’ of ideas, and the ‘flights of lawless speculation’ that characterise the workings of less philosophical minds; Wordsworth’s included. Largely as a result of the influence of Coleridge’s treatment of Wordsworth in *Biographia*, which was compounded by Arnold’s later comments, critical studies of Wordsworth have attempted to trace particular philosophical influences on his poetry and theory, rather than appreciate Wordsworth, himself, as a philosopher. In tracing such influences they have, by and large, insisted that it was Coleridge who provided him with his ideas, and they tend to ‘track’ Coleridge\(^{16}\) and see him, primarily, as the source of Wordsworth’s ‘philosophy’. Where problems of interpretation of Wordsworth’s poetry and theory have occurred – and there are many such cruxes – these have most often been resolved by attending to Coleridge’s more ‘comprehensive’ understanding, and listening to his views on the matter.

But while many twentieth-century critical studies have followed Arnold in refusing Wordsworth the title of philosopher, the ‘sage of Rydal Mount’ was understood to be a ‘wise man’ by other contemporaries and was considered England’s most ‘philosophical’ poet for some time after his death. He was, as Keble had noted, an upholder of ‘high and sacred truth’, not a mere logician, sophist or sceptic. The philosophical Wordsworth revered by Keble in 1844 could well have been considered an Anglican, Tory, humanist, but his philosophical ideals were actually established in the mid-1790s.\(^{17}\) And when Coleridge first spent time with him at Racedown and Alfoxden, he had declared himself to be in awe of Wordsworth’s great intellect, respecting him as much as a philosopher, as a poet. At that time, in his more radical years, Wordsworth had refused Coleridge’s Christianity, identifying with classical republican *mores* and the ideals of the Roman moralists in his aspiration then, to champion the cause of ‘the poor and simple’.

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\(^{15}\) See Richard Gravil’s ‘Coleridge’s Wordsworth’, *The Wordsworth Circle* 15.2 (1984): 38-46, and Don Bialostosky’s ‘Coleridge’s Interpretation of Wordsworth’s Preface to Lyrical Ballads.’ *PMLA* 93.5 (1978): 912-24. Graver writes that it is ‘scandalous’ that *Biographia* ‘be recommended to students for its critical account of Wordsworth’s poetry’ while Bialostosky focuses on the fact that Coleridge ‘was out to refute rather than to clarify’.

\(^{16}\) Coleridge made a virtue of leaving such tracks: ‘In the preface of my Metaphys works I should say - once and all read Tetens, Kant, Fichte etc & then you will trace, or if you are on the hunt, track me (*CNB* II 2375).

\(^{17}\) Swinburne would later write that, ‘Royalist and conservative as he appeared, [Wordsworth] never really ceased, while his power of song was unimpaired, to be in the deepest and most literal sense a republican’. Quoted, without reference, by John Danby in *The Simple Wordsworth* p. 147.
II. Coleridge’s Early Wordsworth

At the time of his celebrated visit to Racedown Lodge in June 1797, Coleridge had written to Joseph Cottle, telling him that he thought Wordsworth ‘the greatest man [he had] ever known’. To reinforce the truth of the matter he had in fact informed Cottle that this was Thomas Poole’s assessment of Wordsworth’s character, and that he concurred with it.18 The same opinion was given in a letter to John Prior Estlin and was repeated a few days later to Robert Southey with added emphasis: ‘Wordsworth is a very great man – the only man, to whom at all times & in all modes of excellence I feel myself inferior’.19 He also told Estlin, in another letter written at Racedown, that Wordsworth was ‘a strict and almost severe critic’. A few months later, after Wordsworth had moved to Alfoxden and had spent some time with him, his opinion remains unchanged. In March 1798 he wrote to Cottle about ‘The Giant Wordsworth’ and of the ‘admiration due to his intellect’. In May he told Estlin, ‘I have now known him a year & some months, and my admiration, I might say, my awe at his intellectual powers has increased even to this hour’.20

The later letters to Cottle and Estlin are both of particular interest for also commenting on Wordsworth’s ‘manners’, and revealing something of Wordsworth’s philosophical and religious principles at this time – which Coleridge notes to differ strongly from his own. Over the previous months Coleridge had been preoccupied with the publication of a collection of poems and a moral dilemma over whether to commit to becoming a Unitarian minister in Shrewsbury, or to accept the financial support offered by the Wedgwoods that would allow him to pursue his philosophical and literary interests. Having finally decided to accept the Wedgwoods’ offer, he was then at leisure to spend time in discussion with Wordsworth over the spring of 1798, a period when Wordsworth was completing Ms B of The Ruined Cottage, having spent the autumn adapting The Borderers for the stage. Coleridge spent time in conversation with Wordsworth in the latter half of February and they obviously discussed the work he was just completing on The Ruined Cottage, which was finished in the first week in March. Coleridge was in awe of this work, which was begun at Racedown, and some of the more recent work, that relating to the character of the Pedlar, would have been composed during his absence from Nether Stowey.21

Coleridge mentions Wordsworth, and his new work, to Cottle in his letter of the 7th March where he relates the need to balance praise for Wordsworth’s intellect, with praise of his manners:

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18 Poole’s opinion was highly regarded by Coleridge. A man of impeccable character and of good standing in the Stowey community he was also something of a father figure for Coleridge. See Elizabeth Sandford, Thomas Poole and his Friends.
19 Coleridge liked to believe that his was the superior intellect in his earlier relationship with Southey; a view Southey contested - recognizing how much Coleridge had also needed him.
20 CCL 1324; 334; 326; 391; 410.
21 Coleridge would later state that he had been in almost daily contact with Wordsworth during the Alfoxden year. In The Music of Humanity, Jonathan Wordsworth asserted that he was a major influence on Wordsworth’s thinking at this time, and contributed greatly to the ideas represented in ‘The Ruined Cottage’. This opinion is echoed by James Butler, editor of the Cornell edition of The Ruined Cottage and The Pedlar. In the latter months of 1797, however, he was not ‘in almost daily contact’ with Wordsworth, and it was only when Wordsworth was in the final stages of completing ‘The Ruined Cottage’ (Ms B) that Coleridge became an almost daily visitor.
The Giant Wordsworth - God love him! - even when I speak in the terms of admiration due to his intellect, I fear lest those terms should keep out of sight the amiableness of his manners - he had written near 1200 lines of blank verse, superior, I hesitate not to aver, to anything in the language which any way resembles it. Poole (whom I feel so consolidated with myself that I seem to have no occasion to speak of him out of myself) thinks of it as likely to benefit mankind much more than anything, Wordsworth has yet written. (CL 1 391)

The letter to Estlin in May reiterates Coleridge’s concern to praise both Wordsworth’s intellect and his character:

I have now known him a year & some months, and my admiration, I might say, my awe at his intellectual powers has increased even to this hour - & (what is of more importance) he is a tried good man. - On one subject we are habitually silent - we found our data dissimilar, & never renewed the subject / It is his practice & almost his nature to convey all of the truth he knows without any attack on what he supposes falsehood, if that falsehood be interwoven with virtues or happiness - he loves & venerates Christ & Christianity - I wish, he did more - but it were wrong indeed, if an incoincidence with one of our wishes altered our respect & affection to a man, whom we are as it were instructed by our great master to say that not being against us he is for us. - His genius is most apparent in poetry - and rarely, except to me in tete a tete, breaks forth in conversational eloquence. (CL 1 410. my italics)

These few lines contain a thumbnail sketch of Wordsworth’s character, and important points made by Coleridge stand in need of amplification. That Wordsworth is a ‘tried good man’ suggests his commitment to being a ‘gentleman’ – a man whose pursuit of virtue and the ‘good life’ has established his good character as a well-mannered, and therefore ‘gentle’ man – in the original sense of the term. Further discussion in the letter about the relativity of his moral judgments can also be seen to define his ‘goodness’ in eudaemonist terms. His beliefs appear to be those of a classical humanist committed to the relative values of Aristotelian virtue-ethics, in which concepts of ‘truth’ are not fixed in relation to falsehood, but rely on relative positions of virtue, defined in the pursuit of ‘happiness’ itself, not according to any certain, fixed moral standard.

Significantly, Coleridge notes it is not only Wordsworth’s practice, but ‘almost his nature’ to convey ‘all of the truth he knows without any attack on what he supposes falsehood, if that falsehood be interwoven with virtues or happiness’. Wordsworth’s behavior is not only demonstrating his pursuit of eudaemonist principles of action – they have become almost second nature to him; they represent his ethos. His judgment of other people’s actions takes into account the ‘manners’ of the characters that perform them. If they are acting in the conscious pursuit of virtue, then they are, by definition, acting justly in the ‘pursuit of happiness’, eudemonia; the activity of the wise man.22 In her discussion of the concept, Martha Nussbaum suggests the word ‘flourishing’ gives a better

22 ‘The pursuit of happiness’ is, of course one of the values enshrined in the American Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution. But Benjamin Franklin was not declaring that Americans should dedicate themselves to an Epicurean pursuit of great pleasure. He would not have envisaged that his understanding of ‘the pursuit of happiness’ would have evolve into the concept widely understood in the United States today - something involving the accumulation of material wealth and the pleasures (luxuries) associated with monetary gain. Such an attitude was considered vicious, not virtuous by republican civic humanists.
understanding of the term. It describes a sense of moral goodness, a self-evident sense of moral rectitude based on acting according to the principle that the pursuit of virtue was the goal of the wise man and led to him being both ‘happy’ and ‘good’. The sense of joy associated with the attainment of this state of mind is the more conscious, reflective and virtuous state of mind; gaudium. Coleridge’s remarks in the May letter to Estlin suggest that Wordsworth’s eudaemonist philosophical principles were the subject of debate at this time, and that Coleridge was listening to Wordsworth’s arguments with attentiveness. Wordsworth’s values differed from the clear-cut, absolute, moral values that defined Coleridge’s Christian beliefs. Wordsworth is described as an open-minded enquirer, and although he does not declare himself a Christian, he is not against Christianity, and Coleridge is prepared to make allowances for his ‘semi-Atheism’ at this time.

The subject on which the two men decided to differ would have been connected with either political or religious differences and probably reflected this difference in ‘morals’. Wordsworth refused Coleridge’s form of Christianity, and defended his own sense of moral values and ‘virtue’ based on classical humanist manners. This placed responsibility for virtuous action on the shoulders of the individual, whose ‘morality’ depended on an individual act of will. Coleridge’s Augustinian Christianity argued that God, not man, was ultimately responsible for the salvation of souls, and Coleridge followed this theological argument, placing his faith in God, rather than relying on his own (weak) will. A clue as to the nature of the subject on which they were ‘habitually silent’ might be offered in the important letter to George Coleridge, also written in March, where Coleridge announced that he had abandoned his republican sympathies (CL I 394-398). He had also professed the importance of his Christian beliefs and that he believed ‘most steadfastly in original sin’. Wordsworth’s eudaemonist moral principles, which stressed the importance of conscious individual action, had no need of such a concept – and quite possibly this was the issue on which they found their ‘data dissimilar’.

The letter to George is famous for Coleridge’s representation of his apostasy as he announced having ‘snapped his squeaking baby-trumpet of Sedition’. He also declared that, were he to side with any party, it would be with the Aristocrats, since the Opposition and the Democrats both ‘wear the filthy garments of vice’. He admits his folly in the past but now wishes to be a ‘good man & a Christian’ (unlike Wordsworth), and not a ‘Whig, Reformist or Republican’. The letter continues by expressing his new concern to withdraw ‘almost totally from the consideration of immediate causes…to muse on fundamental and general causes – the ‘causae causarum’’. In elaborating on his new beliefs he also quotes an important passage from work associated with ‘The Ruined Cottage’, in which Wordsworth describes a mild form of Joy to be found in the pure love of Nature:

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24 In early correspondence with Wordsworth, Coleridge had asked if he was a Christian. Wordsworth had responded, according to his eudaemonist principles, by writing that: ‘when I am a good man, then I am a Christian’. *Letters Conversations, and Recollections of S.T. Coleridge* (London, 1836) I, 205.

25 Wordsworth’s Christianity was more influenced by the Cambrian theologian Pelagius’ doctrines which accepted some worship of the natural world and were declared heretical by Augustine. Pelagius was not a believer in ‘original sin’.
Not useless do I deem
These Shadowy sympathies with things that hold
An inarticulate Language: for the Man
Once taught to love such objects, as excite
No morbid passions, no disquietude,
No vengeance & no hatred, needs must feel
The Joy of that pure principle of Love
So deeply, that, unsatisfied with aught
Less pure & exquisite, he cannot chuse
But seek for objects of a kindred love
In fellow natures, & kindred Joy.
Accordingly, he by degrees perceives
His feelings of aversion softened down,
A holy tenderness pervades his frame!
His sanity of reason not impair’d
Say rather that his thoughts now flowing clear
From a clear fountain flowing, he looks round-
He seeks for Good & finds the Good he seeks,²⁶

Wordsworth  \((CL I 397-8)\)

These lines formed part of a possible ‘reconciling addendum’ to ‘The Ruined Cottage’ and I propose that the lines they are extracted from contain Wordsworth’s distillation of Stoic wisdom that he had discovered in his reading of Cicero’s philosophical works. They are intended to represent the Pedlar’s own Stoic philosophy.²⁷ The description of the growth of the Pedlar’s mind in ‘The Ruined Cottage’ is expressed using concepts that originate in early Stoic philosophy and his character is represented to the reader as that of a ‘natural’ Stoic sage. The reference to ‘Joy’ here is descriptive of the mild inward state of emotion characteristic of the ‘wise man’ who is ‘joyful’ because of his tranquil state of mind: ‘His feelings of aversion softened down / A holy tenderness pervades his frame. This ‘Joy of the pure principle of Love’ is something attained through the active pursuit of virtue, which is defined by the Stoics as ‘following the path of Nature’. It is a feeling that can be described using the term \textit{gaudium}, but here Wordsworth also appears to be suggesting the state of mind described by the term \textit{tranquillitas}.²⁸ Coleridge was obviously impressed by these lines and their philosophy, which Wordsworth does not announce as originating in Stoicism; nor do they claim any need for Christian faith.

The rest of Coleridge’s letter informs his brother of his new mode of discussing and judging matters, in which he endeavors to be more considerate of all aspects of a case, and to listen with care to other people’s opinions. Referring to his own habits of thinking, he stresses a new attitude of mind, based on decisions made after long and considered meditation, rather than jumping to conclusions by asserting a position made according to set values. Instead, he will decide for himself ‘the quantity & the nature of the Evil – I consider this as a most important rule for the regulation of the intellect & the

²⁶ I would suggest Wordsworth is using a subtle play on words here as he seeks and finds ‘the Good’, while Coleridge at this time is more concerned with seeking and finding ‘the God’.
²⁷ The extended passage is later used in Book IV of \textit{The Excursion}, ‘Despondency Corrected’.
²⁸ Both the Epicurean and the Stoic schools of philosophy sought the state of mind described as \textit{tranquillitas}, which signifies an absolute calmness. The Alfoxen and Christabel notebooks are full of fragments of poetry recording Wordsworth’s attempts at achieving, and then describing such a state of mind. This passage foreshadows the description of the poet in the Preface to \textit{Lyrical Ballads} as someone who recollects ‘in tranquility’.
affections – as the only means of preventing the passions from turning the Reason into an hired Advocate’ (398). I would suggest that this new attitude of mind was one he had developed from his discussion with Wordsworth. The concepts and the ideas can be seen to reflect Wordsworth’s open-minded, un-dogmatic approach to philosophy, indicative of his adoption of Cicero’s position, as an Academic Sceptic. This would appear to have been a novel concept for Coleridge who had a natural compulsion for needing to define truth in terms of absolute certainty. I compose the argument of this thesis according to such an assumption, and argue that in March 1798 Coleridge was in awe of Wordsworth’s intellect, rather than vice versa. Wordsworth had provided Coleridge with a new ‘philosophy’ of life, one that Coleridge would find hard to adhere to, and would not be able to maintain. Wordsworth, however, does remain constant in his stoic attitude of mind, which will be represented again in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads when he describes his own habits of meditation, and their importance to building up a stable and wise character.

Contrary to the influential readings of Wordsworth made by Jonathan Wordsworth in The Music of Humanity (1969), and echoed by Stephen Gill in William Wordsworth: A Life (1989), I see the Ms B text of ‘The Ruined Cottage’ as a production of Wordsworth’s own mind – which had been impressed more by the mind of Cicero than Coleridge. Jonathan Wordsworth had made a point of asserting that Coleridge had provided Wordsworth with the knowledge he needed to develop his new poetic voice in The Ruined Cottage and had, most especially, provided him with a ‘one-life’ philosophy. Much critical attention had been given to exploring Coleridge’s ideas at this time in order to define the particular shape of his ‘one-life’ philosophy – so as to then appreciate the influence that it had on Wordsworth. I argue here that it was Cicero’s representation of early Stoic philosophy that provided Wordsworth with a ‘one-life’ philosophy at this time; one that differed radically from Coleridge’s conception. Rather than following Jonathan Wordsworth’s and Gill’s assertions that Wordsworth owed an intellectual debt to Coleridge at this time, I accept Coleridge’s representation of his feelings of deference to Wordsworth’s intellect – as his letters attest – and I have no reason to doubt his sincerity in 1798. Before concluding this discussion of Coleridge’s remarks about Wordsworth in the earlier days of their relationship, I also want to make note, in passing, of Coleridge’s remarks about Wordsworth’s eloquence in his letter to Estlin. It is during this period that Wordsworth had declared to James Tobin that he was dedicating himself to the pursuit of ‘eloquence’ in his poetry, having just demonstrated it, with style, in The Ruined Cottage. In the letter to Estlin, Coleridge related that though this was the case in his poetry, Wordsworth rarely demonstrated his eloquence in conversation – except in animated debate, in private, with Coleridge himself. It would

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29 Coleridge’s comments in this letter need to be compared with his earlier attitude of mind as expressed to John Thelwall: ‘In conversation I am impassioned and oppose what I deem [error] with an eagerness, which is often mistaken for personal asperity – but I am ever so swallowed up in the thing, that I perfectly forget my opponent (CL I 260). It would seem that in conversation with Wordsworth he was unable to be so self-centered. Not only did he obviously choose to listen, he seems to have done so with attention.

30 I briefly touch on Jonathan Wordsworth’s and Gill’s representations of Wordsworth in Chapter 9.
seem that, for all the expectations that Coleridge would dominate any discussion between the two men, he seems to have found Wordsworth’s intellect worthy of an attentive ear.31

In 1797 Wordsworth, the well-mannered intellectual was as important to Coleridge as Wordsworth the eloquent poet, or dramatist. Coleridge does not actually use the term ‘philosopher’ at this time – he has yet to apply that term to himself – but the meaning can be inferred. When, in May 1799, he is faced with the fact that Wordsworth will not be returning to Nether Stowey after the two men’s excursion to Germany, Coleridge writes to Poole of the pain he feels as a consequence of knowing he will not be living near ‘the only one whom in all things I feel my Superior - & you will believe me when I say, that I have few feelings more pleasurable than to find myself in intellectual faculties an Inferior’ (CL I 491). Further praise of Wordsworth, following Coleridge’s return to England, tends to focus on his great poetic powers and on Coleridge’s own lack of them. As Coleridge leaves poetry to Wordsworth and turns to philosophy as his consolation, he still continues to praise Wordsworth’s intellect, as he follows him to the Lake District and assists him in producing the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. Differences between the two men emerge as Wordsworth exercises editorial control over the content of the second volume and Coleridge abandons poetry and turns his attentions to a more critical approach to philosophy.32 But even after noting the existence of the ‘radical Difference’ over poetic theory in July 1802, Coleridge continued to idealise Wordsworth’s intellect and to refer to his philosophic mind, which he hoped would eventually produce the ‘first & finest great philosophic Poem’ – *The Recluse*.

But a certain coolness was also developing in Coleridge’s attitude towards Wordsworth as he began to realise the extent to which his own contributions in discussion had failed to alter Wordsworth’s mind. After the two men had returned from Germany, Coleridge had found Wordsworth as committed as ever to his own particular philosophical position, and unable to appreciate the more sophisticated, idealist, approach to philosophy that Coleridge was learning from his studies in Germany, which had led to a focus on the writings of Plato and Kant.33 As Coleridge comes to distinguish himself as a ‘philosopher’ rather than a poet, his attitude towards Wordsworth’s philosophy turns from admiration to ambivalence and then to criticism, as he comes to recognise, more fully, the radical difference between his transcendental philosophy, and Wordsworth’s stoical empiricism. In 1803, however, Coleridge was still prepared to flatter Wordsworth, and writes to him that he had been in conversation with Sir George and Lady Beaumont who had been visiting

31 Speaking of Wordsworth in his later life, J.S. Mill maintained that he, ‘seemed the best talker I ever heard (& I have heard several first-rate ones)’ *The Earlier Letters of John Stuart Mill* 1812-1848, ed. F.E. Mineka, p 82.


33 After a period of ‘most intense study’ of philosophy, undertaken in order to write his philosophical letters to the Josiah Wedgwood in February 1801, Coleridge announced to Poole that he had overthrown the doctrine of Association, as taught by Hartley. He also announced plans to write a preliminary philosophical work exposing the reputations of Locke, Hobbes, and Hume as unmerited, based on an extensive study of philosophy that he had made, from Aristotle to Kant. This he had discussed with Wordsworth, ‘entirely to Wordsworth’s satisfaction’ (CL II 706-8).
Coleridge’s landlord at Greta Hall. They had been discussing a portrait of Wordsworth recently painted by William Hazlitt, and Coleridge relates that:

Sir G & his wife both say, that the Picture gives them an idea of you as a profound strong-minded Philosopher, not as a Poet - I answered (& I believe, truly - ) that so it must needs do, if it were a good Portrait - for that you were a great Poet by inspirations, & in the Moments of revelation, but that you were a thinking feeling Philosopher habitually - that your Poetry was your Philosophy under the action of strong winds of Feeling - a sea rolling high. (CL II. 957)34

Then, in January 1804, Coleridge paints what, at a first reading, appears to be his most flattering appreciation of Wordsworth ‘the Philosopher’. His description was written shortly after he had spent nearly a month convalescing in the Wordsworth household over the Christmas period of 1803 and the new year of 1804. In a letter to Richard Sharp, in which he relates with certain envy that Wordsworth’s is ‘the happiest Family I ever saw’,35 he names Thomas Wedgwood and Wordsworth as examples of ‘genuine Philosophers’. After a brief discussion of Wedgwood’s virtuous character, he then turns to that of Wordsworth:

Mr. 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, & which therefore I feel exclusively toward T. Wedgwood; but on the other hand, he is an object to be contemplated with greater complacency – because he both deserves to be, and is, a happy man – and a happy man, not from natural Temperament – for therein lies his main obstacle – not by enjoyment of the good things of this world – for even to this Day from the first Dawn of his Manhood he has purchased Independence and Leisure for great & good pursuits by austere frugality and daily Self-denial – nor yet by an accidental confluence of amiable and happy-making Friends and Relatives, for everyone near to his heart had been placed there by Choice and after Knowledge and Deliberation – but he is a happy man because he is a Philosopher – because he knows the intrinsic value of the Different objects of human Pursuit, and regulates his Wishes in Subordination to that Knowledge – because he feels, and with a practical faith, the Truth … that we can do but one thing well, & that therefore we must make a choice – he has made that choice from his early youth, has pursued it & is pursuing it – and certainly no small part of his happiness is owing to this Unity of Interest, & that Homogeneity of character which is the natural consequence of it – & which that excellent man, the Poet Sotheby, noticed to me as characteristic of Wordsworth. (CL II 1033-4)

This passage is a remarkable example of Coleridge’s conflicted feelings towards Wordsworth in 1804. Caught between feelings of admiration and envy at Wordsworth’s success in both his poetry and his domestic affections, he pens a subtle epidéictic that criticises Wordsworth while ostensibly praising him. Wordsworth is praised as a philosopher, but Coleridge also implies that his philosophical abilities are a matter of habit rather than genuine intellect. In emphasising that Wordsworth is a ‘happy man’ Coleridge is not suggesting that Wordsworth is always in good humour – earlier remarks in the letter about the ‘hypochondriacal Graft in his nature’ anyway, forestall such a reading. He is in fact referring to Wordsworth’s ethos – his disposition or character, and to the nature of his actual philosophical beliefs.

34 The painting was not flattering and was later destroyed.
35 Coleridge notes that this is the case, despite Wordsworth’s constitutional ‘occasional Fits of Hypochondriacal Uncomfortableness’.
Coleridge’s comments in the letter are enhanced by the rhetoric he uses to set out the grounds for Wordsworth’s ‘happiness’. To read the letter more closely is to appreciate that he contrasts Thomas Wedgwood’s struggle to be a philosopher with Wordsworth’s comparative ease. Wedgwood’s effort deserves much praise, while Wordsworth does not attract such admiration, for he is not seen to struggle. Wordsworth is not a ‘happy man’ ‘from natural Temperament’ (Coleridge infers that his natural character is an obstacle), nor because of ‘his enjoyment of the good things of this world’. He is not an Epicurean in his attitude; but he can be identified as something of a Stoic. Coleridge does not explicitly use these terms, but they could be inferred by an educated eighteenth-century reader: ‘from the first Dawn of his Manhood he has purchased Independence and Leisure for great & good pursuits by austere frugality and daily Self-denial’. After suggesting three possible causes for Wordsworth’s ‘happiness’, all of which are put aside, Coleridge arrives at the actual final cause in his list: ‘he is a happy man because he is a Philosopher – because he knows the intrinsic value of the Different objects of human Pursuit and regulates his Wishes in Subordination of that Knowledge’. It is important to note Coleridge’s specific recognition that Wordsworth has pursued this philosophy from ‘the first Dawn of his Manhood’. He suggests, therefore, that he has not been able to have much success in influencing Wordsworth’s mind during the period of their friendship. His own comments actually rebut the notion that he had furnished Wordsworth with a ‘one-life philosophy’. In this passage he explicitly identifies Wordsworth as a particular kind of philosopher, a ‘happy man’– a ‘beatus vir – committed to eudaemonist moral principles.

But Coleridge’s remarks also describe Wordsworth as an unsociable character. His happiness is not the result of sociable intercourse with ‘amiable and happy–making Friends and Relatives’; his social interactions are the result of careful, deliberate choice. Coleridge suggests that Wordsworth’s character is wholly based on his identity as a Philosopher, whose ‘practical faith’ is based on his carefully considered actions, carried out strictly according to his eudaemonist principles. Coleridge infers that Wordsworth’s friendship is calculated according to those principles and is not a genuine expression of feeling. That his faith is practical, infers that it is based on material ends, and that he lacks the faith in Christ and the Christian caritas that Coleridge believes necessary in order to be a truly ‘good man’ – a Christian. Wordsworth’s ‘virtue’, from Coleridge’s perspective, is in fact a vice. There is a sense of irony in Coleridge’s description, and a demonstration of the sense of envy that intrudes into Coleridge’s comments on Wordsworth after the 1802 ‘difference’. His praise of Wordsworth’s philosophy registers a complaint about Wordsworth’s character – which is actually too happy for Coleridge’s liking – and too moral.

Coleridge’s comments are coloured by his own feelings of self-pity, his own faith is religious rather than ‘practical’, and he knows that he cannot bind his own will down to ‘do but one thing well’, as Wordsworth can. He praises Wordsworth for his abilities, and hopes that he will achieve the success he deserves, but his envy of those abilities has poisoned his own good will towards Wordsworth. But, typically, having got his animus towards Wordsworth off his chest, he continues, in the next section of the letter, to propose that Wordsworth will succeed as a great philosophical poet. What follows is often quoted for its positive assessment of Wordsworth’s poetic abilities:
Wordsworth is a Poet, a most original Poet – he no more resembles Milton than Milton resembles Shakespere – no more resembles Shakespere than Shakespere resembles Milton – he is himself: and I dare affirm that he will hereafter be admitted as the first & greatest philosophical Poet – the only man who has effected a compleat and constant synthesis of Thought and Feeling and combined them with Poetic Forms, with the music of pleasurable passion and with Imagination or the modifying Power in the highest sense of the word in which I have ventured to oppose it to Fancy, or the aggregating power – in that sense in which it is a dim Analogue of Creation, not all that we can believe but all that we can conceive of creation. Wordsworth is a Poet, and I feel myself a better Poet, in knowing how to honour him, than in all my own poetic Compositions, all I have done or hope to do – and I prophesy immortality to his Recluse, as the first and finest philosophical Poem, if only it be (as it undoubtedly will be) a Faithful Transcript of his own most august & innocent life, of his habitual Feelings & Modes of seeing and hearing. (CL II 1034)

This next section of the letter follows on directly from Coleridge’s mention of ‘the excellent man’ William Sotheby’s earlier appreciation of Wordsworth’s ‘philosophical’ character, something that had concurred with his own analysis. Sotheby had provided his character sketch of Wordsworth in his first letter to Coleridge, written after he had visited the Lake District and met ‘the Lakers’ for the first time, in July 1802. Having recalled Sotheby’s comments, Coleridge’s letter turns – by association – to a re-capitulation of the distinction between Imagination and Fancy that he had first made to Sotheby in a letter of September 10th 1802. It would seem, therefore, that this particular topic, and the distinction, had been discussed again with Wordsworth during Coleridge’s recent convalescence at Dove cottage. Coleridge’s ‘Imagination’ is distinguished as a creative power of the mind, one that conceives rather than merely believes. As a modifying Power it produces something new, while Fancy merely mixes together, in aggregate, things that already exist and remain unchanged.

III. Wordsworth and Coleridge: Radical Difference.

Dulce est inter amicos rarissimā Dissensione condirir plurimas consensiones, saith St Augustine, who said more good things than any Saint or Sinner, that I ever read in Latin (CL I 812).

Coleridge famously sets out his distinction between ‘Imagination’ and ‘Fancy’ in Book I, Chapter IV of Biographia Literaria, as he prepared the grounds for his criticism of Wordsworth in the second Book. But the distinction originated as a result of a series of exchanges between the two men in 1802, in which their differences came to an identifiable crisis point for Coleridge, in July, when he voiced his opinion to Sotheby and Southey that there was ‘somewhere or other a radical Difference’ between his and Wordsworth’s ‘theoretical opinions respecting Poetry.’36 It was in attempting to define the basis of that difference that Coleridge then made his original distinction between

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‘Imagination’ and ‘Fancy’ in his September letter to Sotheby. Coleridge does not elaborate on the grounds for the ‘radical Difference’ in the two original letters. He makes general comment about differences relating to poetic language and metre to Sotheby, but is more specific about the nature of the problem in the letter to Southey, which is the better known of the two, with its references to ‘Wordsworth’s Preface’, which Coleridge described as:

half a child of my own Brain / & so arose out of Conversations, so frequent, that with few exceptions we could scarcely either of us perhaps positively say, which first started any particular Thought...yet I am far from going all lengths with Wordsworth. He has written lately a number of Poems (32 in all)...the greater number...very excellent Compositions but here and there a daring Humbleness of Language & Versification, and a strict adherence to matter of fact even to prolixity that startled me...I have thought & thought again & have not had my doubts solved by Wordsworth. On the contrary, I rather suspect that somewhere or other there is a radical Difference in our theoretical opinions respecting Poetry – this I shall endeavour to go to the Bottom of – and acting the arbitrator between the old School & the New School hope to lay down some plain & perspicuous, tho’ not superficial, Canons of Criticism respecting Poetry. (CL II 830)37

The letter continues with remarks about the recent additions that Wordsworth had made to the 1800 Preface; the new appendix is considered ‘valuable’, and Coleridge believes it will be to Southey’s liking, while the section:

on the Dignity & nature of the office & character of a Poet...is very grand, & of a sort of Verulamian Power & Majesty - but it is, in parts (and this is the fault, me judice, of all the latter half of that Preface) obscure beyond any necessity - & the extreme elaboration & almost constrainedness of the Diction contrasted (to my feelings) somewhat harshly with the general style of the Poems to which the Preface is an Introduction.

The criticisms are general and technical, and Coleridge is not clear in distinguishing what made these differences so ‘radical’. He certainly was not able to lay down his own ‘Canons of Criticism’ at the time – they were not produced until 1815. But in the September letter to Sotheby, Coleridge revealed the existence of a difference of opinion with Wordsworth over the role of Imagination in poetic production, setting out the distinction between ‘Imagination’ and ‘Fancy’ that later becomes central to the argument of Biographia Literaria. Many earlier critics, lacking a detailed knowledge of Coleridge’s correspondence, failed to discern that Coleridge had first made the distinction in 1802.

Sotheby was a new acquaintance, and Coleridge had taken a liking to him as a ‘brother poet’ whose friendship he hoped to cultivate at a time when his relationship with Wordsworth had cooled. He obviously felt the need to impress Sotheby and, within a week of his first letter, he wrote another one in which he included extracts of his ‘Verse letter to Sara’, (CL II 790-8) composed the previous

37 Wordsworth had his own views about the origins of the preface. In a letter to John Abram Heraud (23 Nov 1830), he wrote ‘The preface which I wrote long ago to my own poems I was persuaded to write by the urgent entreaties of a friend, and I heartily regret that I ever had anything to do with it: though I do not reckon the principles then advanced erroneous.’ Later, in his annotations to Baron Field’s Memoirs he repeated the same assertion: ‘I will mention that I never cared a straw about the theory - & the preface was written at the request of Mr Coleridge out of sheer good nature. I recollect the very spot, a deserted quarry in the vale off Grasmere where he pressed the thing upon me & but for that it would never have been thought of.’ Barron Field’s Memoirs of Wordsworth, ed. Geoffrey Little p. 62.
April, and the ur text for ‘Dejection An Ode’. The text sent to Sotheby is described as that of a poem written to Wordsworth during an earlier period of dejection, and Wordsworth’s name is inserted in place of Sara’s. Coleridge begins with an extract lamenting the loss of his earlier state of mind when ‘Joy’ would confront ‘Distress’, ‘Misfortune’ would be combated by ‘Fancy’, and ‘Hope’ grew round him ‘like a climbing vine’. But repeated experiences of ‘dejection’ over the previous months have driven out Joy, Fancy and Hope, leading him to exclaim:

But O! each Visitation
Suspends what Nature gave me at my birth,
My shaping spirit of Imagination! (CL II 815)

By addressing the poem to Wordsworth, Coleridge is also making a point about the role that ‘Imagination’ plays in Wordsworth’s life. The verse letter ‘to Sara’ was composed in response to Coleridge being read four stanzas of a poem Wordsworth had written in late March 1802, the stanzas used later to begin the ‘Ode. Intimations of Immortality’. Wordsworth then responded by writing his poem on the Leech Gatherer (the early version of ‘Resolution and Independence’) as the two men continued a dialogue that would conclude, for the time being, with the publication of ‘Dejection An Ode’ in the Morning Post on Wordsworth’s wedding day – which was also Coleridge’s wedding anniversary. The complex circumstances of that dialogue have been described in a number of studies and will not be rehearsed in detail here. Wordworth laments a feeling of a loss of vision in ‘The Rainbow’; Coleridge responds by declaring his own much greater feelings of dejection in his ‘Verse letter’, but he also announces that it is not nature (the external world) that bestows the feeling of ‘joy’ on Wordsworth, that Wordsworth believes he is losing. The world ‘out there’ is formless. It is the human mind, when filled with the glory of God that experiences feelings of ‘Joy’ and bestows a sense of beauty on the forms of nature. This was the argument Coleridge had stressed earlier in ‘Religious Musings’, as well as in ‘Effusion XXXV’.

In responding to Wordsworth’s stanzas, Coleridge relates his own far more miserable state; one in which he feels absolutely nothing. In his ‘heartless Mood’ of dejection he records how he is completely unaffected by the sights and sounds around him. He experiences ‘Grief without a Pang’ and a ‘void, dark & drear’. The ‘mild Delights’… tender sounds & gentle sights’ of ‘beautiful’ nature

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38 W. Heath’s Wordsworth and Coleridge: A Study of their Literary Relations 1801–1802 is the classic study. But a number of more recent works have built on Heath’s scholarship, including: Gene Ruoff, Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Making of the Major Lyrics; Paul Magnuson, Coleridge and Wordsworth: A Lyrical Dialogue; and Lucy Newlyn, Coleridge, Wordsworth and the Language of Allusion.

39 ‘Tis the sublime of man,
Our noontide Majesty, to know ourselves
Parts and proportions of one wond’rous whole:
This fraternises man, this constitutes
Our Charities and bearings. But ‘tis God
Diffus’d thro’ all, that doth make all one whole’ ll.135-40

40 Effusion XXXV is now better known, in its revised version in Sybilline Leaves (1817), as ‘The Eolian Harp’, in which Coleridge added the much quoted exclamation: ‘O! the one Life, within us and abroad’ that introduces a passage of four lines that concludes by referring to ‘Joyance every where’. (Coleridge’s Poetry and Prose 18) This passage was not in the original 1796 poem. Coleridge’s later revision revisits, and re-states, the earlier difference of opinion discussed here.
leave his heart untouched, as does the ‘sublime’ spectacle of the vast night sky and the starry heavens – ‘I see not feel how beautiful they are!’ But rather than see the cause of his dejection as his inability to respond to the phenomena of nature, he stresses that it is God’s vision present in the mind that bestows all value on the world. Coleridge is dejected because his mind is sick, not because nature has withdrawn some power that had previously provided him with a sense of elation. The physical world of appearances is not the place to look for any lifting of the spirits, it may seem to be that way, but our feelings are not dependent on the natural world. Having defined his own feelings of dejection in response to the commonplaces that Wordsworth uses in his stanzas, and which produce no feeling for him whatsoever, Coleridge then turns to address Wordsworth to disabuse him of his attachment to the world of outer form:

I may not hope from outwards Forms to win  
The Passion & the Life, whose Fountains are within

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

These lines and the argument they present for the creative soul are well known to students of British Romantic literature. Having asserted his claim that it is the soul, not Nature that gives life to things, Coleridge again addresses, and also praises Wordsworth as someone ‘pure of heart’ who has no need to ask ‘What this strong Music in the Soul may be’ because he has already experienced it. In addressing him in such a manner Coleridge co-opts Wordsworth to join him as a fellow believer in the self-creating power of the rapturous and joyful soul.

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, blameless Poet! JOY, that ne’er was given  
Save to the Pure, and in their purest Hour,  
Joy, William! is the Spirit & the Power  
That wedding Nature to us gives in Dow[er]  
A new Earth and new Heaven  
Undreamt of by the Sensual and the Proud!  
JOY is that sweet Voice, Joy that luminous cloud -  
We, we ourselves rejoice!  
And thence comes all that charms or ear or sight,  
All Melodies an Echo of that Voice,  
All colors a suffusion from that Light! (CL II 817)
The ‘beautiful and beauty-making Power’ is finally declared to be ‘JOY’, a word repeated over and over as a ‘hallelujah’ that brings the world to life. Coleridge’s ‘argument’ mixes Platonic philosophy and Hebrew theology to assert the truths of the spiritual man over those of the natural man. William Blake would express a similar argument in 1826 on reading Wordsworth’s 1815 Poems. 41

Coleridge entertains similar Neo-Platonic beliefs to those of Blake, and his argument counters the implied empiricism that seems to be represented in Wordsworth’s stanzas on the rainbow. The sentiments expressed in Wordsworth’s lines appear to be related to a Lockean epistemology as Wordsworth laments a loss of vision that he sees as coming to him, via the senses, from the world of nature. Coleridge’s position opposes Locke’s, and is aligned with the Platonic tradition, but it might also be seen to represent Kant’s belief that the mind must have a necessary a priori ability to produce the world and its representations of joy and sorrow, of sublimity and beauty. But Kant is not mentioned at this time, even though Coleridge had been carefully reading in his works, and Coleridge’s position, drawing as it has done on the experience of perpetual joy, implies a more religious belief, one that is reinforced in the following lines in which Wordsworth is described as a:

Calm stedfast spirit, guided from above,
O Wordsworth! friend of my devoutest choice,
Great son of Genius! full of light and love
Thus, thus dost thou rejoice.

In these lines Coleridge imposes on Wordsworth the belief that his actions are guided from above, that his ‘imagination’, his joyful experience of the world, is the manifestation of a divine power that transcends the human world, giving a sense of enthusiasm that is experienced as ‘JOY’ and literal enlightenment – as experienced by the Hebrew prophets, by mystics, and in the reports of the Hermetic and Neo-Platonic philosophers. 42 Such experience brings promise of ‘A new Earth and a new Heaven’. Plato’s Timaeus, which he had read the previous year, would have been another source for similar ideas. But Wordsworth’s own beliefs, at this time, refused such notions of divine guidance by some transcendent Deity. His response to these lines, as they appeared originally in the ‘Verse letter to Sara,’ was to write his ‘poem on the Leech Gatherer’, in which he explored both sides of the question and developed his narrative into a moral tale, something its published title, ‘Resolution and Independence’ makes clear.

41 Blake believed that Wordsworth’s philosophy of mind tied the mind to Nature and failed to recognise the Divinity in man. Wordsworth’s belief in the ‘Influence of Natural Objects in calling forth and strengthening the Imagination in Boyhood and Early youth’ caused Blake to note: ‘Natural Objects always did & now do weaken, deaden and obliterate Imagination in Me. Wordsworth must know that what he writes Valuable is Not to be found in Nature. Read Michael Angelo’s Sonnet, Vol 2, p 179’. Blake’s comments are to be found in his annotations to Wordsworth’s Poems of 1815 and The Excursion. See, Blake, Complete Writings Ed. Geoffrey Keynes, pp. 782-783. Keynes supplies the relevant lines from Michael Angelo:

  Heaven-born, the Soul a heaven-ward course must hold;
  Beyond the visible world She soars to seek,
  (For what delights the sense is false and weak)
  Ideal Form, the universal mould.

42 Celebration of such Joy was also topical among the German Romantic philosophers Coleridge had been studying in Germany. (Schiller’s ‘Ode to Joy’ was composed in 1785).
The opening stanzas describe the glory of the morning after a night of rain and wind. Birds rejoice and swollen rivers add their 'pleasant noise' to the symphony of sounds produced by nature. A ‘Hare is running races in her mirth’, and when the poet sees it as it ‘raced about with joy’, the image produces a joyful impression on his mind. He is ‘as happy as a boy’ and forgets the ‘ways of men so vain and melancholy’. But then ‘as sometimes chanceth’, such extreme feelings of joy can lead to an abrupt reversal and, ‘As high as we have mounted in delight / In our dejection do we sink as low’. The experience is not as debilitating or exaggerated as Coleridge’s dejection. Wordsworth observes his mind’s reversal, and can comment on it, acknowledging that he can still hear the bird, think of the hare and acknowledge himself still to be ‘happy as a Child of earth’. But he is simultaneously aware that the moods of his mind can change without warning if they are excessive, and that he must develop a more stable sense of self-consciousness in order not to be at the mercy of such uncontrolled emotions. He must learn to control his feelings.

The poem develops into a meditation on the dangers for young poets who believe that their lives might forever remain in ‘a summer mood’ dependent on a ‘genial faith, still rich in genial good’. To become useful members of society they need to develop their own resourcefulness – the genial poet cannot expect others to ‘Build for him, sow for him, and at his call / Love him who for himself will take no heed at all’. Chatterton is named as an example of a poet whose life ends in madness and death due to his excessive ‘pride’, and Burns’ exaltations of ‘glory’ and ‘joy’ can also be read as displays of excessive emotion that (along with the toil of ‘following his plough’) led to his early death. The gladness (laetitia) of youth can end in ‘despondency and madness if the young poet does not learn to control the moods of the mind. And then the poem introduces its extraordinary, exemplary ‘figure’ - that of the leech gatherer: ‘Good God!’ Wordsworth later exclaimed, ‘such a figure in such a place, a pious self-respecting, miserably infirm old man telling such a tale’ (EY 366).

After setting the scene, Wordsworth then describes how he is pulled out of the dejected mood of his own mind by his encounter with this most impressive figure of admonishment who, although a ‘mysterious’ character, exists solidly in ‘the physical world’. In comparing him with a ‘huge Stone’ Wordsworth represents him in a very concrete manner, before going on to describe the circumstances of his life and his struggle to gain ‘an honest maintenance’. Whether or not the meeting occurred by ‘peculiar grace’, Wordsworth is cheered by the example of this man, whose stoic fortitude is recognised as an inspiration that lifts Wordsworth’s mood of self-indulgent melancholy. The resolution of his mood takes place in an encounter with a fellow human being whose resolve in the face of the great challenges he has faced in his life, illustrates the power of the human spirit.

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43 We are fortunate in having Wordsworth’s own gloss on the poem available to us in the letter he wrote to Sara Hutchinson upbraiding her for her criticism of his description of the leech gatherer. In the letter he tells her: ‘I describe myself as being exalted to the highest pitch of delight by the joyousness and beauty of Nature and then depressed, even in the midst of these beautiful objects, to the lowest dejection or despair. A young poet in the midst of the happiness of nature is described as overwhelmed by the thought of the miserable reverses which have befallen the happiest of all men, viz Poets - I think of this till I am so deeply impressed by it , that I consider the manner in which I was rescued from my dejection and despair, almost as the interposition of Providence’ (EY 366 my italics ).
Wordsworth is saved from his depression by this example of human fortitude and not through the actions of some supernatural, transcendent power coming ‘from above’.

In concluding his letter to Sara on how the poem should be read, he tells her that, ‘it was of the utmost importance that you should have had pleasure from contemplating the fortitude, independence, persevering spirit, and the general moral dignity of the old man’s character.’ The same demand would also have been made of Coleridge. It is also worthy of note that, earlier in the letter, he had written ‘I can confidently affirm, that, though I believe God has given me a strong imagination, I cannot conceive a figure more impressive than that of an old man like this…’. Wordsworth’s affirmation of his belief that he had been given ‘a strong imagination’, and the fact that the character of the Leech gatherer was not a product of his imagination, but a ‘flesh and blood’ reality, stresses the importance that he placed, in his poetry, on a natural rather than supernatural imagination.44

Wordsworth’s was committed to experiencing a sense of ‘joy’ that was enduring rather than ecstatic, a measured, calm attitude of mind based on his conscious pursuit of classical humanist ideals. He was a ‘Happy Man’ by virtue of his philosophy of life, something that he pursued, ‘religiously’ at this time. But his values were incompatible with Coleridge’s religious faith, tied as it was to specific Christian ideals that transcended the human world. Although Coleridge had been appreciative of Wordsworth’s classical humanist ethos in 1798, and had acknowledged him, then, to be a ‘tried good man’, changes in their relationship over the intervening years had caused him to become envious of Wordsworth’s habitual good spirits, and he would still have been concerned that Wordsworth should place his faith in the Christian God rather than continuing to honour some vague pagan belief in ‘Nature’. While Coleridge was committed to Christian concepts of virtue that were absolute, Wordsworth’s pursuit of virtue allowed for a more relative and subjective appreciation of values, and Coleridge was probably also jealous of the latitude that Wordsworth’s ‘morality’ seemed to grant him. The undercurrent of envy in Coleridge’s attitude towards Wordsworth surfaces in the week after Wordsworth’s wedding day. Having published ‘Dejection: An Ode’ in *The Morning Post* on the day of the wedding as a tribute to Wordsworth (whose name is not used in the poem), he then published a brief epigram, ‘Spots in the Sun’ a vicious squib in which the name ‘Annette’ was mentioned, a week later.

Coleridge was also preoccupied with theological questions at the time he was writing to Sotheby in 1802. He discusses theology with Estlin in a letter in the following week, as well as relating to Southey, in another letter, ‘I am myself a little theological’.45 In early August, while the Wordsworths were in Calais, he sought to raise his own spirits by setting out on an extensive walking tour, during which he climbed Scafell, the highest mountain in England. Then, in September, in

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44 See also Dorothy’s comments to Sara that follow Wordsworth’s ‘lecture’, in which she tells her to ask herself whether she has ‘hit upon the real tendency and true moral’ of the poem, for her brother never writes ‘merely because a thing happened’(*EY* 367).
45 In 1802 Coleridge’s plans included writing accounts of the major theologians of the Reformation. In a notebook entry he mentions; ‘Luther and Lutheranism, Calvin and Calvinism (with Zwinglius) …Presbyterians & Baxterians in the time of Charles 1 and 2nd – George Fox – & Quakerism/ Socinians and Modern Unitarians’. (CN I 118) See also John Beer, ‘The Development of Coleridge’s Religious Thought’ in *Aids To Reflection*. (CCW 9 pp xlii-lxxviii).
another letter to Sotheby he follows a train of thought that begins with a criticism of the poet William Bowles and ends up defining the difference between ‘Imagination’ and ‘Fancy’ that describes something of the ‘radical Difference’ between his, and Wordsworth’s theoretical opinions. His criticism of Bowles begins with his disapproval of Bowles’ ‘perpetual trick of moralizing everything’:

– which is very well, occasionally – but never to see or describe any interesting appearance in nature, without connecting it by dim analogies with the moral world, proves faintness of Impression. Nature has her proper interest; & he will know what it is, who believes & feels, that every Thing has a Life of its own, & that we are all one Life. A Poet’s Heart & Intellect should be combined, intimately combined & unified, with the great appearances in Nature – & not merely held in solution & loose mixture with them, in the shape of formal Similes – there are moods of the mind in which they are natural – pleasing moods of the mind, & such as a poet will often have, & sometimes express; but they are not the highest, and most appropriate moods. They are ‘Sermoni proprioira’ which I once translated as –‘Properer for a Sermon’ (CL II 864)

Bowles has the sensibility of a poet but not the Passion, of a great poet (like Milton), and Coleridge (identifying himself with Milton), relates how he had ‘involuntarily poured forth a Hymn in the manner of the Psalms’ while on the top of Scafell, and that the experience had helped him to distinguish the efforts of the inspired Hebrew poet – whose mind becomes one with God – from those of the Greek poets. The latter only conceive of their gods inhabiting natural objects in a manner that reflects the action of a simile, while the Hebrew poet’s mind actually becomes one with the Deity, and speaks the voice of the God. Coleridge’s poetic reflections then turn to theological distinctions as he defines a difference in kind between Greek and Hebrew religious belief and this is, in turn, translated into an analogous distinction between Imagination and Fancy:

It must occur to every reader that the Greeks in their religious poems address always the Numina Loci, the Genii, the Dryads, the Naiads, &c &c – All natural objects were dead – mere hollow statues – but there was a Godkin or Godessling included in each – In the Hebrew Poetry you find nothing of this poor Stuff – as poor in genuine Imagination as mean in Intellect – At best it is but Fancy or the aggregating Faculty of the mind – not Imagination, or the modifying and co-adunating Faculty’. (CL II 865-6)

Coleridge relates to Sotheby how his study of ‘Hebrew & Christian Theology & the Theology of Plato’ has influenced his thinking in arriving at this understanding. He tells how, over the last winter he had read the Parmenides and the Timaeus with great care and, a little later, he describes Plato as ‘Milton’s darling’ as he discusses Milton’s ‘Platonising spirit’.

Although, by September 1802, Coleridge would have had a good knowledge of Kant’s philosophy, he makes no mention here of Kant’s understanding of Imagination as Einbildungskraft, and remains committed to pursuing a Platonic understanding of the term. He had been reading Kant’s works since he returned from Germany and Kant’s ‘critical’ approach to philosophy had displaced that

46 Coleridge employed this play on words in the publication of ‘Reflections on Entering into Active Life’, A Poem, which affects Not To Be POETRY, in the Monthly Magazine October 1796.
47 The ‘effusion’ that he claimed to have ‘spontaneously’ produced at this time in his complete absorption in the divinity was ‘Hymn Before Sun-Rise in the Vale of Chamouni’. The poem was later recognized to have been nothing of the sort, and a prime example of the kind of plagiarism that Norman Fruman made the focus of his argument in Coleridge: The Damaged Archangel.
of Hartley by early 1801 (CL II 706). He would have been impressed by Kant’s famous description of the synthesising power of ‘the Imagination’ in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. ‘Synthesis’, according to Kant’s famous definition, is ‘the mere result of the power of imagination (*Einbildungskraft*), a blind but indispensable function of the soul, without which we should have no knowledge whatsoever, but of which we are scarcely ever conscious’. Kant’s ‘plastic power’ works at some preconscious level and orders and classifies our experiences of the world according to rules that exist in an *a priori* realm, existing independently of the external world. According to Kant it is our minds that impose the categories of time and space on the physical world and makes sense of the manifold of experience. Kant had been concerned to argue against the sceptical conclusions that Locke and Hume’s empiricism appeared to lead to, and his revolutionary approach to philosophy had captured Coleridge’s imagination in early 1801. It can be assumed that he was quietly drawing on Kant in setting out his arguments against ‘Locke, Hobbes, & Hume’ in his ‘philosophical letters’ to Josiah Wedgwood in February.

It could be inferred that Kant’s understanding of imagination influenced Coleridge and formed the *philosophical* basis of his differences with Wordsworth. But Coleridge’s comments to Sotheby reflected theological concerns that expressed a differing understanding – that the mind was active in poetic creation, as if inspired by a divine spirit that might enthuse the poet with imaginative power to produce great poetry – as Milton was understood to be inspired, and as Arnold later suggested Wordsworth to have been. Coleridge held the belief that true poets ‘are born, not made’, and have an imaginative ability originating in some higher form of consciousness. Their success as poets depends upon their ability to attune their minds to that higher awareness and is not dependent on their art but on their native genius – their ability to participate in ‘the vision and faculty divine’. Kant’s philosophy, however, offered a new, secular explanation of the workings of this ‘divine’ ability. Instead of being something originating in God, it could be understood as a transcendental faculty of the mind itself. Such a ‘faculty’ is analogous to the act of creation performed by God – who brings all things into existence from some other transcendental realm of being, superior and prior to the human world of experience. And, as Kant realised but never asserted, once that power is understood to exist in the mind of man, it displaces the need for there to be a God – who was previously considered as the divine agent whose mind was necessary to the existence of the world. Coleridge, like Kant, refused to make that heretical deduction, though the later German Romantic philosophers were not so cautious and took the next step in asserting that God could dwell in the mind of man, an incorporation of the divine in the grey matter of the brain that was unacceptable to Christian theology. It was presumably because he could not accept the heretical implications of Kant’s reasoning that Coleridge returned to a detailed study of theology in 1802 as he sought answers to the dilemma posed by Kant. He was also

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48 Emmanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* trans N. Smith, p. 112
49 Meyer Abrams’ argument in *Natural Supernaturalism* pursued the implications of this belief, and he finds Wordsworth, despite his protestations to the contrary, following the German Romantic philosophers. E.D Hirsh’s study *Wordsworth and Schelling: A Typological Study of Romanticism*, also traces these similarities. But they can be better explained by appreciation Wordsworth’s, and Schelling’s, debt to classical philosophy as transmitted by Cicero to early European culture.
reading carefully in Plato, who also conceived of the poet, primarily, as an inspired visionary, most famously in the representation portrayed in his *Ion*.

But in 1815, when writing *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge does refer to Kant’s philosophy to add a more serious and sophisticated tone to his enquiry then, relating that:

The writings of the illustrious sage of Königsberg, the founder of Critical Philosophy, more than any other work at once invigorated and disciplined my understanding. The originality, the depth, and the compression of the thought; the novelty and subtlety, yet solidity and importance of the distinctions; the adamantine chains of logic; and I will venture to add (paradox as it will appear to those who have taken their notion of Immanuel Kant from reviewers and Frenchmen) the clearness and evidence of the *Critique of Pure Reason*; of the *Judgement*; of the *Metaphysical Elements of Natural Philosophy*, and of his *Religion Within the Bounds of Pure Reason*, took possession of me as with a giant’s hand. (*BL* IX 84)

At the time of writing *Biographia*, however, Coleridge was actually drawing extensively on Schelling’s work, which he copied, almost verbatim, as he tried to impress his readers with a philosophical ‘deduction of the Imagination’. But, as Thomas McFarland argued in *Wordsworth and the Pantheist Tradition*, Coleridge’s philosophical beliefs were driven by his religious concerns, and Plato was actually a more congenial influence than Kant. In writing about Coleridge’s understanding of Imagination, and the likelihood that he was influenced by Kant’s controlling idea of Imagination as *Einbildungskraft*, McFarland argued that the idea originated in Plato, and that Coleridge’s understanding was more Platonic that Kantian. McFarland writes that the representation of the creative power of the poet’s mind, ‘as an analogue of the divine creativity, is not the property of Kant, but is an idea of great persistence and great antiquity, [and] is specifically, a Platonism’ (34). 50 The ‘radical difference’ between Wordsworth and Coleridge is better understood as one reflecting the ancient divide between Platonic idealism and Aristotelian realism, though in Wordsworth’s case it was compounded by his adoption of a belief in Nature that was defined by the early Stoic philosophers, and therefore refused Coleridge’s transcendentalism.

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50 In *Coleridge and the Crisis of Reason*, Richard Berkeley presents a major challenge to MacFarland’s *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* claiming that his ‘very specific and idiosyncratic understanding of the issue’ had failed to appreciate ‘the full significance of the pantheism controversy for Coleridge’s poetry and thought’ (1).
Chapter 3

Nature

In reading Wordsworth it is always worth stopping to ask oneself, in any given passage, in what sense he is using the word nature. Prelude XI 31 illustrates this well. Even where he uses ‘nature’ as the equivalent of the external world, or our experience of it, it is his habit to colour that meaning with meanings derived from many of the other very vague uses of the word. ‘Nature’ stands often as an equivalent of the elementary principle of the un-intellectualised goodness in the world of both men and things: the antithesis of custom and formal reason. The different shades of meaning given to the word in the Revolutionary poets generally would furnish the theme of an interesting essay.

H.W. Garrod

I. On Nature

H.W. Garrod’s representation of Wordsworth will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, after I have presented my reading of Wordsworth’s understanding of ‘the word nature’ as used in the final part of The Prelude. James Chandler might be seen to have been responding to Garrod’s comments here when using the concept of ‘second nature’ as a focus for his study of Wordsworth. In setting out the grounds for his thesis in the Introduction to Wordsworth’s Second Nature, Chandler discussed the need to discriminate between three particular appreciations of ‘Nature’ that he found Wordsworth describing in his works. While I have benefitted greatly from following Chandler’s concern to define Wordsworth’s use of the term, I believe there is a simpler explanation of Wordsworth’s understanding of a word that Raymond Williams considered was ‘perhaps the most complex word in the language’. I acknowledge the utility of Chandler’s emphasis on recognising the significance of the concept of ‘second nature’, but I place more emphasis here on ‘Nature’ as represented in ‘Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey’ and revisited in the major odes published in Poems in Two Volumes in 1807, as well as in the argument presented to Coleridge in the 1805 Prelude. That argument concludes with Wordsworth inviting Coleridge to join him in order that the two of them, as ‘Prophets of Nature’ might ‘speak / A lasting inspiration, sanctified / By reason and by truth’ (XIII 442-4).

Chandler’s study set out to distinguish between Rousseauian ideas about ‘nature’ and Burkean concerns with ‘second nature’, as part of an attempt to resolve some of the ‘multiple incoherencies and contradictions’ to be found in Wordsworth’s poetry:

To interpret it well…we must comprehend the dialectic of ostensible and actual purposes at work in its production. We gain a sense of how elusive Wordsworth’s purposes are if we reflect for a moment on the various ways in which his major work can be read as the poetry of second nature. For instance, some of his remarks suggest that readers should regard the poetry itself as a second nature. Not only does he imply that it partakes of “the great Nature that exists in works / Of mighty poets” (Prel. 5:618-19). He also expresses the wish that it will “teach as Nature teaches” (5:231) that it might become “A power like one of Nature’s” (12:311-12). But the poetry attains this condition, he further suggests, only insofar as it can be

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1 Wordsworth pp 54-5.
2 Raymond Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society. 2nd ed. p. 219.
understood as “Proceeding from the depth of untaught things” (12:310) – that is, only insofar as it can be read as poetry of second nature in a different sense. This is the sense in which it is supposed to bear the stamp of its author’s disciplined character and to embody the purposes that reside in the habits of his mind. It becomes poetry of second nature, in other words, because its author refrains from urging his own purposes. It is uncalculated, a product of long experience, a kind of grace, or so it should seem.

I concur with this analysis, and also stress the sincerity of Wordsworth’s attempt to produce poetry that is a product of human nature, a representation of human experience, and is not simply – to invoke Arnold’s concept of the ‘simple’ Wordsworth – an ‘accident of inspiration’. Arnold saw Wordsworth’s hand being guided by ‘Nature’, a term he uses to describe a mind absorbed in some kind of unconscious reverie. But Wordsworth’s argument in the 1802 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* placed the onus on ‘the poet’, as ‘a man speaking to men’, to be both conscious and to speak the truth of the matter which – according to Wordsworth’s philosophical beliefs at the time – is also the truth of Nature. He cannot ‘simply’ use words to produce a truth that seems true. Wordsworth’s poet, as a skilled rhetorician, must also be a virtuous character, ‘a good man speaking well’; he cannot be a mere sophist.

Chandler’s discussion of nature continues:

Then, too, Wordsworth will often suggest that this mind and character are themselves what they are because of the environment in which they matured. We can call this environment “nature”, as he usually does, but we must not lose sight of the role it plays in human culture, a second nature, furnishing the poet with the moral power that sustains and sanctions his writing…. Culture, character, and poetic design – the precise relationship among these three domains of second nature is never clarified by Wordsworth. It tends to be (deliberately?) mystified, the locus of intention, authority, and meaning shifting among them according to both the demands of the rhetorical situation and the degree to which specific purposes must be concealed from his readers, perhaps even himself. The problems thus posed for the reader are vexing in the extreme. They are particularly troublesome in the early years of the major period. Views about which Wordsworth later becomes explicit must often remain implicit in 1798 or 1800, and they must sometimes be couched in terms that initially make them appear quite other than what they are. (Wordsworth’s Second Nature xviii-xix)

When Wordsworth is writing about nature, he incorporates all three of the meanings Chandler describes. But I suggest that all of these representations are ultimately subsumed under his ‘religious’ belief in ‘Nature’, something based on a faith ‘sanctified / By reason and by truth’ (*Prelude* XIII 444); a faith that believed that a life that ‘followed nature’ was also a life of virtue. This was, therefore, not a purely ‘mystical’ belief, but one defined according to principles that Wordsworth had discovered in the philosophy of the early Stoics, as recorded in the philosophical works of Cicero. Wordsworth, like Cicero, used the term to make reference to ‘God’, a divine power behind the universe, source of all things, creator, sustainer, and judge of all that occurred on earth, named Zeus by the Hellenes and Jehovah by the Hebrews. Cicero used the more abstract term Nature, following the Stoics. References to Providence or Fortune also referred to the workings of Nature. These terms are all abstractions denoting something actually indescribable, sublime, beyond the grasp of human thought, incapable of comprehension by the limited human mind.
My argument that Cicero, in particular, was a significant influence on the growth of Wordsworth’s mind is based on the fact that his thinking reproduces so many aspects of Cicero’s own philosophy of life as an Academic Sceptic, sympathetic to the Stoic’s rigorous pursuit of virtue. To ‘follow the path of Nature’ was to follow the path of truth and for Cicero this meant dismissing, overturning, eliminating, all aspects of superstition, and therefore all beliefs about the ‘supernatural’. The path of the virtuous philosopher led to the dismissal of all supernatural concepts, because the path of nature reveals the truth of things as they are. There is no concept of a supernatural realm beyond, or above, the world of Nature in Stoicism. The pursuit of philosophy, the path of nature, eliminates the supernatural. When the Christian recites the Lord’s Prayer and ask that things ‘on earth’ might be as they are ‘in heaven’ he or she is petitioning a supernatural deity. Wordsworth’s pursuit of philosophy in the late 1790s, as taught by Cicero, led to him to reject the dualism implicit in Christian theology. It was during the Alfoxden year that he also made the decision to focus on ‘natural’ rather than ‘supernatural’ topics leaving the realm of the supernatural to Coleridge in the poems of the Lyrical Ballads. Coleridge’s often discussed description of the division of labour in 1798 in Chapter XIV of Biographia Literaria needs to be seen in the context of Wordsworth’s philosophical principles at this time if his reasons for this division are to be fully understood. Wordsworth was again following distinctions to be found in Cicero – who had held the office of Augur as part of his civic duties and was obliged to take matters of ‘religion’ seriously. As a shrewd politician, he knew the benefits of the state controlling certain aspects of religious belief. Roman religion involved a great deal of superstition and a fear of the supernatural, and those in power took advantage of their control. In addition to addressing many of the questions of religion within his Roman context in De Natura Deorum, Cicero had also written De Divinatione.

The philosopher, who discovers the truths of Nature by virtue of the pursuit of reason, discovers what Lucretius and Virgil had hoped to achieve by being granted a vision by the (supernatural) gods. According to Cicero and the Stoics, the true philosopher is distinguished by his knowledge of the world of Nature and his rejection of the supernatural. This distinction between the truths revealed in the natural world and the questionable nature of supernatural appearances is something of a paradox to those who believe the supernatural to be the realm of true revelation. Typical of Stoic philosophy was an awareness that the actualities of human nature, the workings of the human mind and its relationship to the order of the cosmos, are often paradoxical. Most paradoxical, to formal logical approaches, and Platonic concerns with ideal forms, was the Stoic belief that the divinity was not a separate, transcendent, entity. For the Stoics, only bodies existed, the universe was composed only of matter, and this included their conception of ‘the divine’, which existed in Nature, both apart from, but also potentially part of, the human mind. Stoic concepts allowed for the belief, for instance, that two ‘bodies’, human and divine, can both be in the same place at once, a counter-intuitive concept for a rationalist to grasp, and paradoxical to a logician.

3 Lucretius in De Rerum Natura follows the Epicurean school of philosophy in which the gods were acknowledged to dwell in a remote realm beyond this earthly reality. Virgil, an admirer of Lucretius, also followed the Epicurean belief in supernatural gods and addresses himself to them, asking to be granted a vision in the famous ‘O fortunatos nimium’ passage at the end of Georgics II.
Rather than speculating about Wordsworth’s ‘deliberate’, or unconscious, activities of concealment, or becoming too concerned about the ‘multiple incoherencies and contradictions’ in his poetry, or ‘vexed in the extreme’ by his mystifications – it might be that the logic by which we expect Wordsworth to make sense of things, differed from his own form of ‘logic’. I propose instead that Wordsworth’s ‘logic’ was based on Stoic concepts of reason that could never be ‘purely’ rational, in the sense that Kant, for instance, wrote of ‘pure’ reasoning. Stoic concepts were tied to concrete phenomena, and all acts of comprehension were connected, first and foremost, to the world of matter, as an absolute principle. The Stoics did not base their philosophy on abstract concepts, but on reasoning about concrete particulars. Cicero’s particular representation of Stoic philosophy was also distinguished by his attempts to explain their ‘logical’ arguments, using a rhetorical dialectic to argue for their position; a form of argumentation that he had adopted and adapted from Aristotle.

In his discussion of ‘Nature’ in Keywords, Raymond Williams distinguishes three areas of meaning: ‘(i) the essential quality and character of something; (ii) the inherent force which directs either the world or human beings or both; (iii) the material world itself, taken as including or not including human beings'(219). As Chandler notes, Wordsworth utilises all these meanings, but I will be focussing in particular on meaning (ii) in my discussion of Nature in this chapter. In turning to a more classical appreciation of ‘Nature’ it is also necessary to acknowledge Aristotelian notions about nature as ‘the essential quality and character of something’ since they would also have informed Cicero’s manner of thinking and therefore Wordsworth’s. As was stated earlier, I read Wordsworth’s claims about his ‘capability’ as a poet at the end of The Prelude as representing his understanding of formal Aristotelian concepts about ‘nature’. In declaring himself a Poet now ‘capable / Of building up a work that should endure’ (XIII 277-78) he is asserting an ethos that is the natural ‘end’ to the process of growth that he has been describing within the narrative.

Rousseau’s philosophical concepts owe a great deal to Cicero’s representation of early Stoic philosophy. In his study of Rousseau’s debt to Stoic thought, Kennedy F. Roche discusses the concept of nature as it was understood by the Stoics and Aristotle in some detail: ‘Metaphysically considered nature is held to mean in the first place, birth or origin and, in the second, the essence of being, communicated to that being by generation’. In The Prelude Wordsworth reports that in his study of Imagination he has traced the origins of the ‘faculty’ back to ‘the very place of its birth / In its blind cavern’ (XIII 173-4), and the progress of his song concludes with the claim, humbly made, that his imagination has achieved its final end, the actualisation of its potential. Aristotle defines ‘nature’ as describing, ‘in the first place, an innate potentiality of development, and in the second, the actualisation of this potentiality’. It is ‘The principle of movement which the being finds itself impelled per se, and not per accidens to obey.’ ‘In other words’, Roche writes:

4 Kennedy F. Roche. Rousseau: Stoic and Romantic p. 3. Roche continues, ‘Thus St Thomas Aquinas says that: “The word nature comes from the word nasci to be born”’. 73
according to its innate potentiality. Hence, the actualisation of the potentiality is a process in accordance with nature and the epithet natural is applied to it. (3)

Wordsworth’s ethos as ‘A Poet’ – who is also considered to be a ‘Prophet of Nature’ – is something that he considered essential to his identity. There was no possibility, according to his stoic principles, that he could merely ‘seem’ to be what he claimed to be. The universe reflected the working of divine laws ordained by reason – and Imagination is famously celebrated as ‘Reason in her most exalted mood’ at the climax of argument of The Prelude. One of the ways to better understand the complexities of the Wordsworthian imagination and the apparent paradoxes of his theory of poetry, lies in appreciating the extent to which Wordsworth saw Nature as the Stoics did, as ‘the inherent force which directs either the world or human beings or both’. In describing the sumnum bonum of the Stoics in his Lives of the Philosophers Diogenes Laertius wrote:

The end is to live in accordance with nature – both one’s own nature and the nature of wholes – doing none of the things that are forbidden by the Law that is common, which is the same thing as Right Reason that pervades all things, and is the same as Zeus. (7.87)

I suggest that Wordsworth was already committed to Stoic principles in the later 1790s – much earlier than canonical Wordsworth studies allow. At this time, I believe his knowledge of Stoic concepts was limited mainly to his reading in Cicero. Although he may also have read in Seneca or Marcus Aurelius or Epictetus, my own attempts at accounting for Wordsworth’s stoic frame of mind in the later 1790s are linked also to a ‘sceptical’ attitude that I see as originating in Cicero’s praise of ‘Academic’ scepticism. For this reason I do not go beyond Cicero’s works here, to present a more detailed and specialised study of Stoic philosophy, something that would be necessary to fully explain Wordsworth’s intellectual debts, which became more considerable as he subsequently read more widely in the later Roman Stoics.5 Seneca’s influence is recognisable, by 1804, in the ode ‘To Duty’, and his Moralia would also have been of obvious interest to Wordsworth as he sought answers to ‘moral questions’ at Racedown, where there were two editions of Seneca’s Morals, in the library.6

Here, I limit my enquiry to the proposal that Wordsworth framed his reality according to paradoxical Stoic concepts in his dispute with Coleridge over Imagination in 1802 and 1805. Stoic philosophy was widely discussed by eighteenth-century intellectuals, who probably focussed on the more popular representation of Stoicism found in the works of the later Roman Stoics, especially Seneca. They might also have referred to later, secondary literature, describing Stoic philosophy in the work of such writers as Diogenes Laertius or Sextus Empiricus, or the record found, more generally, in Plutarch. Earlier in the century both Old Whig and the Country party sympathisers recognised the virtuous example of Cato (the younger), who was a folk hero of the republican movement. Stoic philosophy was taught alongside the study of Plato and Aristotle at Oxford, though not at Cambridge where the

5 A detailed study on the topic of ‘Wordsworth and Stoicism’ would require a far more complex discussion of Stoic philosophy and would require another thesis length study to do it justice. This is not a study of Wordsworth and stoicism, but one that stresses the significance of Cicero’s influence at a particularly crucial time in the development of Wordsworth’s poetic ethos.

6 Seneca’s Essays De Vita Beata, De Tranquillitate Animi, and De Providentia, in particular, can be seen to have influenced Wordsworth’s attitude of mind in the early 1800s.
more progressive and ‘enlightened’ teachings of Paley were the fashion.\(^7\) Coleridge shows that he has a general knowledge of Cicero’s philosophical works in his discussions of philosophy, and it would seem that he had been engaged in discussion with Wordsworth about Stoic philosophy by 1802, something I discuss below; but he was not sympathetic to Stoicism.\(^8\)

### II. A Sense Sublime

It is a curious fact of canonical Wordsworth studies, that the strong Stoic sentiments expressed in ‘Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey’ have been largely ignored by Romantic criticism, even though the lines in the central section of the poem that describe Wordsworth’s Stoic faith are often cited by writers on Stoicism for the transparency of the Stoic concepts they express. The ‘poem on the Wye’ has often been read as evidence of Wordsworth’s pantheism – the idea that everything is God, and God is everything, and Coleridge is seen to have provided him with his concepts. But pantheism is too loose a term to describe Wordsworth’s actual belief in nature, which is perhaps better described as panentheism: God is in everything and everything is in God.\(^9\) I define Wordsworth’s specific relationship to ‘Nature’ at this time, as that of a Stoic philosopher, a novitiate Stoic sage, rather than as a ‘son of Rousseau’, or as a worshipper of ‘rocks and stones and trees’, or as a follower of Burke and ‘Burkean’ notions of ‘second nature’. In remaining focussed on the ‘natural man’ I do not deny the ‘spiritual’ in man, but I understand the \textit{pneuma}, as Wordsworth did - as an integral part of the natural world. This is a ‘one life’ theory that Wordsworth discovered in Stoic philosophy, rather than in his discussions with Coleridge. Here I differ from established opinion that, while acknowledging Wordsworth’s adoption of a Stoic attitude of mind around 1804, does not generally recognise his knowledge of early Stoic philosophy in the late 1790s.

‘Lines Written a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a tour, July 13 1798’ was composed some four months after Ms B of ‘The Ruined Cottage’. It presents a declaration of faith in Nature, as well as a declaration of love for Humanity and Dorothy. The central section that acknowledges the change in Wordsworth’s ethos, signals a transition from an earlier state of mind as an enthusiast of nature, addicted to the ‘aching joys’ and ‘dizzy raptures’ found in ‘nature’ which, at that earlier time, was considered to be ‘all in all’. In order to satisfy his ‘appetite’ for her pleasures then, Wordsworth would follow ‘Wherever nature led’. But now, ‘That time is past’, and the loss of those pleasures has been replaced by ‘Abundant recompense’. This compensation is described in a carefully constructed enthymematic ‘argument’ [1] ‘\textit{For I have learned /To look on nature, not as}\n
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\(^7\) Robert Southey, Thomas De Quincey and John Wilson had all studied at Oxford. Southey became an early convert to Stoic thought; possibly this contributed to his intolerance of Coleridge’s lack of will. He found the work of Epictetus, in particular, his guide to stoicism.

\(^8\) Coleridge had made a point of attacking Godwin - whom he demonised for his Stoic attitude of mind - at the end of his third ‘Lecture on Revealed Religion’ in Bristol in 1795. Coleridge’s rhetoric implies Godwin’s philosophy to be the work of Satan, and opposes it in the name of Christ.

\(^9\) For an important study of Coleridge’s concerns with pantheism, in a book that might be read as supplementing my representation of Wordsworth’s reasoning by providing a better understanding of Coleridge’s concerns, see Richard Berkeley, \textit{Coleridge and the Crisis of Reason}. 

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in the hour / Of thoughtless youth…’ [2] ‘And I have felt / A presence that disturbs me with the joy / Of elevated thoughts…’ [3] Therefore am I still / A lover of the meadows and the woods, / And Mountains…’. The argument can be read as a transition from youth to manhood, from sensibility to sense, in which his appreciation of ‘nature’ (that may once have been strongly influenced by Rousseau), now has strong stoic overtones. The argument does not set up a dualism that distinguishes between nature and man, but rather accommodates human nature – ‘the still sad music of humanity’ – and divine nature, which is described in terms that originate in Stoic philosophy:

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
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought
And rolls through all things.

The sense of a disturbing, but elevated, sublime presence existing in nature, and in the mind of man (which is conceived of as a ‘motion and a spirit’ impelling things and thoughts, and rolling through all things) incorporates a strong sense of the Stoic understanding of the divine reason or logos that animates the cosmos. Wordsworth expresses his knowledge of Stoic concepts in ‘Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey’ and makes a statement of faith in a Stoic attitude of mind that is radically different from Coleridge’s Christian faith in a divinity that exists in another, better, world that transcends the world of Nature. The poem also marks a transition, a turning point in Wordsworth’s life that he wishes to celebrate. In giving up the ‘aching joys’ and ‘dizzy raptures’ of his youth he acknowledges that he has received ‘abundant recompense’ in the gifts he has received from ‘nature and the language of the sense’. In a very explicit expression of his faith in Nature he states that he is:

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

I propose that Wordsworth had made a substantial investment in Stoic philosophy by 1798 when he makes this declaration, which clearly distinguishes his philosophy of the mind from that of Coleridge; and the poem should, perhaps, be taken as a declaration of independence from Coleridge’s more Christian-orientated understanding.

In my own study of Stoic thought I have used John Sellars’ *Stoicism* (2006) – a comprehensive contemporary study that provides the necessary background to Stoicism in general, while A. A. Long’s *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics* provides an invaluable,
detailed introduction to the Hellenistic philosophers that occupied Cicero’s attention. At the beginning of his chapter on ‘Stoicism’, Long presents a general characterization of the Stoic system of thought that serves as an excellent introduction, since it encapsulates the essence of an attitude of mind that, I argue, also describes that of Wordsworth in the late 1790s and early 1800s. The chapter is headed by a quotation from De Finibus in which Cato (the younger) is speaking as spokesperson of the Stoic school of philosophy in which he expresses his wonder at the comprehensiveness of the Stoic system of thought:

*The remarkable coherence of the system and the extraordinary orderliness of the subject matter have made me prolix. Don’t you find it amazing, in heaven’s name?... What is there which is not linked to something else that all would collapse if you moved a single letter? But there is nothing at all which can be moved.*

(De Finibus III. 74)

The Stoics, as the quotation indicates, prided themselves on the coherence of their philosophy. They were convinced that the universe is amenable to rational explanation, and is itself a rationally organized structure. The faculty in man which enables him to think, to plan and to speak – which the Stoics called *logos* – is literally embodied in the universe at large. The individual human being at the essence of his nature shares a property which belongs to Nature in the cosmic sense. And because cosmic Nature embraces all that there is, the human individual is a part of the world in a precise and integral sense. Cosmic events and human actions are therefore not happenings of two quite different orders: in the last analysis they are both alike consequences of one thing – *logos*. To put it another way, cosmic Nature or God (the terms refer to the same thing in Stoicism) and man are related to each other at the heart of their being as rational agents. If a man fully recognizes the implications of this relationship, he will act in a manner which wholly accords with human rationality at its best, the excellence of which is guaranteed by its willing agreement with Nature. This is what it is to be wise, a step beyond mere rationality and the goal of human existence is complete harmony between a man’s own attitudes and actions and the actual course of events. Natural philosophy and logic are fundamental and intimately related to this goal. In order to live in accordance with Nature a man must know which facts are true, what their truth consists in and how one true proposition is related to another. The coherence of Stoicism is based on the belief that natural events are so causally related to one another that on them a set of propositions can be supported which will enable a man to plan a life wholly at one with Nature or God. (*Hellenistic Philosophy* 108)

Long’s synopsis is highly suggestive of ideas that are to be found reproduced in Wordsworth’s writings in 1798, and in the attitude of mind that defined his character in the early 1800s. Stoic principles define a carefully argued philosophical system that could be characterised as providing the grounds for a comprehensive ‘one-life’ philosophy, and I argue that they were the direct source of Wordsworth’s philosophical ideals at the time he moved to Alfoxden. I believe that he shared his understanding with Coleridge, who sympathised with such a one-life concept, but was unable to

10 Long is an expert on Hellenistic Philosophy and his work is more specialised in its focus on the more fragmentary texts of the early Greek Stoics - the works that Cicero relied on. I also, especially, recommend, Karsten Friis Johansen’s chapter on ‘Early Stoicism’ in her *History of Ancient Philosophy: From the Beginning to Augustine* (1998), for its concise and coherent treatment of a complex topic. A careful reading of her chapter offers the Wordsworth scholar the possibility of identifying the origins of several aspects of Wordsworth’s enigmatic thinking. For further background reading, and for more detailed and more specialised treatments of key aspects of Stoic philosophy (that I have not developed here), I have referred to: Tad Brennan, *The Stoic Life: Emotions, Duties & Fate*; K. Ierodiakonou, (ed,) *Topics in Stoic Philosophy*; A. A. Long, *Problems in Stoicism* (1971), & *Stoic Studies* (1996); J.M. Rist, *Stoic Philosophy* (1969), & *The Stoics* (1978); E.H. Sandbach, *The Stoics* (1975); R.W. Sharples, *Stoics, Epicureans, and Sceptics* (1996). Other articles and essays are listed in the bibliography.
square Stoic philosophy with his Christian faith; Coleridge therefore accepted certain aspects of Wordsworth’s thinking, which he found to be inspiring and of great intellectual merit, while rejecting anything that compromised his own religious beliefs.  

Stoic philosophy forms an integrated system, and the philosophies of nature, of ethics and of logic are complexly intertwined. Logic, for the Stoics, is not restricted to the kind of demonstrative reasoning that Aristotle set out in his *Analytics*; it is embodied in the universe at large. Deductive inference is possible because of the way things ‘actually are’ as the work of Nature, or God - the cosmic *logos*. Logic was therefore considered to be ‘the science of rational discourse’ and included the *means* by which the sage has to know, in order to obtain knowledge. This means that language and the spoken word are also part of ‘logical’ analysis.

By ‘logic’ the Stoics meant something which includes theory of knowledge, semantics, grammar, and stylistics as well as formal logic. In Stoicism these elements of ‘logic’ are all associated with each other because they have *logos* as their subject matter. *Logos* means both speech and reason; and speech can be considered both from a phonetic and from a semantic aspect. Or again, a Stoic will discuss under ‘logic’ both the rules of thought and valid argument - logic in the strict sense - and also parts of speech, by which thoughts and arguments are expressed. To know something in Stoicism is to be able to assert a proposition which is demonstrably true, and thus epistemology becomes a branch of ‘logic’ in the generous sense given to that term by the Stoics. (118)

Because speech plays a necessary role in any discussion of ‘things’, the words used to discuss them are also part of the picture, and, for the Stoics, they are actually conceived of as having a material existence. Words, as meaningful utterances, ‘sayings’ or *Lekta* are also considered to be ‘things’ (although considered as things without bodies), and words, things, and the relations that hold between them, are therefore the subject of Stoic dialectic, which differs from that practised by the Academy:

Part of the difference between Platonic or Aristotelian methodology and Stoicism is due to the Stoic concept of *logos*. The unification under a single concept of the cause of all happenings and the instrument of thought and discourse led the Stoics to abandon certain modes of philosophical analysis which in their view had nothing real corresponding to them. Language and thought, being natural, must be matched up with natural phenomena. Universals, having no objective existence, cannot be a subject of philosophical study. As concepts they provide us with a convenient way of classifying things, but they do not define the structure of reality. Nature reveals to us particular objects not universals. The value of language to the philosopher is its capacity to describe the world. In a world governed by *logos* what is needed is to connect, to find the right description, the description which fastens upon the appropriate bit of Nature. (147)

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11 For a study that presents Coleridge’s differing, more Calvinistic reading of the *logos*, in its Johannine and Pauline form, see Ben Brice’s *Coleridge and Scepticism*. Brice’s study teases out the subtle philosophical and theological differences within the sceptical tradition as it developed out of Cicero’s classical humanist understanding and was appropriated and transformed into Christian dogma. David Hume was to re-assert a more ‘Academic’ form of scepticism in the eighteenth century, drawing heavily on Cicero to do so.

12 The Stoics distinguished between ‘corporeals’ *somata* which have ‘Existence’, while ‘incorporeals’ *asomata* only have ‘Subsistence’. Void, time, place, and sayables *lekta*, are incorporeals.
The Stoic’s differing, broader, appreciation of logic can be a cause of confusion for scholars attempting to impose a ‘logical’ understanding on Wordsworth’s beliefs, if they do not appreciate that Wordsworth’s own ‘logic’ followed Stoic conceptions, with their much broader appreciation of the term. Wordsworth’s reading in Cicero provided him with a ‘one life’ philosophy that he had adopted by the time he moved to Alfoxden and spent time with Coleridge. That Coleridge did not have much success in convincing the ‘semi-Atheist’ Wordsworth to turn to Christ can be seen in the sentiments contained in ‘Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey’, composed after Wordsworth had left Alfoxden and had been staying in Bristol, en route for Germany. Far from requiring Coleridge’s help in finding a philosophy and a new poetic voice over the previous year, he continued to demonstrate that his was an ‘independent intellect’, one that Coleridge continued to respect and admire.

III. Sparks of the Divinity

Part of the reason for the lack of a general understanding of Wordsworth’s turn to Stoicism in the late 1790s is due to Jane Worthington’s analysis of Wordsworth’s knowledge of Stoicism in her 1946 study, Wordsworth’s Reading of Roman Prose. Unfortunately her chapter ‘Wordsworth and Roman Stoicism’ was committed to studying the influence of the Roman Stoics, and this led her to overlook the more important influence of the earlier Greek Stoics on Wordsworth’s work. Lacking the detailed textual and historical knowledge available today, she based much of her analysis on Wordsworth’s reading and on the presence of books in the Rydal Mt Library, and she failed to appreciate Wordsworth’s early reading in Cicero. Although she acknowledged Cicero’s later influence and noted, significantly, that ‘Wordsworth always speaks of Cicero as the “philosophic Cicero”’ (43), she still believed that he did not discover Stoic philosophy until 1804, when he came to it via the works of the later Roman Stoics: Seneca, Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus. The fact that Wordsworth set out his ‘own’ natural philosophy in terms that were remarkably similar to Stoic natural philosophy, before 1804, was seen by Worthington as purely coincidental. And she was determined to stress that Wordsworth’s own earlier beliefs were original, and not in any way derived from Stoicism. Her chapter, therefore, opens by stressing that Wordsworth’s ‘own’ natural philosophy (as expressed in some of his best-known passages) was the product of the ‘serene and blessed mood’ of his own mind. She explicitly denied that Wordsworth was influenced in any way by Stoicism before 1804, and even went to the extent of proposing that, if an influence was to be found, it was most likely to be that of Spinoza, since his ideas reproduced Stoic concepts, and it is known that Coleridge was discussing Spinoza with Wordsworth in 1798.13

Worthington proposed that Wordsworth turned to Stoic philosophy some time in 1804 as a result of the supposed loss of his earlier, more romantic, visionary beliefs. Her argument, unfortunately, gave further support to H. W. Garrod’s thesis that Wordsworth suffered a dramatic anti-

13 Part 1 of Berkeley’s study provides a detailed discussion of Coleridge and Spinoza.
climax after Coleridge left for Malta. According to this reading of Wordsworth, his remarks about his loss of the ‘visionary gleam’, as represented in ‘Resolution and Independence’, the ode ‘To Duty’, ‘Elegiae Stanzas’ and the great ‘Ode’ itself, are all seen to suggest a sense of despair at this loss, one that is tempered by ‘stoic’ resignation. This is to read Wordsworth according to an understanding of stoic fortitude that became definitive of the attitude of the great Roman Stoics – an attitude that also became the popular appreciation of Stoicism in Renaissance Europe. But this is to read Wordsworth’s loss of the ‘visionary gleam’ in a negative light, and was not Wordsworth’s intention in these poems, which are ‘positively’ stoical. Wordsworth presents an argument that the individual human mind must lose its original connection with the ‘divine nature’ in order to become fully human. Only then can the human mind develop a new relationship with Nature and, through the pursuit of natural wisdom (something facilitated by having had a ‘liberal education’), arrive at a conscious blending of human and divine consciousness.

This understanding, which Wordsworth was attempting to explain to Coleridge in the ‘Ode’, and in the ode ‘To Duty’ (which argued for a Stoic rather than a Christian appreciation of predestination), was also represented in the narrative of The Prelude. The Stoics believed that human beings received guidance from Nature in their infancy, and if they were fortunate in being born into a supportive environment, this lasted up until the time that they became capable of reasoning for themselves. This guidance was figured as the presence of a ‘divine light’, that accompanies the infant at birth, and Cicero, who refers to this understanding in Tusculan Disputations 3, translates the Greek term ἀφορμαί as ‘little seeds’ or ‘sparks’ of excellence and rationality that nature bestows on human beings. These ‘sparks of the divinity’ – to use John Keats’ expression – support the early growth of the mind, providing it is nurtured in a caring environment and not subjected to the corrupt reasoning that, unfortunately, guides most human beings. The Stoics recognised, however, that in most cases souls were born into an environment too inhospitable for the divine ‘spark’ to flourish. As a consequence their divine light was soon extinguished and their infant minds followed the ‘light of sense’ that replaced it – the limited and often false path of human reasoning. But if a child was fortunate enough to be reared in a supportive natural environment, he or she would be guided by Nature in infancy, childhood, and early youth, after which time a necessary transition needed to occur, a sacrifice of divine knowing.

14 Garrod’s suggestion, in his 1923 study Wordsworth, became influential in criticism of the following decade. Willard Sperry further developed Garrod’s thesis in Wordsworth’s Anti-climax and his representation of Wordsworth, in turn, influenced Geoffrey Hartman.

15 Cicero sets out this understanding, which is presented by Cato as spokesperson for the Stoics, in the discussion of Stoic ethics in De Finibus III.

16 Cicero uses both metaphors in TD 3.2: nunc parvulos nobis dedit [sc. natura] igniculos and sunt enim ingenii nostris seminsa innata virtutem. See also references in De Legibus 1.33 and De Finibus 4. 17-8 and 5.43., and the commentary by Ingo Gildenhard in Paideia Romana, p. 171.

17 In his famous letter about the world as ‘The vale of soul making’ Keats wrote: ‘I say ‘Soul making’ Soul as distinguished from Intelligence - There may be intelligences or sparks of the divinity in millions - but they are not Souls till they acquire identities, till each one is personally itself’. Letters of John Keats, p. 266. The Prelude is a narrative about such soul making. Two very different minds, those of Rousseau and Calvin refer to the ἀφορμαί, as described by Cicero, in their respective writings as if the concept was a commonplace; though for Calvin the guidance comes from a transcendent deity.
Wordsworth utilises this understanding, most obviously, in the ‘Ode. Intimations of Immortality’ in which references to the ‘fountain light’ and ‘master light’ that guides the infant and youth, relate to the Stoic ‘sparks of the divinity’. In this instance the infant, growing up in a propitious natural environment with loving parents, has received Nature’s gift. But at a certain stage the youth must abandon his reliance on natural reason in order to develop his own ability to reason for himself. If he makes wise choices and pursues the life of virtue, as defined by Socrates and the Stoics, he will then have the possibility of attaining to a higher state of communion with Nature again – his own mind having the potential to become divine. This ideal developmental course is not made explicit in the ‘Ode’, but what is stressed is the necessary loss of ‘the visionary gleam’. In early youth Nature can still be a guiding light, but the transition to manhood requires the loss of this guidance, as a ‘man’ must learn to reason for himself.18

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

The character of ‘the Youth’ and that of ‘the Man’ differ, and ‘the Man’ must necessarily lose his instinctive connection with Nature in order to develop his own wisdom. The aim, the ‘virtue’ of ‘the Youth’, is that he should become a virtuous ‘Man’, and this requires a necessary loss of innate ‘vision’, something that he has to rediscover by the exercise of his own will through the pursuit of right reason. Ideally, in a civic humanist context such a man will become a noble embodiment of civic virtù.19

This Stoic belief in the existence of divine ‘seeds’ or ‘sparks’, that guide the infant mind in the period before it can reason for itself, is often referred to as ‘the Stoic cradle argument’. Wordsworth constructed the narrative of The Prelude utilising this Stoic concept of human development, which Cicero set out in detail in De Finibus III. In The Prelude Wordsworth relates how he had felt himself to be guided by Nature in his childhood, and then how he had later continued to rely too heavily on Nature’s guidance as he approached manhood. By idealising his strong feelings of a connection with Nature in his youth, and believing himself to be a ‘chosen son’ (Nature’s Priest), he had unwittingly failed to develop his own capacity to reason. His youthful poetic enthusiasm developed into a political enthusiasm while he was in France in 1791, and he believed that he had been granted something of a prophetic insight into the events of the times. His over-enthusiastic engagement with the French revolutionarily cause was later identified as a form of madness – something he admits to in Book X of

18 In ‘Lines Written above Tintern Abbey’ Wordsworth is announcing that he has crossed the threshold into ‘manhood’. Dorothy, in contrast, has not yet achieved this ‘mature’ perspective.

19 Cicero’s representation of the stoic ἀφορμή is also reproduced in the descriptions of the growth of noblemen’s minds in Castiglione’s The Courtier when nature is described as having sown ‘seeds’ of virtue in men’s souls. Spencer inherits the tradition, and so too does Shakespeare in his discussion of Art and Nature in the Last Plays. In Cymbeline, Belarius, referring to Cymbeline’s children, exclaims ‘How hard it is to hide the sparks of nature’ (III iii 79). See Frank Kermode’s sections on ‘Nature’, ‘Art’ and ‘Art and Nature’ in his Introduction to The Tempest in the Arden Shakespeare.
the poem, as he justifies his support for the revolutionaries and describes his subsequent fall from grace and his realisation of the hubris of his earlier claims. Having relied too heavily on Nature’s guidance, he recognised that he had failed to develop his own sense of identity. His over-enthusiastic support for the French revolutionary cause had led him to pursue a fanatical course of action that led to a position of extreme isolation, and an inevitable mental collapse. As he recovered from this period of crisis he pursued a course of study that enabled him to identify answers to his political or ‘moral questions’ through an enquiry based on reason not emotion. Unfortunately his study of Godwin’s philosophy only led him into further error, and he retired to Racedown where, I argue, his reading in Cicero’s philosophical works acted as a ‘cure’ for his state of mind, by providing answers to his ‘moral questions’. In Tusculan Disputations Cicero explicitly defines ‘philosophy’ as a cure for the sick mind.

At Racedown Wordsworth developed the capacity to think for himself, while pursuing a virtuous life in which he attempted to distinguish true from false reason. He was then able to re-establish a connection with Nature, as a wise man, whose mind embodied natural wisdom, and could again become one with Nature – but this time as a fully conscious, mature adult – a ‘man’ whose Imagination was identified with ‘Highest Reason’. The plot of The Prelude explains those circumstances to Coleridge as the argument of the poem commends the Stoic principles that Wordsworth had followed in order to attain to the state of mind celebrated at the end of the poem as a ‘Prophet of Nature’ speaking ‘A lasting inspiration, sanctified / By reason and by truth.’ This reasoned state of mind bears no relationship to any conception of ‘poetic’ or ‘prophetic election’. It has nothing in common with the juvenile state of mind described in the ‘glad preamble’ to the poem. As a ‘chosen son’ Wordsworth was incapable of ‘building up a Work that should endure’. The poet reliant on inspiration is not able to act consciously, and is therefore not a ‘wise man’, someone in whom the divine and the human are united. The Stoic, however, has become conscious of the power of his own mind through his dedication to the ‘philosophical life’ – the pursuit of virtue, following Socratic principles. Through such a pursuit it is possible to become conscious of the divinity in the mind itself, rather than merely being ‘possessed’ by some divine ‘influx’ (Prelude XII 308). In his later ‘manly’ reappraisal of the ‘mystical’ experiences of his later youth, Wordsworth re-defines such experiences as ‘vicious’ rather than ‘virtuous’. Having originally believed himself to be favoured as a ‘chosen son’, he later recognised that such vatic experiences limited, rather than enlarged, his consciousness. He was then able to put a different light on the experiences of his youth, and to realise that the divine guidance that Nature had provided to one of her favoured sons had become a problem as he approached manhood. It was only after the ‘crisis of that strong disease’ (Prelude 1850: XI 306), that he was then able to develop his own mental capacity, so that he might consciously attain to a state of divine wisdom – to an understanding, hopefully, of the ‘mind of man…in beauty exalted, as it is itself / Of substance and of fabric more divine’ (XIII 451-2).

My justification for the assertions I make here is provided in more detail in Part II, but since my reading of The Prelude in Chapter 5 is based on appreciating Wordsworth’s stoic frame of mind, I need to present them as working hypotheses here. I propose that Wordsworth’s original understanding of Stoic thought originated in his reading of Cicero at Racedown, and that ‘Lines Written Above
Tintern Abbey’; the Two-Part Prelude of 1799; the sentiments expressed in ‘Resolution and Independence’; the philosophy behind the ‘Ode: Intimation of Immortality’; the Stoicism expressed in the ode ‘To Duty’; the treatment of emotional distress in ‘Elegiac Stanzas’, and the argument of the 1805 Prelude, all betray the strong influence of Cicero’s representation of Stoic philosophy, which is later backed up by Wordsworth’s reading in Seneca. Wordsworth’s sentiments in the ode ‘To Duty’ are not those of resignation, but express a sense of commitment to a life that engages with ‘Providence’, ‘Fate’ or ‘Fortune’ in a positive manner of acceptance, rather than living in fear at what might happen to one. A sense of Duty implies a willingness to act, as ‘a man’, in determining one’s own fate rather than relying, as Coleridge did, on the grace of God. The Stoic sets his mind on achieving a particular goal, and makes every effort to achieve it. But it is not the attainment of the goal that is important; rather the attitude of mind and the commitment to act. Wordsworth’s thoughts in the ode ‘To Duty’ were specifically directed towards Coleridge in the hope that he might engage in life with a similar moral purpose. The Stoic sentiments expressed in the ode ‘To Duty’ might be summed up by a quotation from Seneca, one that Wordsworth would have hoped Coleridge might be capable of understanding: Ducunt volentem fatam nolentem trahunt.

This more positive aspect of early stoicism tended to be lost in later, more popular, Elizabethan descriptions of the stoic character as that of a wise man who had managed to overcome his feelings. Having suppressed his troublesome emotions, such a character was then seen to be able to act justly, and in an attitude of equanimity, as something of a secular saint. Popular opinion has always been sceptical of such absolute control over the emotions, and Cicero also acknowledged that, in reality, the character of the perfect Stoic was ‘nowhere to be found’. Cicero’s own Stoicism was based on the more moderate teachings of the ‘middle’ Stoic philosophers Panaetius and Posidonius, which reflected a more common-sense approach to human actions than the more severe original teaching of Zeno and Chrysippus. The later Roman Stoics inherited the philosophy of the earlier Greeks, but their more resigned attitude of mind was a response to specific historical circumstances as the Roman Empire was collapsing into tyranny. By Seneca’s time the despotism of the Emperors created a situation where ‘manly fortitude’ was considered a means of escape from the horrors of the times, and Seneca had to pay the ultimate price for his beliefs and take his own life – an action that was considered truly stoical. So too was Cato’s earlier example, which was later idealised by the classical republicans in seventeenth-century England, and by Addison and his circle, in the eighteenth, as well as by such radical thinkers as John Trenchard.

20 The poem’s concerns with Duty are misread if the concept of Duty is equated with the Kantian understanding that Coleridge probably upheld. Wordsworth’s Stoic sense of Duty is at complete odds with Kant’s rationalism, though some critics have, uncritically, conflated the two positions.

21 ‘The Fates lead him who will; him who won’t, they drag’.
In 1836 Wordsworth did add a quote from Seneca as an epigram to the poem: ‘Jam non consilio bonus, sed more eo perductus, ut non tantum recte facere possim, sed nisi recte facere non possim’.
I am no longer good through deliberate intent, but by long habit have reached a point where I am not only able to do right, but am unable to do anything but what is right (Seneca, Letters 130.10).

22 Wordsworth alludes to Addison’s Cato in Descriptive Sketches, and owned a copy of Trenchard’s Cato’s Letters in 1795.
To read Wordsworth’s appreciation of Stoicism against this later Roman backdrop as Jane Worthington did is, I believe, a misreading. Wordsworth would have known of the Roman Stoics, but they were not his first introduction to Stoic philosophy if he had been reading carefully in Cicero’s works in the 1790s. Evidence to be found in the revisions done to An Evening Walk in 1794, when Wordsworth was living with Dorothy at Windy Brow, suggests that Wordsworth was already familiar with some Stoic concepts. The Windy Brow revisions repay some careful study since they show Wordsworth already considering a number of concerns that would become more topical at Racedown, and he opens ‘The Ruined Cottage’ with lines written at Windy Brow. He appears to have been reading Measure for Measure at that time also, and to have been reflecting on Shakespeare’s treatment of a Stoic character – Angelo – as well as on the play’s discussion of concepts of justice. A description of Grasmere churchyard in the revisions to An Evening Walk, contrasts the ‘sensible warm motion’ of children at play, with the bodies of those lying in, and becoming one with, the ‘dull earth’ (PW I. 7). Wordsworth’s choice of words echoes those of Claudio in Measure for Measure, who is confronting the reality of his own death. Wordsworth had essentially committed the same ‘sin’ as Claudio in his liaison with Annette Vallon, a relationship that would have been much on his mind in 1794 as he considered the nature of his own ‘guilt’. Worthington had initially explored likely sources for Wordsworth’s knowledge of Stoicism in the work of Bacon, Montaigne, and Samuel Daniel, but she had dismissed these secondary sources in favour of her Roman originals, and she also acknowledged Cicero’s significant influence as one of the two foremost sources of Stoic thought. But she failed to see the existence of the earlier connection with Stoicism made by Wordsworth via his earlier reading in Cicero. Her chapter provides a brief synopsis of many of the key beliefs of Stoic philosophy, which had originated in the work of the earlier Greek Stoics, and she gives several references to Cicero’s works in addition to her discussion of the writings of the later Roman Stoics. Once she reached work that she understood to be later than 1804, she then thought she was on safe ground in attributing Wordsworth’s ideas to Stoic influence, especially when it came to The Excursion. But she did not appreciate that much of the philosophical content in Books 1 and 4 was in fact written in 1797-8, when Wordsworth was drawing heavily on Stoic concepts as he wrote ‘The Ruined Cottage’, especially in describing the character development of the Pedlar.

The Prelude concludes by celebrating both the ‘sublime’ manifestations of ‘Nature’ and the ‘beautiful’ productions of human nature which are defined in terms of the workings of ‘Imagination’ and ‘Fancy’. Wordsworth also makes carefully planned appeals to pathos and ethos, in his attempt to win Coleridge over to his Stoic faith - in Nature. The divine, ‘sublime’ workings of original Nature are presented working in mutual interchange with the ‘beautiful’ productions of ‘second nature’, and the two ‘realms’ interpenetrate each other in a stoic ‘blending’, which cannot be conceived of in dualistic,

23 Claudio  Ay, but to die, and go we know not where
To lie in deep obstruction and to rot:
This sensible warm motion to ‘become
A kneaded clod. (Measure for Measure III i 116)
Claudio’s reference to being ‘imprisoned in the viewless winds/And blown with restless violence round about/ The pendant world’, a few lines later, would also have struck Wordsworth’s ear.
or Kantian terms, as a ‘synthesis’. The Stoics’ paradoxical, counter-intuitive, and illogical belief that two bodies can occupy the same space, at the same time, was nonsensical to a mind like Coleridge’s, who entertained Platonic notions of a transcendent divine power that ‘descended’ on the human world to provide divine guidance. Wordsworth opposed Coleridge’s transcendentalism, maintaining a Stoic faith in a non-idealist position, which, although contradictory to the elementary principles of physics, could be justified by Stoic logic, which conceived of ‘bodies’ as compounds of matter and mind. The divine ‘active principle’ - ‘mind’- penetrates the earthly ‘passive principle’- ‘matter’- to produce life, but there is no absolute division between the two principles. The Stoic position is often described as ‘materialist’ in distinguishing it from idealist systems of philosophy, but A.A. Long suggests the term is misleading, and that the Stoics would be better described as ‘vitalists’. ‘Their Nature, like Spinoza’s God or Nature, is a thing to which both thought and extension are attributable’.24

IV. Synthesis or Blending

In this section I want to return briefly to the ‘radical Difference’ of opinion of 1802 in order to suggest that Wordsworth was actually sharing his understanding of Stoic philosophy with Coleridge as the two men were discussing their differing opinions about poetic theory and imagination. Having looked at the circumstances of that earlier discussion I turn to the terms Coleridge used in his later, better known description of the differences between ‘Imagination’ and ‘Fancy’ in Biographia Literaria. I then return to the earlier discussion of those concepts in 1802 and 1804 – to look again at the language Coleridge used in his letters to Sotheby and Sharp.

The Stoics held three different notions of the way in which two entities might be combined. There could be ‘juxtaposition’, ‘fusion’ or a ‘total blending’. It would seem, from the terminology Coleridge used to describe the differences between his and Wordsworth’s appreciation of ‘Imagination’ and ‘Fancy’, that the two men had discussed this concept in some detail. On this particular topic of ‘mixtures’, Wordsworth maintained a very particular Stoic position of ‘total blending’, while Coleridge was insisting on the concept of fusion, or synthesis, a position he seems, by 1815, to be taking from Kant. Wordsworth’s Stoic position allowed for two substances to be mixed together and to appear to be totally ‘blended’. This was different from ‘juxtaposition’ in which two substances are mixed together but remain separate – like salt and sugar mixed in a bowl. The example of ‘total blending’ given by the Stoics is that wine and water can be mixed together and would appear to be dissolved, each in the other. But the wine can be extracted from the mixture if an oil-soaked sponge is placed in it, since the oil draws out the wine, which is able to be separated from the water. Although the two substances appear to be dissolved each in the other, they still maintain their individual identity. Stoic philosophers paid great attention to such observations, and their philosophy sought reasons for explaining such phenomena, rather than relying on purely abstract reasoning.

Geoffrey Hartman made a point of discussing the ‘dynamics of contrast and blending’ in his famous reading of Wordsworth. Taking his cue from the passage in the prospectus to ‘The Recluse’ in which Wordsworth described the blended might of mind and external world, he comments on ‘the “blendings” for which the later Wordsworth is famous’ (Wordsworth’s Poetry 104). His study traces a shift from an earlier phase in which ‘contrasts’ predominate, to a later one in which ‘blending’ occurs. His concern with ‘contrasts and blendings’ is linked to his argument that ‘by 1798 [Wordsworth] had come to firm self-consciousness and separated his imagination from nature’ (175). His observations about ‘blending’ serve to reinforce the argument of his thesis about ‘Wordsworth’s ‘consciousness’ and ‘anti-self consciousness’’. I suggest that Wordsworth’s appreciation of ‘blendings’ had its source in his knowledge of early Stoic philosophy, and his own particular concern to stress a particular distinction between ‘blending’ and ‘synthesis’ (or ‘fusion’) that he used to distinguish between his and Coleridge’s radically different theories of knowledge.

I have suggested that the thirteen Book text of the original 1805 Prelude was produced as a result of Wordsworth deciding to further address the argument between him and Coleridge over Imagination and Fancy that had originated in the 1802 ‘radical Difference’. It would seem that the two men revisited the topic during Coleridge’s stay with Wordsworth before he left for Malta, a conjecture based on the fact that Coleridge raises it again in his letter to Sharp in January 1804. In his later, definitive, commentary on the matter in Biographia Literaria (in which he would contradict Wordsworth’s ‘peculiar opinions’ and the ‘perversity of his judgement’), Fancy, differing in kind, was relegated to an inferior, uncreative, mundane role, while Imagination, ‘the vision and faculty divine’, was the power that made the poet.

The poet, described in ideal perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity that blends and as it were fuses, each unto each, by that synthetic and magical power to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of Imagination. (BL XIV 173-4)

Coleridge’s ‘Imagination’—the term he had ‘exclusively appropriated’ to describe some kind of theurgic power—has mystified readers for nearly a couple of centuries. This famous passage concludes a section in which Coleridge had echoed the question ‘What is a Poet?’ that Wordsworth had asked in his 1802 additions to the Preface to Lyrical Ballads. Coleridge writes that ‘the question ‘What is poetry? is so nearly the same question with, what is a poet ? that the answer to the one is involved in the solution of the other’ (BL 173). In stressing that the poet’s creative activity does not simply ‘blend’ but, ‘as it were fuses each into each by a synthetic and magical power’ (my emphasis), Coleridge re-iterates the distinctions he had made in his earlier letters to Sotheby in 1802, and to Sharp in January 1804. In placing a stress on ‘fusion’ he is again making a particular distinction between a Kantian concept—clearly adverted to here in describing an act of synthesis—and one he attributes to Wordsworth, in which the poet’s heart and intellect are ‘merely held in solution & loose

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25 CL II 862-867; 1031-1035.
mixture’ with ‘the great appearances of nature’. That distinction, made in his letter to Sharp, reinforces the similar one made in his earlier letter to Sotheby.

Coleridge’s answer to the question, ‘What is poetry / what is a poet?’, one that describes the poet ‘in ideal perfection’, is then qualified by a long list of activities in which antithetical qualities are, typically, balanced or reconciled. The passage is then rounded off by a sententious conclusion:

Finally, good sense is the body of poetic genius, fancy its drapery, motion its life, and imagination the soul that is everywhere; and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole.

I suggest that there is little for the reader to ‘grasp’ in Coleridge’s abstract definition of ‘the poet’ as a master of imaginative synthesis. But it should be clear that the ‘giant hand’ of Kant is directing his pen here, as he strongly alludes to Imagination as Kant’s Einbildungskraft – the power or faculty that ‘forms all into one’. By attending closely to Coleridge’s language it is possible to discern something more of the substance of the debate that had been going on with Wordsworth over imagination in 1802, and which was seemingly revisited in 1804. I return now, to the letters to Sotheby and Sharp. In the first letter, Coleridge had defined his one-life philosophy as a total union of the ‘Poet’s heart and intellect’ with the great appearances in Nature, and he had contrasted this idealised state of true poetic rapture with the ‘fancies’ of a poet’s mind in his less enthused compositions.

A Poet’s Heart & Intellect should be combined, intimately combined & unified, with the great appearances in Nature - & not merely held in solution & loose mixture with them, in the shape of formal Similes – there are moods of the mind in which they are natural – pleasing moods of the mind, & such as a poet will often have, & sometimes express; but they are not the highest, and most appropriate moods. They are ‘Sermoni proprioira’ which I once translated as – ‘Properer for a Sermon’ (CL II 864)

The true poet of ‘The Imagination’ does not compose poetry simply by drawing on topics and repeating commonplaces in arguments that are dressed up in poetic language – as Coleridge admits to having done in ‘On Leaving a Place of Residence’. He must also be inspired, and lose himself in ‘the great appearances of nature’ if he is to attain to the highest, most imaginative forms of true poetic expression. His subjective identity must be fused with the objects of nature. Fanciful rhetoric might be used to write an effective sermon in which the speaker ‘Leads up and down his captivated flock’ with his ‘crook of eloquence’, as Coleridge was doing in 1797 when writing sermons that he would have planned and set out according to ‘laws’ of composition set down in handbooks. But in his delivery, he would also have relied on an audience sympathetic to the religious themes he was expounding on, and would have drawn upon their expectation that he was speaking on behalf of God, in an impassioned and inspired manner – as though enthused. And in the process of delivering such a sermon, with a prepared text, in such a setting and with an appreciative and ‘primed’ audience, he could easily work himself into a state of mind in which he actually felt his delivery was enthused.

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26 Later published as, ‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’.
According to Coleridge, true poetry is produced in similar states of inspiration which, to be true to Nature – as Coleridge understands ‘Nature’ – must also be underwritten by the true (Christian) God. In the letter to Sotheby the Psalms are cited as evidence of truly inspired poetry and are contrasted with the religious poetry of the Greeks, described as:

poor Stuff – as poor in genuine Imagination as mean in Intellect – At best it is but Fancy or the aggregating Faculty of the mind – not Imagination, or the modifying and co-adunating Faculty’. (CL II 865-6)

Coleridge insists that the act of poetic inspiration that can be truly described as an act of Imagination (in the highest sense of the word) is one of total fusion. The poet’s ‘Heart and Intellect’ are not merely held ‘in solution & loose mixture’ with Nature’s great appearances by a merely fanciful ‘aggregating Faculty of the mind’; they are modified in the synthesis enacted by the ‘co-adunating Faculty’ of Imagination. In 1804, Coleridge believed that one day Wordsworth would, ‘hereafter be admitted as the first & greatest philosophical Poet, because he would be:

the only man who has effected a compleat and constant synthesis of Thought and Feeling and combined them with Poetic Forms, with the music of pleasurable passion and with Imagination or the modifying Power in the highest sense of the word in which I have ventured to oppose it to Fancy, or the aggregating power – in that sense in which it is a dim Analogue of Creation, not all that we can believe but all that we can conceive of creation.’

It would seem, from the terminology being repeatedly used, that Coleridge’s demands for total ‘fusion’ rather than ‘loose mixture’, is a direct response to a difference of opinion with Wordsworth, who is maintaining a Stoic position in which ‘Mind’ and ‘Nature’ are seen as ‘blending’, without a formal ‘synthesis’ occurring. For Wordsworth, there is no understanding of a ‘fusion’ enacted by the ‘synthetic and magical power’ of the ‘Imagination’. I suggest, as part of my argument here, that Wordsworth must have actually discussed the Stoic concept of ‘mixtures’ that distinguished between ‘juxtaposition’, ‘fusion’, or a ‘total blending’ with Coleridge; and that he had argued for a union of divine and human identities that was, specifically, one of ‘total blending’, in which the two unite, but do not lose their separate identity. Coleridge’s concern to see a union that is a total ‘fusion’, defined in terms of a ‘compleat and constant synthesis’, sets out his radically different appreciation of this unification. His ‘Imagination’ is a transcendental faculty of the mind, having ‘divine’ powers that are superior to, and rule over, human experience. Coleridge’s terminology, in his comments on the differences between Imagination and Fancy, is dictated by his concern to rebut Wordsworth’s Stoic position.

Wordsworth had argued for a difference of degree, rather than one of kind in his discussion of the matter, and by attending to Wordsworth’s actual work it is possible to see his commitment to the concept of a ‘blending’ of the divine and the human, and not a ‘fusion’ in which the human ‘Fancy’ is

28 Coleridge would have had Lowth’s Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews in mind.
29 Coleridge repeated this distinction between the ‘shaping and modifying power’ of imagination, and the ‘aggregative and associative power’ of fancy in Omnia in 1812, p. 182.
transformed into the divine ‘Imagination’. Wordsworth refused this notion at the time of his disputation with Coleridge on the topic of ‘Imagination’ – as set out in *The Prelude*. Where Coleridge’s position can be seen to support his belief that great poets ‘are born not made’ – their work the production of their imaginative genius – Wordsworth argues the classical position that both Nature and Art are necessary for the productions of a genius. He must be actively engaged in the ‘work’ of poetry, he cannot merely rely on inspiration. In the *exordium* to the 1805 *Prelude*, written as an ‘Address to Coleridge’, Wordsworth subtly opposes Coleridge’s belief that poets are born not made by exploring the topic and demonstrating its limitations.

**V. Gladness and Sadness: The Exordium to ‘The Prelude’**

As was noted in Chapter 2, *The Prelude* opens with a celebration of the speaker’s freedom, evidence of his inspiration, and expectations of great work to be accomplished. But it soon transpires that his joy is too exultant, and the promised compositions that his inspired state of mind were hoped to produce, do not materialise. He cannot maintain his inspiration and produce a sustained piece of poetry; his harp is too soon defrauded. Undismayed, however, he then seeks for milder forms of inspiration in states of reverie, while lying beneath shady trees in a classic, pastoral setting. He also exercises his imagination as he envisions the place to which his steps will lead him, imagining the sweet Vale and even seeing it, as if ‘the very house and fields’ were ‘Present before [his] eyes’ (I 83-4). These reveries also fail to produce sustained poetry but this is not, initially, described as distressing – the glad poet continues on his journey, remaining still in hope, and expressing joy in the present moment.

In the section that follows, however, it is acknowledged that the speaker does have plans and hopes of great works that he would like to produce. He has ambitions to produce an epic (*The Recluse*), but then admits that his intentions remain unrealised, as he continues to experience ‘unruly times’ when his inspiration fails him. This is disheartening since he seems not ‘To lack that first great gift, the vital soul / Nor general Truths’ (I 161-2) nor the ‘Forms, images’ and ‘other aids’ – ‘external things’ that aid a poet in his work. But he is unable to find a suitable topic or theme, and although he displays his knowledge of them by listing numerous examples, none actually prove inspiring. The idea of relating ‘some tale from [his] own heart’ (I 221) is contemplated but abandoned as it is seen to lack foundation. Even his ‘last and favourite aspiration – ‘a philosophic song / Of Truth that cherishes our daily life (I 230-1), proves too great a burden to take on, with its ‘meditations passionate from deep / Recesses in man’s heart, immortal verse / Thoughtfully fitted to the Orphean lyre’ (I 232-4). Coleridge would later respond to Wordsworth’s poem, as ‘an Orphic tale indeed / A Tale divine of high and passionate Thoughts… a linked song of Truth …Not learnt, but native’, in his ‘Poem to William Wordsworth’.

But what Coleridge did not hear, and what was emphasised first by Wordsworth, was that his philosophic song would be of ‘Truth that cherishes our daily life’. The poem

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30 See The Norton *Prelude* pp. 542-3.
that the ‘unfortunate’, overjoyed, youthful, poet does eventually write in his maturity does do just that – setting up the ‘Truth’ of the beauties of everyday human ‘Fancy’ alongside those of the more passionate and sublime activities of divine ‘Imagination’.

In ‘cherishing daily life’ Wordsworth is also adverting to the fact that his philosophical poem will be Aristotelian in its philosophy – concerned with the phenomena of actual daily life, rather than pursuing any idealist or ‘dogmatic’ philosophical position. But for all his plans, at this point in the poem, he lacks any sense of direction, confronted with ethical dilemmas that he does not have the strength of mind to resolve:

Thus from day to day
I live, a mockery of the brotherhood
Of vice and virtue, with no skill to part
Vague longing that is bred by want of power
From paramount impulse not to be withstood, (I 238-42)

That vice and virtue are seen as comprising a ‘brotherhood’, rather than defining pure opposites, reveals something of the Aristotelian form of ethical argumentation and judgement that Wordsworth is utilising in the poem. He laments the fact that he has no skill, that he lacks the capacity, to find a middle path – the virtuous mean – between the two vicious positions that he finds he is trapped in. On the one hand, ‘Vague longing bred by want of power’ incapacitates him, while, on the other, ‘paramount impulse’ overpowers him. What is wanting is some ability to control his inspiration so that he can direct his poetic course and find a virtuous position, a ‘happy’ mean between the two states of mind he find himself oscillating between, uncontrollably. In the course of the poem he will find the ability to distinguish between two contrary states of emotion, and attain the capacity to produce ‘a Work that should endure’ (XIII 278). And, most especially, he will learn ‘to keep / In wholesome separation the two natures / The one that feels, the other that observes (XIII 329-331).

The over-joyed poet, celebrating his reliance on natural inspiration at the very beginning of the poem, is later described as burdened by emotions that are too strong, and lead to overpowering states of feeling that are not productive. They will later be recognised as evidence of a ‘strong disease’ of his mind. The inspired vates poet is at the mercy of his strong emotions, and is incapable of finding the right balance between feeling and thought, emotion and reason, inspiration and art, imagination and technical skill. Like a sailing ship at the mercy of strong winds, but with no crew to haul the ropes or man the tiller, the inspired poet is all at sea, pitching about without any ability to harness his inspiration. Wordsworth does not use this classical commonplace to describe his state of mind because it would be too common, but the descriptions and the rhetoric he does use, reveal a complex use of topics designed to enhance his narrative, and produce poetry that is more effective than that produced solely by inspiration. Central to the rhetorical strategies used to invent the argument of the poem is the setting up of the fundamental dichotomy between strong and mild states of emotion found in classical thought, as defined by Cicero in his Tusculan Disputations, and refined by Quintilian in his Institutes. Certainly there is a ‘blessing in this gentle breeze’ at the very beginning of the poem, as nature smiles on the wandering poet (as she had earlier smiled on James Thomson’s wanderers in The Seasons), but
the ‘gentle’, ‘mild-creative breeze’ with the possible potential to inspire poetic numbers had all too soon become ‘A tempest, a redundant energy / Vexing its own creation (I 46-7).\(^{31}\)

Wordsworth’s sense of despair at his apparent lack of ability to produce poetry is to be brought to a climax in a rhetorical display that marks the conclusion to this opening section. He amplifies his sense of hopelessness, describing his plight in grand language, reminiscent of Shakespeare’s diction and sentiments expressed by Hamlet (in addition to his echo from *Samson Agonistes*), as he pulls out all the stops in his carefully studied display of passion. In his despair he observes that it would be better to indulge in joyful pursuits: ‘to stray about / Voluptuously\(^{32}\) through fields and rural walks / …given up to vacant musings’ (I 252-5). This is the ‘freedom’ that was celebrated in the opening lines of the poem. But the description is now cast in a less positive light, and the careful reader begins to grasp the sense of irony in the ‘too glad’ preamble, in which excess of joy is now understood to be a vice rather than a virtue. The tables have been turned, and Wordsworth can be seen to have presented both sides of the question, in a skilful display of his rhetorical abilities, and his understanding of the relativity of all judgements.

The ‘glad preamble’ presents ‘evidence’ of failed poetic inspiration, while the ‘post-preamble’ passage, describes the speaker’s failure to find a suitable topic for poetic invention, one that might substitute for the fragmentary nature of his inspired utterances. But, as his genial spirits ‘recoil and droop’ and he describes himself seeking ‘repose / In indolence from vain perplexity’, a very timely utterance brings his thoughts relief. A final *exclamatio* turns – as if by accident – into an ‘address’ to the Derwent, as childhood memories come flooding back and the speaker suddenly ‘discovers’ a suitable topic, one that had been hidden in his memory – the hiding place of his power – and his narrative is, finally, underway.

Was it for this
That one, the fairest of all rivers, loved
To blend his murmurs with my nurse’s song,
And from his alder shades and rocky falls,
And from his fords and shallows, sent a voice
That flowed along my dreams? For this didst thou,
O Derwent, travelling over the green plains
Near my ‘sweet birthplace’, didst thou, beauteous stream,
Make ceaseless music through the night and day,
Which with its steady cadence tempering
Our human waywardness, composed my thoughts
To more than infant softness, giving me
Among the fretful dwellings of mankind,
A knowledge, a dim earnest, of the calm
Which nature breathes among the hills and groves? (I 271-285)

The poet, lacking inspiration, and unable to find any suitable topic for invention, turns to the imagination (defined here as his memory) for impetus. But the actual means that give his poetry its power here are rhetorical. Wordsworth’s poetic life, which appeared to have come to nothing, is

\(^{31}\) The meaning here is made clearer in the 1850 text, ‘but is now become’ (1850: I 36).

\(^{32}\) The Latin *Voluptas* carries connotations of decadent, luxurious, joy.
‘carried off’ by his ‘eloquence’ here, as he relies on matters of style, using the figures of *exclamatio* and *apostrophe* to add his own song to that of his nurse and the Derwent.\(^{33}\) The question ‘addressed’ to the Derwent is, of course, a rhetorical one; the *exclamatio* is a dramatic figure of speech intended to express great and genuine feelings of emotion. It refers back to the state of mind described in the previous lines, and Wordsworth’s ‘answer’ to it, is to produce a Thirteen Book poem that refutes any suggestion that he had actually recoiled, or drooped or sought ‘repose / In Indolence’. It is highly significant that, in the process of introducing his argument to Coleridge, Wordsworth describes the river Derwent, the voice of nature, *blending* his murmurs with Wordsworth’s nurse’s song. The ‘song’ of these ‘divine’ and ‘human’ voices compose a two-part harmony, making ‘ceaseless music’ as their two voices sing together, as one. This is not a ‘synthesis’ in which either party dominates or is subsumed by the other, but a ‘harmonious interchange’. The record of Wordsworth’s life begins by acknowledging that as a child he was fostered alike ‘by beauty and by fear’, and concludes with a celebration of a civilised Imagination, one ‘softened down’ by the work of Fancy, as represented in the beauties of the human ‘moral’ world. (XIII 289-313). This understanding, voiced also in the original opening lines composed at Goslar (Ms JJ), was recorded well before the argument over ‘imagination’ in 1802, in which Coleridge had argued that the best poetry was the product of an innate imaginative ability – the best poets, divinely inspired. It would appear that the difference of opinion had existed much earlier, and that Wordsworth was voicing his own opinion as he thought about his role as a poet, and his relationship to Coleridge, while at Goslar.

The ‘glad preamble’ appears to glamorise the belief that poets are born not made, but then displays the insufficiency of natural inspiration – only to *then* produce work of great ability. Wordsworth works with consummate rhetorical skill to capture the mind of his reader and exploit his or her feelings as he turns this way and that, in the ‘turnings intricate’ of his artful verse. But the tension between reliance on inspiration, and the need for craft, is revisited in the course of the poem and is rendered more complex in the ‘argument’ that Wordsworth invents in an imagined ‘debate’ with Coleridge on the matter. The narrative differentiates between the stronger effusions felt in youth – and understood then as evidence of prophetic election – and the milder forms of expression practised by a skilful artist who has learnt to manipulate the reader’s mind into believing and ‘seeing’ what is represented in words on a page. Wordsworth’s argument with Coleridge challenged Coleridge’s belief that poets are born not made, that the best poets rely upon ‘the gift of Imagination in the highest and strictest sense of the word’. Instead Wordsworth displays the proofs of his own rhetorical art in which ‘divine’, sublime, Imagination is blended with ‘human’, beautiful, Fancy. Finally, in the peroration, after having given the poetic ‘history’ of the growth of his own mind, Wordsworth calls on Coleridge to judge his argument and, if won over, to join him as a ‘Prophet of Nature’.

\(^{33}\) Tradition had it, following Quintilian, that the figure of apostrophe should be avoided in the exordium, so that its usage here might be seen to signal a turn from the matter of the *exordium* to that of the narrative. See J. Douglas Kneale, ‘Romantic Aversions: Apostrophe Reconsidered’ in *Rhetorical Traditions and British Romantic Literature* pp 149-166.
Another way of reading *The Prelude* is to recognise that the form of its argument bears a relationship to a classical form of disputation known as the *schola*, (a Latinized form of the Greek *scholē*). In such a form of argument a thesis is set down at the beginning of the work and is then discussed by the writer, whose intention is to clarify the topic by arguing against it. Cicero uses this form in his *Tusculan Disputations* and Margaret Graver describes it in the Introduction to her translation and commentary of Books 3 and 4 of Cicero’s text.\(^{34}\)

In place of dialectical exchange between named speakers the *schola* gives the lion’s share of the discussion to an unnamed principle speaker whose voice will usually be recognised as that of the author himself. The exceptionally docile interlocutor speaks only at the beginning and closing and at points of transition. His chief function is to supply the thesis, a one-sentence statement of opinion which is eventually proved wrong. (*Cicero on the Emotions* xv)

The form is not a perfect fit, Coleridge does not actually set out the thesis, nor does he speak in the poem. But the actions of the inspired poet in the glad preamble exemplify Coleridge’s belief that the best poet possesses, or is possessed by, ‘the vision and faculty divine’. And, at critical moments within the poem Wordsworth, as narrator, invokes Coleridge’s presence and turns, specifically, to address him. Although Coleridge is not literally given voice, his thoughts and experiences are represented or referred to by Wordsworth, as he treats the topics he is declaiming on with Coleridge’s interests very much in mind. I find Graver’s description highly suggestive of the kind of argument that Wordsworth frames in *The Prelude*, taking a philosophical form of discussion, and adopting it to poetic ends in a ‘philosophic poem’. Wordsworth’s ‘Address to Coleridge’ can therefore be read as a response to the thesis ‘that poets are born not made’, one that Coleridge was known to hold. The invitation extended to Coleridge to join Wordsworth, on his terms, as a ‘Prophet of Nature’ at the end of the poem is a final rhetorical flourish, perfectly executed, and an epitome of rhetorical skill, as Wordsworth makes his ultimate, impassioned plea for Coleridge’s mind.

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\(^{34}\) *Cicero on the Emotions: Tusculan Disputations 3 and 4.*
Chapter 4

Imagination

I. Images and Imaginations

In 1814, having spent the previous seven years in something of a state of exile from his public duties as a Poet, Wordsworth published *The Excursion*, which was announced as being the second part of his projected *magnum opus*, ‘The Recluse’.\(^1\) The work was prefaced by a dedication to Lord Lonsdale, some brief introductory remarks referring to the genesis of the poem, and an inspiring *Prospectus* describing Wordsworth’s subject matter: ‘On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life’. God, conceived of in Christian terms as a transcendent deity, is not mentioned, and although ‘Jehovah’ is named, he is bypassed ‘unalarmed’ as the poet, rather irreverently, announces that his subject matter is even more awe-full; it concerns what takes place within the ‘Mind of Man / My haunt and main region of my song’ (*PW* V 4).\(^2\)

The lines comprising the *Prospectus* were written some fourteen years earlier, and present ideas that inspired Wordsworth at a time when he was also defining his theory of poetry. Some of the more pious readers of *The Excursion* would have considered his remarks in the *Prospectus* to be at odds with the Christian sentiments expressed by the Pastor at the close of the poem. And Wordsworth was questioned, at the time, as to whether or not the poem suggested the worship of Nature, rather than God. Around the time the lines were originally written Wordsworth would still have been described as a ‘semi-Atheist’ by Coleridge, and held strong sympathies for ‘pagan’ ideas about religion that were in conflict with Coleridge’s explicit Christian beliefs. Where Coleridge looked to Augustine, who saw everything as pre-ordained by God, Wordsworth was more Celtic in his Christianity. Like the Cambrian theologian Pelagius – who Augustine accused of defining a Christianity that was no more than an extension of Celtic druidism – Wordsworth believed that human beings also had moral responsibility for their own actions because ‘God’ had given them free-will.\(^3\) Coleridge, who was notoriously lacking in will, found Augustine’s notion of salvation for true believers a more promising means of saving his own soul.

Pelagius’ belief that there was something of a struggle between the grace of God and the will of his people (the Pelagian heresy), lay at the heart of Celtic Christianity, and Wordsworth’s Christianity, when he later accepted the need for the state religion (the Anglican Church) to direct the *mores* of the British people, remained more Pelagian than Augustinian. Standing in his churchyard in the mountains Wordsworth would have believed that God’s grace was to be seen in all aspects of the

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\(^1\) In the wake of Francis Jeffrey’s attacks on *Poems in Two Volumes*, Wordsworth refrained from publishing any more poetry until he had completed *The Excursion*.

\(^2\) Meyer Abrams made his interpretation of the argument of Prospectus central to his thesis about Wordsworth’s Romantic identity in *Natural Supernaturalism*.

\(^3\) For a brief discussion of Pelagius, see ‘The Pelagian Controversy’ in Bertrand Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy*, pp. 383-5.
natural world. This was a belief held earlier by the druids – and by the ancient Stoic philosophers who also accepted that the divinity could reside in the ‘mind of man’ and existed in nature, and as ‘Nature’, a divine power that did not exist apart from the physical world. This understanding was unacceptable to Augustine, who saw Pelagius’ beliefs as heretical, and instead preached a dualistic doctrine and the existence of a transcendent deity.4

The Excursion, however, does not pursue an argument that arrives at any ‘certain’ conclusions about theology, or about the mind of Man, Nature or Human Life. It is not dogmatic in its philosophising, and presents a philosophical dialogue set in ‘something of a dramatic form’ in which the characters speak their minds, and the reader is left to make his or her own conclusions, based on the ‘evidence’ presented. The characters in the poem ‘invent’ a number of ‘arguments’ that are discussed, at some length, as each of the eloquent speakers discourse on the matter at hand, addressing each other, and also the mind of the reader. There is no final resolution to this debate, or disputation, and readers are left to draw their own conclusions from the protracted dialogical display they have just ‘witnessed’, in their mind’s eye, their imagination, as they read the poem.

In this study I understand the term ‘imagination’ to refer, primarily, to the image-making faculty of the mind, the traditional understanding described by Aristotle in De Anima, as I argue that Wordsworth held the same understanding, and never intended the later more ‘Romantic’ definition of the word. Aristotle had written that:

To the thinking soul images (phantasiae) serve as if they were contents of perception (and when it asserts or denies them to be good or bad it avoids or pursues them). That is why the soul never thinks without an image’. (De Anima III 7. 431)

The classical poetic tradition placed much emphasis on painting pictures in the mind’s eye of its audience/readers, and I argue that Wordsworth’s understanding of ‘imagination’ was primarily concerned with this function. At the same time, our phantasiae – the ‘impressions’ or ‘appearances’ in our minds which can be described also as ‘fancies’ (from the Greek term), or as ‘imaginations’ (from the Latin imago), are necessarily tied to sense impressions. In summarising his comments Aristotle made two further points:

No one can learn or understand anything in the absence of sense, and when the mind is actively aware of anything it is necessarily aware of it along with an image; for images are like sensuous contents except in that they contain no matter’. (III 7. 432)

Aristotle also maintained that although concepts were not images, ‘they necessarily involve them’. His thinking on the matter was both metaphorical and literal, as he tried to account for philosophical distinctions as well as psychological experiences, and it is his more empirical concern with the

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4 Wordsworth’s more educated contemporary readers would have recognised that a description of a priest presiding over a churchyard in the mountains could be an allusion to Rousseau’s Savoyard vicar whose controversial creed had earned Rousseau infamy in Europe among the established Christian orthodoxy.
‘language of the sense’\(^5\) that Wordsworth followed in his conceptualisation of imagination, which was tied more closely to Aristotle’s, rather than Locke’s, or Hartley’s, empiricism.

*The Excursion* is written as a narrative, presented in an imaginative ‘poetic’ form to facilitate the reader imagining that he or she had actually participated in the philosophical dialogues that are rehearsed. Through such imaginative participation Wordsworth had hoped that his discourse might have made a substantial impression on the minds of his readers and have served to educate their ‘imagination’. In this use of the term, the reader’s ‘imagination’ is understood to describe his or her enduring perception of things in the mind, as well as the faculty that enables them to remain in the memory as an aspect of a ‘self’ that persists in time. In this sense someone’s ‘imagination’ might be understood as that person’s sense of self-identity or soul, a reading that Thomas McFarland discusses in his study *Originality and Imagination*.\(^6\) Wordsworth uses imagination in a similar sense in his famous letter to Lady Beaumont in 1807 in which he also comments upon the diminished capacity of most of his reader’s imaginations.\(^7\)

The lines set out as a *Prospectus* were provocative, and Wordsworth obviously considered them important as he used them to place the arguments of *The Excursion* in some kind of a context, and I will return to them, briefly, in my conclusion. The Address to Lord Lonsdale that preceded the brief Preface, subtly distinguishes his work as a poet ‘Now’, from that of his youth, when he ‘roamed, on youthful pleasures bent; / And mused in rocky cell or sylvan tent / Beside swift-flowing Lowther’s current clear’ (*PW* V 1). The ‘Work’ he presents to Lonsdale ‘now’ is something quite different from the fanciful and ‘inspired’ productions of his youth. His prefatory remarks explain how *The Excursion* came to be the second part of ‘The Recluse’, relating that when, several years ago, he had retired to his native mountains, with the hope of being enabled to construct a literary work that might live, it was a reasonable thing that he should take a review of his own mind, and examine how far Nature and Education had qualified him for such employment. As subsidiary to this preparation he undertook to record, in verse, the origin and progress of his own powers, as far as he was acquainted with them. That Work, addressed to a dear Friend, most distinguished for his knowledge and genius, has long been finished; and the result of the investigation which gave rise to it was a determination to compose a philosophical poem, containing views of Man, Nature, and Society; and to be entitled, The Recluse. (*PW* V 2)\(^8\)

The ‘Work, addressed to a dear Friend’ – the 1805 *Prelude* – is, significantly, described as ‘long finished’. Its completion was marked by the fact that, in finishing it, Wordsworth felt able to declare himself ‘capable / Of building up a Work that should endure’ (*Prelude* XIII 277-8). And in the

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\(^5\) *Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey*.

\(^6\) In *The Prelude* Wordsworth refers to ‘The soul, [as] the imagination of the whole’ (XIII 65). Hume’s sceptical claim that he could find no evidence for the continuity of his consciousness had raised questions about the reality of this ‘soul’ for eighteenth-century thinkers.

\(^7\) (*MY* I 146) I discuss this letter below.

\(^8\) The ‘Address to Coleridge’, though completed in 1805, describes the growth of Wordsworth’s mind up to the time of the Alfoxden year; the time when he first voiced his determination to write an epic giving ‘pictures of Nature, Man, and Society’.
passage, in *The Prelude* that follows immediately after this declaration of his capability, Wordsworth formally acknowledges the role played by ‘Education’ working in tandem with ‘Nature’.

In the Preface he then describes the relationship of this former ‘Work’ to ‘The Recluse’ as that of an ‘ante-chapel…to the body of a gothic church’. His other published ‘minor pieces’ are likened to ‘little cells, oratories, and sepulchral recesses’ as they too are seen to contribute to the grand and unified structure of his mature poetic enterprise – one that he hopes will both ‘please’ and ‘benefit his countrymen’. Having described something of the genesis of *The Excursion* – as well as revealing that he has not been idle as a poet, over the past seven years – Wordsworth concludes his introductory remarks by making the point that he does not offer any guidance as to how the poem should be read – he makes no further comment about his philosophy, or his poetic theory, or his art:

> It is not the Author’s intention formally to announce a system: it was more animating to him to proceed in a different course; and if he shall succeed in conveying to the mind clear thoughts, lively images and strong feelings, the Reader will have no difficulty in extracting the system for himself. (*PW* V 2)

It would have been clear to Wordsworth’s classically educated readers that the ‘system’ being used in *The Excursion*, was based on rhetorical principles that owed much to Ciceronian oratory, with its aims to ‘instruct’, ‘please’ and ‘move’ the minds of its auditors; and that the poem’s form, as a philosophical disputation, was derived from the example of Cicero’s philosophical works. Cicero had drawn, in turn, on Aristotle’s use of appeals to *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos*, the three *pisteis* that Aristotle defined in his *Rhetoric*, and which Cicero adopted and adapted to his own ends in his work. The correlation between ‘clear thoughts’ and appeals to *logos*, and that between ‘strong feelings’ and appeals to *pathos*, is relatively clear. That Wordsworth should link ‘lively images’ with appeals to *ethos* is not so self-evident. But when ‘lively images’ are also considered as ‘imaginations’, and Wordsworth’s commentary on his poetic art in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* is taken into account, his ‘system’ becomes clearer – but only if his *classical* concerns with ‘imagination’ and with ‘imagery’ are both recognised and understood. I argue here that they have not been, and that this is primarily due to the uncritical assumptions of those who continue to read Wordsworth’s works, and his appreciation of ‘imagination’, according to Coleridge’s commentary on Wordsworth’s theory in *Biographia Literaria*. Wordsworth was concerned with concepts of *ethos* as they related to both the moral character of his ideal poet, and the imaginative means by which he delivered his ‘message’ to his reader.

Having looked at Wordsworth’s commentary about his poetic aspirations in 1814, it is also useful to look at an earlier discussion of his poetic aims, as expressed in the letter to Lady Beaumont in May 1807 after the publication of *Poems in Two Volumes*. In the letter he famously defended his new poetry against the ignorance of the reading public who he described as lacking sufficient imagination to appreciate his art. He refers to the ‘pure absolute honest ignorance, in which all worldlings of every rank and situation must be enveloped, with respect to the *thoughts, feelings,* and

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9 See Kenneth Johnston, *Wordsworth and The Recluse*, for a detailed analysis of the approximate plan and chronology of *The Recluse.*
images, on which the life of my poetry depends’ (MY I 145, my italics). He goes on to refer to the ‘hurry of images’ presented by everyday people too caught up in their daily business of ‘vanity’ and ‘selfishness’ to take any time to reflect on their own imaginations, and he adds an ethical dimension to his criticism.

It is an awful truth, that there neither is, nor can be, any genuine enjoyment of Poetry among nineteen out of twenty of those persons…This is a truth, and an awful one, because to be incapable of a feeling of Poetry in my sense of the word is to be without love of human nature and reverence for God.

Continuing in this line of thought, he reassures Lady Beaumont that, despite popular opinion, the ‘destiny’ of his poems will be:

to console the afflicted, to add sunshine to daylight by making the happy happier, to teach that young and gracious of every age, to see, to think and feel and therefore to become more actively and securely virtuous; this is their office…(my italics)

However, having stressed the seriousness of his art of poetry and the fact that it has an ‘office’ to perform, he then concedes that the vast majority of his readers – even those ‘grave, kindly–natured worthy persons, who would be pleased if they could’ – lack an essential capacity to understand his poems: ‘their imagination has slept; and the voice which is the voice of my Poetry without Imagination cannot be heard’.

Wordsworth’s remarks, which claim that there is much more to his ‘simple’ poetry than meets the eye, were written in a private letter and portray personal feelings that he would not have intended for public reading. His comments provide evidence of the moral seriousness of his aims, which are reinforced later in the letter when he writes, ‘There is scarcely one of my Poems which does not aim to direct the attention to some moral sentiment, or to some general principle, or law of thought, or of our intellectual constitution’ (148). In acknowledging that the imaginations of most of his readers are asleep, and that they are therefore unable to hear the voice of his poetry, Wordsworth also expressed his belief ‘that every great and original writer, in proportion as he is great and original, must himself create the taste by which he is to be relished; he must teach the art by which he is to be seen.’ This Wordsworth understood to be ‘a work of time’ and he concluded his letter by writing:

I doubt not that you will share with me an invincible confidence that my writings (and among them these little Poems) will co-operate with the benign tendencies in human nature and society, wherever found: and that they will, in their degree, be efficacious in making men wiser, better and happier. (MY I 150)

Wordsworth’s comments demonstrate the high moral seriousness of his poetic art; and it is unfortunate that they have been used by some critics to present evidence of his ‘egotism’.

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10 Wordsworth is using the three-string, *logos, ethos, pathos* formula derived from Cicero and Quintilian here - and repeats it also a few lines later.

11 Wordsworth writes that Coleridge may have already told her of this belief in an earlier conversation.
Before leaving the letter it is also important to note Wordsworth’s comments about the art of his imagination in his new poems which:

Taken collectively, fix the attention upon a subject eminently poetical, viz., the interest which objects in nature derive from the predominance of certain affections more or less permanent, more or less capable of salutary renewal in the mind of the being contemplating these objects. *(MYI 147)*

His remarks describe an imaginative art of poetry in which natural objects are grasped by the minds, or imaginations, of those who behold them and are then held in the imagination of the perceiver. But, as Wordsworth’s earlier comments make clear, the ability of the percipient to contemplate ‘objects in nature’ in a proper manner, relies upon ‘the predominance of certain affections’ already being present in the imagination of the contemplator. This process requires an educated imagination, and Wordsworth’s poetry is intended to act in a manner that will ‘teach that young and gracious of every age, to see, to think and feel and therefore to become more actively and securely virtuous’ (my italics).

In summing up his remarks about the imaginative activity required to appreciate his new poems Wordsworth states that, ‘This is poetic, and essentially poetic, and why? because it is creative’. Wordsworth’s understanding of the ‘poetic’ or ‘creative’ imagination was based on a very classical understanding of the imagination rather than the more ‘Romantic’ concept entertained by Coleridge.

### II. Coleridgean Imaginations

Imagination does not appear to be a topic of discussion in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, though it is later discussed in the 1815 Preface and in the *Essay Supplementary* where Wordsworth’s comments are made in response to remarks made earlier by Coleridge. I will be arguing here, however, that ‘imagination’ does play a part in the theory of the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, which reinvents a very classical appreciation of imagination rather than inventing any novel ‘romantic manifesto’. When Coleridge had written about his ‘radical Difference’ of opinion with Wordsworth and had told Southey he was intending to write his own ‘Canons on Criticism’ in response, he was responding to the content of Wordsworth’s 1802 additions to the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. I have suggested that this issue was something Coleridge discussed with Wordsworth again, without any sense of resolution, shortly before he left the Lake District for Malta in 1804. During Coleridge’s absence Wordsworth decided to address this question and, in expanding the ‘Two-Part Prelude’, he not only extended the period of time he had intended to cover, but also expanded the scope of his argument. Instead of completing the poem with a description of his Cambridge years, he extended the

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12 The note to ‘The Thorn’, added in 1800, describes ‘the reasonable share of imagination’ that ‘Superstitious men’ have in contrast to their being ‘utterly destitute of fancy, the power by which pleasure and surprise are excited by sudden varieties of situation and accumulated imagery’. In commenting on the word ‘imagination’, Wordsworth describes it as ‘the faculty which produces impressive effects out of simple images’ *(MLB 37)*.

13 Coleridge had written of ‘the imagination, or shaping and modifying power’ and ‘the fancy, or the aggregative and associative power’ in *Omniania; or Horae Otiiosiores*, a miscellany of essays and notes he published with Robert Southey in 1812. See the edition edited by Robert Gittings, p. 182.
narrative to include more intimate details of his transition from youth to maturity, incorporating a moral theme, and bringing the history of his life up to the period when he ‘wantoned in wild poesy’ with Coleridge at Alfoxden. This ‘justification’ of his own life was not limited to providing the details of his personal history, it was also composed as a carefully constructed argument, a disputation, addressed to Coleridge, that defined, and defended his own understanding of the role that Imagination and Fancy played in his own poetic productions. In his ‘poem to Coleridge’, Wordsworth gives a detailed justification of his own position in a work that also demonstrates his ‘knowledge’, and the ‘power’ of his imagination, as he attempts to persuade Coleridge to change his mind on the matter of ‘Imagination’. In concluding the poem Wordsworth hoped that the two men might resolve their differences and work together again as ‘joint labourers in a work…Of …redemption’ (Prelude XIII 439-441).

That The Prelude addresses an argument to Coleridge about the nature of Imagination is something that does not appear to have been understood by later criticism, which originally focussed on the published 1850 text in which that argument was obscured. In studying the poem here in its original form I stress that form as an ‘Address’, and refer readers to Ernest De Selincourt’s 1925 parallel text edition in which he reproduced a photograph of the beautifully executed calligraphy of the ‘title page’, for the fair copy of the 1805 poem (Ms B) which then had no title:

Poem
Title not yet fixed upon

By
William Wordsworth
Addressed to
S.T. Coleridge

Wordworth changed his mind on certain matters after 1806, when Ms A and B were finally completed, and in revising parts of the poem after 1816 to make it more suitable for a general audience, he upset the ‘logic’ of his original, carefully balanced, argument. He also added passages that reflected a new sense of Christian piety that was at odds with elements of his earlier classical humanist ideals. This has led to some confusion about interpretation of The Prelude, with the later text being read as justifying different beliefs about Imagination to those intended by Wordsworth in 1805. I read the 1805 poem as Wordsworth’s attempt to have the ‘last word’ in an argument with Coleridge over ‘Imagination’ and poetic theory that had begun in 1802 in the wake of the publication of the additions to the Preface to Lyrical Ballads.

But any hope Wordsworth had entertained that Coleridge would be able to understand his argument, or be won over to his side, would have been dashed when he met Coleridge again after his return to England. Coleridge was in a worse state of mental and physical health than before he left, and the entire Wordsworth circle were deeply shocked by the great change in his character. The pathetic character sketch, ‘The Complaint’, penned by Wordsworth a few weeks before he actually read his ‘poem to Coleridge’ to him, paints a poignant picture. It marks the end of any hope Wordsworth might have had of recovering a real sense of companionship with Coleridge again:
There is a change – and I am poor;
Your love hath been, nor long ago,
A fountain at my fond heart’s door,
Whose only business was to flow;
And flow it did; not taking heed
Of its own bounty, or my need.

What happy moments did I count!
Blest was I then all bliss above!
Now, for that consecrated fount
Of murmuring, sparkling, living love,
What have I? shall I dare tell?
A comfortless and hidden well.

A well of love – it may be deep -
I trust it is, - and never dry:
What matter? if the waters sleep
In silence and obscurity.
- Such change, and at the very door
Of my fond heart, hath made me poor. (PW II 34)

The pathos of the description is offset by Wordsworth’s characteristic sense of irony; there are
two subtle digs at Coleridge in the poem that reflect something of Wordsworth’s discriminating
intellect. The first, at the end of the opening stanza, relates that Coleridge’s ‘only business’ was his
ability to spout forth endless advice, without actually taking into account the needs of his audience, or
applying his wisdom to his own case. But in Wordsworth’s epideictic the blame attributed to
Coleridge for this characteristic is balanced by the praise for his ‘murmuring, sparkling, living love’,
which Wordsworth consistently acknowledged to be the most significant aspect, for him, of
Coleridge’s character. It was not his intellect, but his love and friendship that Wordsworth had valued
the most in the early days of their relationship, and it was this loss that is lamented in the poem. The
second dig at Coleridge is implied in the placing of the question mark in the last stanza, and sees
Wordsworth punning at Coleridge’s expense, questioning whether Coleridge’s ‘matter’ actually had
any substance.

But in addition to seeming to lack any coherent ‘matter’ in his own thoughts at this time,
Coleridge was also unable to appreciate the matter of the argument Wordsworth had set out in his
thirteen–book Address. Ironically, Wordsworth’s aim in writing his Address was never realised. The
reading of The Prelude to Coleridge at Coleorton, over the holy nights of Christmas 1806, might be
seen as one of the greatest ‘misreadings’ in English literature. Wordsworth’s rhetoric was effective on

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14 In the Fenwick Note to A Complaint Wordsworth records: ‘Suggested by a change in the manners of a friend. Town-End 1806’ (IFN 9). (The place was later revised, in pencil, to Coleorton). This Character study should be compared with the similar exercise, carried out with an equally ironic stance in 1802, in ‘Stanzas Written in my Pocket-Copy of Thomson’s Castle of Indolence, in which Wordsworth had compared his and Coleridge’s characters. The poem also provides evidence that he had made a more objective analysis of his own earlier glorification of states of indolence. He can even be seen to have identified his earlier state of mind with that of Narcissus, in describing himself as a ‘withered flower’ (line 20). In his early youth he confessed to placing Ovid above Virgil in his estimation, and had read Bishop Sandy’s translation of Ovid’s Metamorphoses at Hawkeshead. (See IFN 42). The daffodil is of the genus narcissi.
two points, but his actual argument fell on deaf ears. Coleridge was won over by Wordsworth’s ‘manner’, as Wordsworth demonstrated his sophisticated rhetorical skill. He was both deeply ‘moved’ by Wordsworth’s appeals to pathos, and ‘pleased’ by Wordsworth’s ethos: which he saw, mistakenly, as that of an inspired Orphic bard. But he was not capable of being ‘instructed’ by the ‘matter’ of Wordsworth’s logos. Wordsworth failed to convince him of his alternative, more classic, appreciation of ‘imagination’. He was no more persuaded to accept Wordsworth’s stoic philosophical beliefs in January 1807 than he had been in 1798, when Wordsworth would have read him ‘Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey’.

Coleridge responded to Wordsworth’s epic by writing his own poem: To William Wordsworth. In his appreciation of Wordsworth’s work he shows that he had no idea that the Address was both a ‘defence’ of Wordsworth’s poetic art or that it re-iterated his differing understanding of ‘imagination’. Nor was he at all persuaded that he should join Wordsworth as a ‘Prophet of Nature’ on Wordsworth’s terms. Unconscious of Wordsworth’s actual claims in his Address, Coleridge defined Wordsworth’s art quite differently. Wordsworth’s ‘history’ of the growth of his mind is described as something ‘More than historic’, it is a ‘prophetic Lay…An Orphic Tale indeed / A Tale divine of high and passionate thoughts…a Song of Truth…Not learnt, but native, her own natural notes!’ In his response Coleridge effectively denies Wordsworth’s voice its own authority, concluding his response by maintaining that Wordsworth’s ‘Lay’ was so powerful that when he finally rose after it had ceased, he ‘found himself in prayer’. As would also happen some nine year later – when he did actually address his differences with Wordsworth in writing Biographia Literaria – his great praise of Wordsworth occurs as a means of denying any recognition of his actual power as a poet. It was in Biographia that Coleridge finally produced his more considered and far more significant response to the argument over imagination, and his last word on the topic would become definitive for later literary criticism.

In Biographia, Coleridge set out to ridicule Wordsworth’s theoretical claims in order to prove that his success as a poet (and not a philosopher) depended on his ‘Imagination’. In his opening paragraph Coleridge introduced the work as a ‘statement of my principles in politics, religion and philosophy, and the application of the rules deduced from philosophical principles to poetry and criticism’. And of the objects which he proposed to himself:

it was not the least important to effect, as far as possible, a settlement of the long-continued controversy concerning the true nature of poetic diction, and at the same time to define with the utmost impartiality the real poetic character of the poet by whose writings this controversy was first kindled and has been since fuelled and fired. (BL I 1)

It is clear that in 1815, when Coleridge was penning these lines he was still engaged in a dispute with Wordsworth that remained a burning issue, and Wordsworth is described as having continued to feed the flames of the controversy. Coleridge’s rhetoric implies that Wordsworth’s remarks are of an

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15 ‘To William Wordsworth: Lines composed, for the greater part on the night on which he finished the recitation of his poem (in thirteen books) concerning the growth and history of his own mind’. For the full text of the poem as written in 1806 see NP pp. 542-4.
inflammatory nature and he considers them to be somewhat out of line with his ‘real poetic character’ – which Coleridge suggests he understands better than Wordsworth himself. The implication is that Wordsworth is deceiving himself. At the same time, Coleridge makes a claim of ‘utmost impartiality’ for his own attempts at definition, in an attempt to gain a sympathetic hearing from his reader. He argues that Wordsworth’s theorising was both ‘impracticable’ and ‘useless’ in order to assert that he was a great poet by virtue of his imaginative genius – because of his romantic character, not because of his poetic art. At the end of his critical study of Wordsworth’s poetry Coleridge ‘Lastly and pre-eminently’ challenged for Wordsworth, ‘the gift of imagination in the highest and strictest sense of the word’ (XXII 271). It was a definition that was made on Coleridge’s rather than Wordsworth’s terms and asserts that Coleridge, as a ‘critical’ philosopher, has been able to define the real nature of Wordsworth’s genius as a true poet - one born not made.

Coleridge’s sleight of hand in *Biographia* has led many critics into believing in a set of ‘uncritical assumptions’ about Wordsworth that have, over time, become incorporated into our reading of Wordsworth as facts, and have indeed come to attain the status of a ‘Romantic Ideology’. Coleridge’s representation of Wordsworth appears to have been based on his own ideological presuppositions, since he failed to actually engage with Wordsworth’s theory, nor did he manage to produce the deduction from first principles that he had promised to set out in his ‘definition’ of ‘Imagination’. It is a moot point whether Coleridge actually believed that his representation of Wordsworth was the truth of the matter, or whether he had deduced his own ideal model of ‘the poet’ whose success, like that of Milton, was dependent upon ‘the gift of imagination in the highest and strictest sense of the word’, and then chose Wordsworth as his exemplar. Whatever his motivation, which was linked to the emotional nature of his relationship with Wordsworth, he was quite clear in defining his intentions at the time that he had completed his ‘criticism’ of Wordsworth in 1815. While he represented himself to the public as writing about Wordsworth with ‘utmost impartiality’, he was more candid in a letter to a friend, Dr Brabant, to whom he related:

I have given a full account (raisonné) of the Controversy concerning Wordsworth’s Poems and Theory, in which my name has been so constantly included – I have no doubt, that Wordsworth will be displeased – but I have done my Duty to myself and to the Public, in (as I believe) compleatly subverting the Theory & in proving that the Poet has never acted on it except in particular Stanzas which are the Blots of his Composition. (CL III. 579)

Coleridge intended that his remarks in *Biographia* would be seen to have resolved the differences between the two men, and to suggest that their opinions were really very similar; and several later critics have, as a result, drawn the same conclusions. But the work was a propaganda

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16 *BL* XVIII 210
17 A representative study of such a belief can be found in James A. Heffernan’s *Wordsworth’s Theory of Poetry: The Transforming Imagination* (1969). In his prefatory remarks, Heffernan states that ‘no one has yet fully explained how Wordsworth - the pioneer of English Romanticism - conceived of imagination’. His study of Wordsworth’s theory bravely sets out to rectify that omission. Heffernan begins his research with the 1800 Preface and neglects Wordsworth’s earlier formative texts - an indication of the changes in Wordsworth studies in the last half-century. On the question of ‘Imagination’ and ‘Fancy’ Heffernan concludes: ‘Basically
exercise representing Coleridge’s biased opinions on the matter, as he quite deliberately, and publicly, ‘corrected’ Wordsworth’s ‘mistaken’ opinions, and appeared to be doing Wordsworth a favour by rescuing him from his ignorance, and providing a more ‘philosophical’ understanding of his genius. Unfortunately for the history of Wordsworth criticism, it is Coleridge’s ‘last word’ on the argument over imagination, as presented in Biographia Literaria, that many ‘critical’ readers of The Prelude turn to for guidance. It was Coleridge’s *logos* that was later used to set down the parameters by which poetry would be studied, Imagination understood, and Wordsworth interpreted.

Readers of Biographia, in 1817, knew nothing of Wordsworth’s comments on ‘Imagination’ in his still private ‘Address to Coleridge’. But readers of Biographia after 1850 (who had also read The Prelude) presumed a correspondence between Wordsworth’s use of the word, and Coleridge’s. Since they had no other context that might have guided their reading they made the assumption that Wordsworth was using the term as Coleridge understood it. This was something that Coleridge’s treatment of Wordsworth in Biographia encouraged but which, I argue here, was neither necessary, nor correct. Wordsworth’s comments on imagination in the Preface to his Poems of 1815 and in the Essay Supplementary show that he had not changed his mind by then, and Coleridge’s treatment of the topic in Biographia did not cause him to change it later.

To argue that Coleridge’s famous remarks about ‘The Imagination’ in Biographia Literaria are not relevant to Wordsworth’s treatment of ‘Imagination’ in The Prelude is to contradict the editorial opinion expressed by the editors of the Norton Prelude – Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams and Stephen Gill. Jonathan Wordsworth’s notes to The Prelude, in both the Norton, and his Penguin edition of the poem, refer readers to Chapter 13 of Biographia in the expectation that Coleridge’s description of ‘The Imagination’ as a transcendental power of the mind might help clarify Wordsworth’s use of the term in The Prelude. W. J. B. Owen, in an essay entitled ‘Wordsworth’s Imagination’, was also committed to the belief that Wordsworth’s understanding of Imagination concurred with that of Coleridge:

> Wordsworth made many attempts to define and illustrate the faculty which he and others of the Romantic generation called Imagination, but with the exception of the Preface of 1815 he made no effort to produce a sustained, formal theory of its nature and operations. This paper attempts to survey Wordsworth’s views of the imagination, to draw attention to some difficulties of logic in them, and to impose on them whatever logic seems possible. An overall control, implicit or explicit, of my observations will be Coleridge’s definitions, in Biographia Literaria Chapter 13, of the Primary and Secondary Imagination, which I need not cite here in detail.18

Owen obviously thought that Wordsworth had not managed ‘to produce a sustained, formal theory’ of the nature and operations of a faculty called Imagination in the Preface of 1815. He was therefore determined to help define Wordsworth’s views for him, by drawing attention to ‘some difficulties of logic in them’ and using his knowledge, as a critic, he intended to ‘impose on them

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whatever logic’ he deemed ‘possible’. His attitude reflects that of Coleridge, and Owen sincerely believed that Coleridge’s definitions in *Biographia Literaria* Chapter 13 could, and indeed should, be used to define ‘Wordsworth’s Imagination’. He also considered that his informed readers would know them well enough for him not to need to cite them in any detail. Coleridge’s authority on the matter is taken for granted.

But Wordsworth actively resisted thinking in terms that limited his understanding to definitions controlled by purely logical arguments; and the failure of critics to appreciate this fundamental aspect of Wordsworth’s thinking has led to a critical tradition that feels justified in accusing Wordsworth of a ‘rather confused anti-intellectualism’, while praising Coleridge for his ‘impressive analysis of the poetic imagination’.19 I am concerned to defend Wordsworth’s intellectual prowess, and suggest that those critics who pride themselves on their logical abilities, and judge Wordsworth for lacking them, have failed to understand Wordsworth’s imagination and the fact that he expressed his ideas according to a rhetorical dialectic, rather than a strictly logical one. Coleridge was opposed to such a form of rhetorical argumentation because it lacked the rigorous logical thinking he had decided to pursue in his own enquiries, following the example of Kant. Literary critics trained in a tradition strongly indebted to Coleridgean ideals also find Wordsworth’s manner of reasoning ‘illogical’. But it was a form of argument set down by Aristotle, whose example, as a philosopher, Wordsworth followed.

The idea that Wordsworth was writing about imagination as a ‘creative’ or ‘Romantic’ power of the poetic mind, as understood by Coleridge, continues to have some currency. Kenneth Johnston had assumed this when he wrote *Wordsworth and The Recluse*, and his reading of Wordsworth there is structured accordingly. In his prefatory remarks he asserted that ‘Wordsworth and Coleridge, like most post-Kantian Idealists of the time, celebrated the creative imagination’ (xv). This was a commonplace of Wordsworth criticism in the 1970s and early 1980s, but it is one I am determined to argue against here. I assert that Wordsworth was not a post-Kantian idealist when he wrote his ‘Address to Coleridge’, which refutes Kantian theory. Nor was he one when he wrote *The Excursion* – the only definite part of ‘The Recluse’ ever finished. Similarly, in the Introduction to the Oxford Casebook, *William Wordsworth’s ‘The Prelude’* (2006), Stephen Gill takes it for granted that *The Prelude* is ‘a work that both explained and, through the originality and quality of its verse, exemplified all that [Wordsworth] had pronounced on over the years about the creative imagination’ (5).20 This may well describe what later readers concluded from their knowledge of what Coleridge wrote about Wordsworth, but I again suggest that it was not what Wordsworth had in mind.

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19 These distinctions are made in the concluding paragraph of R.L. Brett’s and A.R. Jones’ *Introduction to their 1st edition of Lyrical Ballads:*

But whereas Coleridge went on to give an impressive analysis of the poetic imagination and its relation to the reasoning power of man’s mind, Wordsworth’s views remain the expression of a rather confused anti-intellectualism. Coleridge set himself no less a task than to explain poetry as part of man’s whole intellectual and spiritual endeavour. Wordsworth is intent only on expressing the convictions which grew from his own personal experience. (I)

Coleridge’s proposals about Wordsworth’s imaginative power in *Biographia* went against the grain of Wordsworth’s own beliefs at the time. And in the Prefaces to *Lyrical Ballads*; his ‘Address to Coleridge’; the Preface to the *Poems of 1815*; and the *Essay Supplementary*, Wordsworth continued to articulate his opposition to Coleridge’s more modern – possibly Kantian – understanding of Imagination. During this period he maintained a commitment to the ancient ‘manners’ and ‘morals’ that defined his own character, and a poetic art that understood ‘imagination’ as a practical activity of the mind in its relationship with the ‘objects of nature’ and the world of human experience. Wordsworth conceived of imagination as an activity of the mind that interacted ‘democratically’ with the world of the senses, rather than acting in the sovereign capacity envisaged by Kant in his critical philosophy.

Earlier, in *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth*, Gill had made a point of stressing the importance of Imagination to Wordsworth’s poetry by placing a five-page section of quotations: ‘Wordsworth on Poetry and Imagination’ among the prefatory materials preceding his ‘Introduction’. The section appears as something of a paratext, existing outside the main body of the work, and signalling the importance of a topic that has been largely avoided by recent critical studies. ‘Imagination’ has become something of an embarrassment in a more historically orientated, and methodologically sophisticated age that has learnt to distance itself from ‘High’ Romantic concerns about metaphysics, and immaterial matters of ‘consciousness’. As Richard Cronin has observed, ‘the major achievement of Romantic studies in the last twenty years is to have transferred to ‘history’ the glamour that was once routinely attached to the word ‘imagination’. But despite the major shifts in the discipline of literary studies over the past quarter century, the ‘turn to history’ has yet to provide an alternative appreciation of ‘imagination’ to the now problematic definition provided by Coleridge, on Wordsworth’s behalf, in *Biographia Literaria*.

Although ‘Imagination’ has been dismissed as a form of ‘false consciousness’ – by both Marxian and Freudian readings of literature – the problems it presents, in its Coleridgean guise, have not actually been addressed. It continues to haunt Romantic Studies as a ghostly presence, a now defunct Romantic spirit that has not properly been laid to rest. And although it has been banished to the margins (perhaps an appropriate habitation for Coleridgean commentary) it continues, intermittently, to drift across the centre of the page, ‘like an unfathered vapour’, that might engulf some lonely reader’s mind as he or she ponders the problem ‘imagination’ poses to contemporary readers. The ‘Romantic Imagination’ lives on as an apparently necessary and potent ideal for readers of *The Prelude*, who seem to be obliged to pursue a Romantic interpretation of the poem. Because of this, I argue that *The Prelude* remains something of a sacred cow, a fetish even, of the ‘spilt religion’ of Romanticism – not something that Wordsworth ever intended. Central to the beliefs of that ‘religion’ is a dogma, based on interpretations of Coleridge’s definitions of the primary and secondary

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imagination in *Biographia Literaria*, as defined by the later disciples of that cult – senior academics trained in a literary tradition that was largely based on Coleridgean principles.  

**III. Pictures in the Mind**

In order to develop a better appreciation of Wordsworth’s understanding of imagination, it is necessary to turn to classical concerns with *phantasiae* rather than ‘romantic’ concepts of ‘the creative imagination’. In Chapter 11 I will be referring to Cicero’s understanding of *phantasiae* in his *Academica*, and in Chapter 12 I discuss Quintilian’s appreciation of the term in *De Institutione Oratoria*. For now I turn to M.W. Bundy’s study of the topic in *The Theory of Imagination in Classical and Medieval Thought*, published in 1927, in order to provide a more general background to these initial concerns about Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s respective understanding and experience of ‘imagination’.

Bundy’s classic analysis developed out of an initial concern to define the history of the meaning of the terms ‘Imagination’ and ‘Fancy’ in preparation for a planned work on the English Romantic Poets and their theory of imagination. But as Bundy discovered the complexity of the subject, his preliminary investigations grew into a much larger historical study, one that then became his main focus. His planned study on Romantic theories of the imagination was never written. In describing his initial research Bundy wrote:

> The writer had anticipated a study of the obvious German philosophers, of the English critics of the eighteenth century, and of the Swiss aestheticians. He soon found himself, however engaged in a quite different study, for Coleridge sent him to the study of the psychology of the Middle Ages, Wordsworth sent him to the entire English Empirical tradition, and Blake to the mystics; and these in turn inevitably directed the attention to those great classical philosophies in which the concepts of ‘appearance’ and ‘image’ were first defined, – to the systems of Plato and Aristotle, the Stoics and the Neo-Platonists. (7)

My own investigations into Wordsworth’s understanding of ‘imagination’ have likewise led back to the ‘great classical philosophies in which the concepts of ‘appearance’ and ‘image’ were first defined’, rather than the ‘obvious’ eighteenth century European influences. And it is in the philosophical principles of Aristotle and the Stoics, in particular, that I have found the influences that helped shape Wordsworth’s beliefs about imagination. Plato and the Neo-Platonists form another, differing axis of enquiry, one more appropriate for the definitions set out in Coleridge’s mind. It is in following the Platonic axis that most Romantic critics have attempted to track the influences of earlier thinkers on Coleridge’s ideas about Imagination – it is the path he led them down as he recorded his own enquiries; the path travelled also by the early church fathers. This necessarily involves Coleridgean-orientated critics in the kind of extensive study of intellectual concepts that Bundy was

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22 In *Originality and Imagination* Thomas McFarland relates that ‘a favourite question in viva voce examinations was a request to distinguish Coleridge’s conceptions of primary imagination, secondary imagination, and fancy: and the ritual answer, which invariably satisfied the examiners in full, was to simply repeat the puzzling words (90-1).
committed to as he focussed on the more influential Platonic and Neo-platonic traditions. In contrast to Aristotle, Plato gave less authority to images, *eikasia*, than he did to intellectual concepts – *eidola*; ideas based on reasoning. These cognitive ideas were not to be confused with images; they were philosophical concepts based on purely mental activity and were not contaminated by sense impressions. In proposing a world of ‘Ideal Forms’ Plato distinguished between the world of Being – that of pure knowledge, and the world of Becoming – that of contingent knowing. Images (*eikasia*) as mere appearances (*phantasiae*), belonged to the world of phenomena; they are therefore more ‘poetic’, and could also be misleading. In contrast, philosophical concepts defined by reason, in the world of Being, were necessarily ‘true’. This is a vast simplification of Plato’s distinctions and terms, but I largely bypass Plato because I find Wordsworth’s knowledge on these questions to derive from Aristotle via Cicero, founded on the sense-based knowledge that Plato rejects as worthy of philosophical enquiry. Aristotle rejected Plato’s transcendentalism believing Plato’s ideal forms to be abstractions created by the human mind rather than independent entities.23

Modern approaches to the topic of ‘imagination’ tend to discuss the term with regard to matters of aesthetics, but Wordsworth’s classical understanding predated the development of aesthetic theory and, as Bundy pointed out in his Introduction:

‘Imagination’ in the first place is not primarily a critical term. When the Greek metaphysician, attempting to distinguish between appearance and reality, used the Greek word from which ‘fancy’ is derived, important consequences followed for the history of the critical term. When the ancient psychologist sought to establish the relation of imagination to sensation, on the one hand, and to reason, on the other, he also was laying the foundations for the views of Wordsworth, Shelley, and Ruskin. When, in turn, the classical moralists tried to decide whether our fancies were trustworthy guides to conduct, there were resulting implications from which the term aesthetics could not well escape….Plato and Aristotle brought to their thought about fine art the conclusions of the metaphysician, the psychologist, and the moralist. It is for this reason that we shall study for the most part, the fortunes of our term in epistemology, in psychology, and in ethics. (8)

I am also concerned, primarily, with the epistemological, psychological and ethical questions that Wordsworth raised as a classical thinker. My insistence on Cicero as a primary influence for Wordsworth’s knowledge of philosophy in the 1790s is supported by the fact that Wordsworth represents Aristotelian and Stoic concepts rather than the blend of Platonism and Stoicism that occurs in Rome *after* Cicero’s time, and became the mainstream tradition from which Neo-Platonism subsequently developed.24 It is this school of thought that produces the ideal of the visionary poet, and which draws especially on Plato’s descriptions of poets as inspired visionaries. George Kennedy notes

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23 Other studies on the topic of Imagination that have been particularly helpful are: J.M. Cocking’s *Imagination: A Study in the History of Ideas*; Alan R White’s *The Language of Imagination*; Richard Kearney’s *The Wake of Imagination: Toward a Postmodern Culture*; Gerard Watson’s *Phantasia in Classical Thought*; Mary Warnock’s *Imagination*. See also Kearney’s *The Poetics of Imagining: Modern and Postmodern*, a study of the existentialist imaginings that were a later development of Romantic thought. Cocking’s essay ‘The Imagination as Messenger: From Plato to Kristeva’, published as an Epilogue to his unfinished study, gives a concise overview of the history of imagination, and raises the issues that need to be understood by a contemporary reader. The Introduction to John Whale’s *Imagination Under Pressure*, presents a good overview of the questions raised about Imagination in Romantic Studies in recent years.

that while ‘Aristotle shared many of Plato’s ethical values, his theory of ethics is not based on religious belief of reward and punishment in the afterlife (as was Plato’s) but on how to achieve happiness in a secular society by rational control of the emotions’. This is something that was distinctive and characteristic of Wordsworth’s ethos, and differed, radically, from Coleridge’s ideals.

Coleridge followed the Platonic tradition, and Kant’s philosophy was also based on pure reason and not experience. Plato also invoked the ‘ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry’ in his concern to distinguish between images and cognitions, claiming that the philosopher by his reasoning can relate how he knows something, while the poet cannot. Plato had no time for visionary poets whose knowledge could not be verified, and he accused poets, in general, of corrupting the youth of Athens by painting ‘false’ pictures in their minds. Poets were therefore banned from his ideal Republic. But his quarrel with the ‘poets’ was also addressed to the poetical language of the rhetoricians and the Sophists. His argument against rhetoricians is famously set out in the Gorgias; and in the Sophist he engages in proving that Sophists are concerned ‘not with things as they are but as they appear’; another reference to appearances as having no enduring reality. In his later dialogues Plato moderated his position against rhetoric and also came to accept the reality of the world of becoming, and the need for philosophy to address its existence. But the more dogmatic distinctions defined by his idealism established a school of thought that continued to privilege the mind of the philosopher over that of the rhetorician.

Where Plato had been concerned to distinguish philosophy from rhetoric, Aristotle distinguished between arguments that appealed to logic, that were based on certain, indubitable premises, and those that were ‘reasoned’ according to premises that were not certain, but only probable. Aristotle defined Rhetoric as the ‘counterpart’ to Dialectic, (Rhetoric I 1354a), and included arguments that made appeals to ethos and pathos as well as logos. He saw Dialectic (logic) and Rhetoric both being used by ‘all men … [who] discuss statements and maintain them, to defend themselves and to attack others’ (Rhetoric I. 1354a). Aristotle was more practical, and pragmatic, in his studies of the arts of Poetry and Rhetoric, defending the art of mimesis and its claim to represent verisimilitude, while also defining the means, the technical skill, by which the poet, or rhetorician, might achieve their ends.

As a philosophical concept, Aristotle’s belief that we always think in ‘images’ or pictures is naïve and open to question, and it fails to account for our ability to imagine abstract concepts. It is a topic of debate in philosophy as to whether Aristotle’s account is meant to be realistic, or only metaphorical, or even whether it is an appropriate model of the activity that actually takes place.

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26 Significantly, in the Essay Supplementary, Wordsworth claims this to be the poet’s actual prerogative:

The appropriate business of poetry, (which nevertheless, if genuine, is as permanent as pure science,) her appropriate employment, her privilege and her duty, is to treat of things not as they are, but as they appear; not as they exist in themselves, but as they seem to exist to the senses, and to the passions. What a world of delusion does this acknowledged obligation prepare for the inexperienced! What temptations to go astray are held forth for them whose thoughts have been little disciplined by the understanding, and whose feelings revolt from the sway of reason! (Pr W III 63)

27 In Wordsworth and the Composition of Knowledge, Brad Sullivan summarises some of the issues at stake in the ancient quarrel between philosophy and rhetoric.
Modern philosophers are divided over this question. For differing reasons, Sartre, Wittgenstein and Ryle, for instance, all disapprove of linking a pictorial image with an act of thought. But seventeenth and eighteenth century philosophers, such as Hobbes, Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume all followed Aristotle in describing thoughts as ‘imaginations’ that are pictured in the mind’s eye. Their minds, like Wordsworth’s, operated within the classical paradigm that owed much to Cicero and remained influential up until the end of the long eighteenth century.

In treating imagination as a picture-making faculty I also take into account Wordsworth’s particularly strong powers of visualisation. That he had a strong visual memory was a distinctive aspect of his character, one that is evident in the experiences portrayed in two of his most famous poems: ‘Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey’ and ‘I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud’. But the belief that ‘ideas’ in the mind must represent ‘images’ of the sense world raises another concern. Some people have very visual ‘imaginations’, and re-member thoughts about ‘things’, in vivid pictorial detail, while others only have a vague and shadowy sense of an ‘image’ – something they would happily call an ‘idea’. Visualisers re-assemble what were once physical percepts as pictures ‘in’ the memory, and can also find, simultaneously and spontaneously, that the memory is so ‘real’ that it also evokes the emotional state experienced at that earlier time. Wordsworth makes a particular point of noting this ‘association’, which he obviously experienced to a strong degree. He writes about ‘collecting’ images of beautiful and sublime landscapes that will be re–collected at a future date, in his letter to Dorothy during his first expedition to France in 1790:

Ten thousand times in the course of this tour have I regretted the inability of my memory to retain a more strong impression of the beautiful forms before me, and again and again in quitting a fortunate station have I returned to it with the most eager avidity, with the hope of bearing away a more lively picture. At this moment when many of these landscapes are floating before my mind, I feel a high [enjoyment] in reflecting that perhaps scarce a day of my life will pass [in] which I will not derive some happiness from these images. (EY.35–36)

I argue that Wordsworth had a highly developed visual memory while Coleridge did not. Wordsworth could ‘see’ what he recalled to his mind as distinctive images in his mind’s eye, while Coleridge appears to have lacked such ability. Although Coleridge’s early notebooks are full of ‘descriptions’ of nature, (especially that of ‘sublime’ mountain scenery), he found it difficult to describe such images, in words, with ease. In early letters he remarks on his inability to look at external objects, to ‘grasp’ them in his mind, and then describe them in adequate poetic detail – he found it difficult to ‘paint from nature’ and his actual poetic style is also characterised by its abstraction. In a couple of letters written in Germany in May 1799 he remarks, specifically, about his inability to describe ‘things’. In the first of these he is writing to his wife, and the letter opens with a reflection on the difficulty of his being able to communicate what he has seen in Germany because of

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28 Alan R White’s *The Language of Imagination* makes a detailed analysis of this question.
29 David Hartley made much of this association that Hartley updated and popularised, makes the point that an imaginary experience does not evoke the emotional response that occurs when we think about (imagine) a real experience that had actually happened. *De Anima* 427b 21.
the insufficiency of language – the inability of words, as ‘arbitrary characters’, to convey an imagination to Sara of his experiences. In addition to the failure of language to convey such images Coleridge admits that, ‘I neither am or ever was a good Hand at description. – I see what I write/ but alas! I cannot write what I see’ (CL 1 503).

Coleridge’s remarks suggest that did not really ‘see’ things in great detail in his mind’s eye; nor did what he saw remain long in his mind. His imagination is therefore impoverished since, with his limited visual memory, he cannot re-member – re-assemble – a record of the images he has seen, in order to be able to produce an imagination in his own mind – one sufficiently vivid for him to translate into words that will convey that imagination to his wife. A little later in the same letter he presents an unimaginative Coleridgean counterpart to Wordsworth’s later ‘Den of Yordas’ passage in *The Prelude* (VIII 711-741) as he describes a visit to a cavern famous for its limestone formations, led by a Guide who:

> had the talent of finding out & seeing uncommon Likenesses [in the different] forms of the Stalactite: Here was a nun – this was Solomon’s temple [th]at was a Roman Catholic chapel – here was a Lion's claw – nothing but flesh & blood wanting to make it completely a claw / ! – This was an organ & had all the notes of the organ / &c &c &c – but alas! with all possible straining of my eyes, ear, & my imagination I could see nothing but common Stalactite; – and hear nothing but the dull ding of common Cavern Stones. (CL 1 506)

A couple of days after completing his long letters to Sara, Coleridge again comments on his inability to clearly describe what he has seen, in a letter to Thomas Poole. Relating how he had come across a group of women sowing Fir-seed on a heath in a thick mist, he attempts to describe the atmosphere of the scene and setting:

> Never did I behold aught so impressively picturesque, or rather statue-esque, as these Groups of Women in all their various attitudes – The thick mist, thro’ which their figures came to my eye, gave such a soft Unreality to them! These lines, my dear Poole, I have written rather for my own pleasure than yours – for is it impossible that this misery of words can give to you, that which it may yet perhaps be able to recall to me. – What can be the cause I am so miserable a Describer? Is it that I understand neither the practice nor the principles of Painting? – or is it not true, that others have really succeeded? – I could half suspect that what are deemed fine descriptions, produce their effects almost purely by a charm of words, with which & with whose combinations, we associate feelings indeed, but no distinct Images. (CL 1 511)

This last sentence is particularly relevant to my argument here that the charm of words might produce a strong feeling response for Coleridge, but this was not accompanied by images in his mind. Nor does it appear that he has given much thought to the particular rhetorical skill that some poets, including Wordsworth, used to deliberately impress striking images on the minds of their readers, a skill that Wordsworth had been experimenting with in 1798.

Although Coleridge found it hard to ‘visualise’ naturally, he did experience vivid images in his mind’s eye when he was under the influence of opium. But when these opium visions assumed a life of their own, as seemingly autonomous activities occurring within Coleridge’s ‘own’ mind, they
became ‘objects’ of great fear. In order to combat them he had to keep his mind occupied by engaging in abstract thought, in mental activity, so that the hallucinations could not enter into his consciousness. During the most extreme cases of his diseased state of mind he could not sleep for fear of dreaming, since the dreams could easily turn into nightmares over which he had no control. Because these images were so vivid and realistic he genuinely feared that, should they occur, he would actually lose his mind. It is easy to see why, later in his life, he stressed the importance of distinguishing between the veracity of the ‘idea’ – a product of pure consciousness – and the falsity of the ‘image’, something purely phenomenal, but also some ‘thing’ that might enter the mind unbidden. His later discrimination between ‘image’ and ‘idea’ was not simply a philosophical distinction implementing a dualism that privileged the ideal world; it was also a defence against madness.\(^{30}\) Wordsworth was the opposite, and looked at nature with an eye that could reproduce its detail not, he stressed, by ‘making an inventory of her features’, but by taking them all in as impressions that were distinctive and vivid. Later he was capable of revisiting the scene in his imagination to discover the significant aspects that had impressed themselves on his memory. This process of ‘recollection in tranquillity’ was central to Wordsworth’s poetic technique.

In his ‘Recollections of Wordsworth’ Aubrey De Vere reports Wordsworth stating, towards the end of his life, that he ‘had hardly known anyone but [himself] who had a true eye for Nature’, and compared his own practise with that of another unnamed poet who:

took pains; he went out with his pencil and notebook, and jotted down whatever struck him most – a river rippling over the sand, a ruined tower on a rock above it, a promontory, and a mountain-ash waving its berries. He went home, and wove the whole together into a poetical description.

De Vere then records Wordsworth pausing at this point, for effect, and then resuming his topic with a ‘flashing eye and impassioned voice’, stating:

But Nature does not permit an inventory to be made of her charms! He should have left his pencil and notebook at home; fixed his eye, as he walked, with a reverent attention on all that surrounded him, and taken all into a heart that could understand and enjoy. Then, after several days had passed by, he should have interrogated his memory as to the scene. He would have discovered that while much of what he had admired was preserved to him, much was also wisely obliterated. That which remained – the picture surviving in his mind – would have presented the ideal and essential truth of the scene, and done so, in a large part, by discarding much which, though in itself striking, was not characteristic.\(^{31}\)

\(^{30}\) Much earlier, in the first of his philosophical letters to Josiah Wedgwood Coleridge notes an original distinction between the two terms, but notes that they have become synonyms. (CL II 682)

\(^{31}\) A. de Vere, ‘Recollections of Wordsworth’, Essays Chiefly on Poetry. II 276-7. Wordsworth may have been echoing Bacon, who in The Great Instauration had written: ‘And all depends on keeping the eye steadily fixed upon the facts of nature and so receiving their images simply as they are. For God forbid that we should give out a dream of our own imagination for a pattern of the world; rather may he graciously grant to us to write an apocalypse or true vision of the footsteps of the Creator imprinted on his creatures.’ The Works of Francis Bacon. Ed. James Spedding, IV 32-3.

In commenting on this passage from de Vere’s recollections H.W. Garrod wrote: ‘The discerning reader will not fail to observe here congruences with the teachings of Aristotle; but he will perhaps – since it is rarely that poets let us into their secrets of composition – be more interested in attending to Wordsworth’s practise than to his theory’ (Wordsworth, 45). My concern here is with the ‘theory’, which I argue does, indeed, owe a debt to Aristotle’s epistemology.
This physiological difference also plays a significant part in the development of the ‘radical Difference’ between the two men in 1802. In both ‘the poem on the Wye’ and that ‘on the daffodils’, Wordsworth’s comments demonstrate his visual acuity and the vivid pictorial detail of his memory’s mental representations as the ‘pictures’ in his mind, ‘revive again’. Where Coleridge attempts to record similar experiences his poetic expression relies upon extravagant description that might paint the picture through calling up ‘ideas’, and utilising commonplaces, rather than reproducing an image existing in his mind’s eye, of an actual place. But where Coleridge was attempting to make philosophical distinctions that drew lines between ‘ideal’ and ‘material’ representations, Wordsworth preferred to ‘save the appearances’. His descriptions of imagination, or fancy, are phenomenological, dependent on concrete representations, \textit{phainomena} that are impressed on the mind as \textit{phantasiae} by sensate forms – ‘the language of the sense’– inscribed on the mind of the poet, by Nature. Coleridge’s preference for writing ‘supernatural’ poetry was an indication of the difficulty he had in describing natural forms; supernatural images could be conjured up without any need to have concerns about verisimilitude. Wordsworth’s ability to visualise strongly, and reproduce what he saw effectively, was central to his actual art of the imagination, and Coleridge was unable to appreciate the significance of this art, because he, like so many of Wordsworth’s readers, literally lacked the imagination to do so.

It is known that Coleridge borrowed Hugh Blair’s \textit{Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres} from Bristol library in January 1798, and it is widely assumed that he and Wordsworth read and discussed the work. In his chapter on ‘Descriptive Poetry’, Blair wrote:

Description is the great test of a poet’s imagination, and always distinguishes an original from a second-rate genius. To a writer of the inferior class, nature, when at any time he attempts to describe it, appears exhausted by those who have gone before him in the same track. He sees nothing new, or peculiar, in the object which he would paint; his conceptions of it are loose and vague; and his expressions, of course, feeble and general. He gives us words rather than ideas, we meet with language indeed of poetical description, but we apprehend the object described very indistinctly. Whereas a true poet makes us imagine that we see it before our eyes; he catches the distinguishing features; he gives it the colours of life and reality; he places it in such light that a painter could copy after him. This happy talent is chiefly owing to a strong imagination, which first receives a lively impression of the object; and then, by employing a proper selection of circumstances in describing it, transmits that impression in its full force to the imagination of others. (488-9)\textsuperscript{32}

Coleridge knew by the time he returned from Germany that, in comparison with Wordsworth his poetic genius was only ‘second-rate’. It is not at all unlikely that in reflecting on his own poetic genius, he would have acknowledged that Wordsworth had the kind of imagination that Blair describes. But, precisely because he lacked the same ability, he failed to fully appreciate the nature of its operations and took issue with some of Wordsworth’s comments about poetic theory in the Preface to \textit{Lyrical Ballads}. Wordsworth’s actual poetic genius might well be accounted for in Blair’s description of a ‘true poet’ – one who has a ‘happy talent’ chiefly owing to his ‘strong imagination

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres}, London, T. Allman, 1831.
which first receives a lively impression of the object; and then, by employing a proper selection of circumstances in describing it, transmits that impression in its full force to the imagination of others’.
Chapter 5

The Prelude

Imagination,… in truth,
Is but another name for absolute strength
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
And Reason in her most exalted mood.

I. Transcendental or Empirical Imagination

When ‘Imagination’ becomes the topic of discussion in the study of Wordsworth’s poetry, the text that automatically comes to mind is, of course, The Prelude. Wordsworth, Imagination, and The Prelude, are so well associated that there is no need to think on the matter; the linkage is habitual – second nature, to anyone well versed in British Romantic poetry. The much discussed ‘apostrophe’ to Imagination in Book VI, and the discourse on ‘Imagination’ in Book XIII, can be considered the two main sites of the Wordsworthian Imagination. The title to the concluding books, Imagination, How Impaired and Restored, announces Wordsworth’s final topic. In the final Book, ‘Imagination’ is explicitly named as the ‘faculty’ that ‘hath been the moving soul / Of our long labour’, and as having been ‘our theme’ (XIII 185). But what, exactly, Wordsworth intended when writing about ‘the Imagination’ in these final books has never been clearly understood. The majority of critical readers of The Prelude read the poem according to a Coleridgean understanding of the word, and see the poem expressing Wordsworth’s faith in Imagination as a transcendental power of the mind.

Émile Legouis first acknowledged the importance of Coleridge’s influence in his discussion of the Wordsworthian imagination in The Early Life of William Wordsworth, 1770-1798: A Study of The Prelude, and H.W Garrod followed Legouis in making the imagination central to his reading of Wordsworth. More recently Geoffrey Hartman built on the ideas of these earlier ‘strong precursors’ to produce his own particular idiosyncratic, but highly influential, representation of Wordsworth’s imagination. Legouis and Garrod read The Prelude as a narrative of poetic election that ends by celebrating Wordsworth as a visionary Prophet-poet of ‘the Imagination’, while Hartman argued that Wordsworth’s career was characterised by a failure of such vision. The High Romantic criticism exemplified in the work of Meyer Abrams, and in the earlier work of Harold Bloom, supported and reinforced the idea of the visionary Wordsworth and all these critics also, characteristically, placed Wordsworth’s work within a Judaeo-Christian context rather than recognising that Wordsworth’s beliefs at the time he wrote the original text were more pagan and classical. As noted above, the

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1 Prelude: 1850. Book XIV.
2 The heading to the 1850 text was revised to: Imagination and Taste, How Impaired and Restored.
3 Wordsworth (1923).
4 Abrams, Bloom and Hartman’s interpretations all strongly reflect their Jewish heritage. The claim I make here would be questioned by scholars who recognise strong biblical influences on Wordsworth’s thinking during this period. Certainly Wordsworth grew up in a Christian society, had been schooled in Christian teachings, and was even intended to take holy orders. He would have known the Bible and the Anglican prayer book.
editors of the Norton Prelude also support Coleridge’s idealisation of ‘the Imagination’ as a romantic and creative power of the mind. In Natural Supernaturalism, Abrams allied Wordsworth’s beliefs in the poem with those of the European Romantics, claiming that the creative power of ‘the Imagination’ once understood to emanate from the Divine mind, could now be understood to exist, in its own right, in the human mind. The Romantics claimed ‘Imagination’ as their own – a secularisation of what had previously been considered a sacred, supernatural power.\(^5\)

In his youth Wordsworth experienced strong states of inspiration that he did not associate with any Christian belief, and in the argument presented to Coleridge in The Prelude, he insists that this ‘divine’ power, wherever it originates, has to be ‘humanised’. ‘Sublime’ imaginations must be blended with the workings of ‘Fancy’, the ‘beautiful’ productions of the human mind, based on experience of the human world. In a complex set of associations, premised on classical distinctions about manners and morals based on human situations and experiences, emotional as well as rational, his argument denies the binary distinctions set out in Coleridge’s logical approach and the dualism implicit in Coleridge’s worldview. Wordsworth’s distinctions include his use of the ethos-pathos dichotomy, as described by Dockhorn and Lindenberg for. For his eighteenth-century readers he also provides a more modern variation on those ancient concepts, as revised and applied by Edmund Burke in his Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful.\(^6\)

But because Wordsworth presented his ideas according to a dialectic dependent on rhetorical principles of argumentation, his position has not been clearly understood and he has been criticised for his confused thinking. The meditation on Imagination in Book XIII of The Prelude has been taken as an example of his lack of logical definition: either his own reasoning was confused, or else he was attempting to represent a Coleridgean understanding of Imagination that he hadn’t fully grasped. This was the suggestion that W.J.B. Owen made in his essay on ‘Wordsworth’s Imagination’ that I quoted from in Chapter 4. But Wordsworth’s form of reasoning was perfectly valid and coherent, once it is understood. Wordsworth acknowledged the great power of syllogistic reasoning in Book XI of The Prelude; but he also describes the danger that attends:

\begin{quote}
Upon a function rather proud to be
The enemy of falsehood, than the friend
Of truth, to sit in judgement than to feel (XI 135-7)
\end{quote}

The narrative of The Prelude acknowledges the limitations of reasoned arguments dependent solely on logic – something exemplified in extremis by the method of Godwin’s philosophising in 1795. So it is not surprising that Wordsworth’s use of ‘reason’ relies on arguments from probability, and the use of

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\(^5\) For Abrams’ ‘High Romantic Argument’ see Natural Supernaturalism p. 13.

\(^6\) For a detailed discussion of these distinctions, and Wordsworth’s later manipulation of them in A Guide Through the District of the Lakes, see Theresa M. Kelley, Wordsworth’s Revisionary Aesthetics.
enthymemes, rather than syllogisms, to convey his meaning. Wordsworth expresses a rhetoric that is classical and opposes the ‘rhetoric of Romanticism’, as set out by Abrams and other High Romantic critics.

In contrast to these High Romantic readings of Wordsworth there have always been other readers of *The Prelude* who report a sense of confusion when Wordsworth appears to place his faith in ‘Imagination’, defined in such abstract terms, in the final Book. They find that this apparent idealisation of ‘the Imagination’ contradicts the thrust of his earlier argument, one that seemed to favour a more empirical understanding of imagination connected with nature. To describe ‘Imagination’ as a transcendental power of the mind itself, in the final book of the poem, negates any need for the mind to be in relationship with nature. And to suggest a Kantian reading of ‘Imagination’ – as Einbildungskraft – denies nature any power; the mind itself is creative in its activities and nature merely provides the necessary forms on which it acts. There is no possibility for a ‘marriage’ of equal powers, but rather a recognition of the sovereignty of Imagination, a master–slave relationship in which human ‘Fancy’ plays an inferior role, its powers limited to the ‘reproduction’ rather than the ‘production’ of ‘images’, according to Kantian theory.8

Critics who believed Wordsworth’s understanding of ‘imagination’ was based on an empirical concept rather than a transcendental one, found it contradictory to interpret the poem as the celebration of a prophetic vocation in the tradition of the peoples of the Book. The traditional Hebrew Prophet speaks the mind of God; he does not speak with his own mind – his own identity is displaced at such times of vatic utterance – and the speaker is acknowledged not to be in his ‘right’ mind; he is ‘mad’. As I am arguing here, Wordsworth wrote *The Prelude* specifically to describe the growth of his ‘own’ mind, and distance himself from his youthful identity as a vatic poet. The poem sets out his reasons for having to cast off of his ‘priestly robes’ in order that he might become a poet of the human imagination; ‘a man speaking to men’. It would therefore be extremely paradoxical for him to conclude the poem by declaring that he was a great poet by virtue of some divine inspiration. Coleridge expressed a belief in truth being a ‘divine ventriloquist’, but Wordsworth recognised the importance of owning his own thoughts and arriving at truth statements that were defined by reason, rather than inspiration. As has already been stressed, the ‘Prophet of Nature’ in the original text of *The Prelude* is a conscious speaker, speaking a ‘lasting inspiration, sanctified / By reason and by truth’ (XIII 443-4 my emphasis), not by any divine sanction.9 The term ‘prophet’ is being used to describe a poet, as was common in Wordsworth’s time.

The debate as to whether Wordsworth intended to represent an ‘empirical’ or ‘transcendental’ concept of Imagination has engaged critics and scholars in dialogue for over a century. The general consensus appears to be that Wordsworth began thinking about ‘imagination’ in empirical terms and

7 Wordsworth could also have been alluding to Sir Francis Bacon’s dismissal of syllogistic reasoning in *The Advancement of Knowledge* - a text that Wordsworth echoes quietly and consistently.
8 Kant’s psychology distinguishes between two types of imagination, one of which is associative and subject entirely to empirical laws (the reproductive imagination = Fancy), while the other is spontaneous and determinative not, like sense, merely determinable (the productive imagination = Imagination).
9 The passage was later revised to: ‘A lasting inspiration, sanctified / By reason, blest by faith’ (1850 XIV 445–6).
was later convinced, by Coleridge, to accept a ‘transcendental’ appreciation of imagination’s powers. The meaning of the term ‘Imagination’ in The Prelude remains confused because of an apparent lack of clarification of terms or concepts, and also because of differences between the 1805 and 1850 texts of the poem. But what can be stated, with certainty, is that Coleridge was committed to believing in ‘The Imagination’ as a transcendental power of the mind, and he also thought that Wordsworth’s best poetry was the product of such inspiration. And in responding, positively, to Coleridge’s remarks in Biographia, a number of later critics also accepted this to be Wordsworth’s meaning. The situation is further complicated because the later alterations to the 1805 text, influenced by Wordsworth’s later acceptance of Christianity, allow for the possibility of reading the word ‘Imagination’ as signifying a God-given transcendental power of the mind. But if, as I argue here, Wordsworth was committed to Aristotelian and Stoic principles in 1805, it was impossible for him to represent Imagination in such a manner, since both philosophical systems rejected such a belief. In the following chapter I present something of a reception history of The Prelude, and discuss the work of some of the critics mentioned here in more detail. But first I present a reading of the last book of The Prelude that presents an alternative appreciation of imagination to the one largely accepted as canonical.

II. Sublime Imaginations and Beautiful Fancies

In the final Book of The Prelude Wordsworth clarifies his understanding of the term ‘Imagination’ as he sums his argument. The work concludes in a carefully structured peroration that contains all the elements expected in the concluding section of such an epic Address. The peroration is expected to recapitulate the main argument, and to do so in a forceful manner, using impressive and eloquent language in a grand style. It is also the place to appeal to the more tender feelings of the audience in a final act of persuasion, and the place to acknowledge those to whom thanks are due. The book opens, appropriately, with a vivid set-piece of description portraying a ‘sublime’ experience that occurs on the summit of the highest mountain in England and Wales.10

The opening lines describe the circumstances of Wordsworth’s early morning ascent, which was begun in the dark with the intention of observing the sunrise from the summit. In the earlier stages of his assault on the mountain he describes himself ‘Hemmed round on every side with fog and damp’ seeing little as, ‘With forehead bent /Earthward, as if in opposition set / Against an enemy’ he ‘panted up the mountain / With eager pace’ (XIII 29-32). As he climbs he describes himself engrossed in private musings until, suddenly:

a light upon the turf
Fell like a flash: I looked about and, lo!
The Moon stood naked in the heavens, at height
Immense above my head, and on the shore
I found myself of a huge sea of mist

10 The location was also the setting for Gray’s Pindaric Ode, ‘The Bard’, and the region around Snowden was also associated with the Druids. Wordsworth’s imagery also draws on other works, including Beattie’s The Minstrel, and Thomas Pennant’s description of his Snowden experiences in A Tour in Wales.
In an instant, he is transported into another landscape having ‘broken through’ the cloud that had limited his vision. He sees another world at his feet – the real sea is ‘usurped’ by a sea of mist, and the Moon is again described as it ‘looked down upon this show / In single glory’. But what captures Wordsworth’s eye and ear is not the sublime heavenly spectacle, but the sublime earthly one – the ‘blue chasm; a fracture in the vapour’ through which the ‘homeless voice of waters rose’.

In the meditation that follows the ‘vision’ on Snowden, Wordsworth describes ‘a sense of God, or whatso’e’er is dim / Or vast in its own being’ (XIII 72), a description analogous to the ‘sense sublime’ experienced in ‘Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey’. This godlike power is imagined as having created the ‘universal spectacle’ observed by Wordsworth on the lonely mountain. The scene is described as ‘Grand in itself alone’, but is also complemented by the existence of ‘The soul – the imagination of the whole’, lodged in the ‘deep and gloomy breathing place’ of the ‘dark, deep thoroughfare’ (XIII 57; 65). Wordsworth’s description of the scene acknowledges two differing, but complementary aspects of the sublime – the vastness of the starry sky and the moon, ‘at height / Immense above [his] head’ and the dimness, ‘darkness and depth’, of the blue chasm beneath his feet. In his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* Edmund Burke had argued that the descriptions of great depth represented the highest form of the sublime.

The ‘vision’ presents a carefully balanced picture of Nature’s sublime power existing in both the heights and the depths, and in the comparison that follows, her power is also seen as ‘the express Resemblance...a genuine counterpart/ And brother of the glorious faculty / Which higher minds bear with them as their own’ (XIII 86-90). Men of wisdom are also able to incorporate the divine power of Nature in their own minds, and demonstrate a similar creative ability in moulding and shaping the appearances of the world. Such ability is specifically not the product of enthusiasm: ‘They need not extraordinary calls / To rouse them’, nor are they ‘enthralled’ by sensible impressions. ‘Such minds are truly from the Deity / For they are Powers’ (XIII 101-7). These god-like souls experience genuine happiness and understanding of the world and a true appreciation of moral judgements. Their knowledge is gained through the application of their own minds, which have attained a sense of identity with the divine mind through their wise pursuit of virtue. The Stoic sage was credited with having attained such insight.

The 1805 text expresses concepts that fit with a Stoic conception of the universe and the divinity, while the later revisions that appear in the 1850 text incorporate Christian values and distinctions that define a different cosmology. The earlier concepts would be considered heretical by orthodox Christian theologians, since no division is made between the mind of man and the mind of God. In Christianity God can become man, but man cannot become one with God who, as in Judaism and Islam, is totally other, transcending this world, which exists in an inferior state of becoming. In the later revisions to the 1805 text Wordsworth’s acceptance of Christian doctrine is clearly set out. God is defined as a transcendent power and Nature is seen as subservient to that God’s laws. In the 1850 text, the sense of bliss known to ‘higher minds’ in the 1805 version is limited to the ‘highest
bliss / That flesh can know’; and moral judgements are defined by the ‘pure source’ and originate only in God, rather than through the judgements of men of higher minds.

A comparison of the two texts reveals the extent to which Stoic principles were later abandoned in favour of more humble claims as Wordsworth acknowledges that the ideals he was prepared to argue for in 1805, and even 1815, are unattainable. The 1805 text suggests that Wordsworth still considered it within his ability to attain to the highest form of consciousness, with Nature’s help, and become one with Nature as a ‘higher mind’:

Oh! who is he that hath his whole long life
Preserved, enlarged, this freedom in himself?
For this alone is genuine liberty (XIII 120-2)

But the 1850 text is less sanguine, and acknowledges the impossibility of achieving that ideal state of mind. Wordsworth expresses his more realistic acknowledgement of the situation in words that echo Cicero’s critique of the claims made by the Stoics that they could achieve their absolute commitment to the pursuit of virtue. The 1850 text qualifies the claims that Wordsworth had achieved anything like ‘genuine liberty’ and asks firstly:

Where is the favoured being who hath held
That course unchecked, unerring, and untired
In one perpetual progress smooth and bright? (1850 XIV 133-5)

Mindful of meeker Christian sympathies, the 1850 text has the line, ‘A humbler destiny have we retraced…’ The optimistic hopes of the 1805 text are replaced by an acknowledgement that Wordsworth’s actual path was one of ‘lapse and hesitating choice’, of ‘backward wanderings along thorny ways’ (1850 XIV 133-6). There follows, in both texts, a declaration of his moral integrity, relating that he had always upheld divine ideals and had not pursued selfish or vulgar ends. Taught by the basic principles of fear and love, and the realisation that love casts out fear, he then defines a classic taxonomy of good and bad, defined by feelings of emotion. Strong feelings of love – experienced in the presence of sublime and lovely forms – drive out fear; and ‘pain’ is also recognised as something of a teacher, not as an ‘evil’. The distinction is repeated in the 1850 text, however, showing that Wordsworth was still prepared to accept Nature as a teacher, and to refuse orthodox Christian doctrine that would propose more absolute principles of good and evil. As a child it was the ‘Presences of nature’ that had ‘Impressed upon all forms the characters / Of danger and desire’ (I 490-8).

In the following lines a distinction is made between ‘merely’ human love and a higher form of love that is divine. In the 1850 text the distinction between these two forms of love is stated in clearly dualistic terms and the revisions, made in 1816, express pious Christian sentiments that describe human love needing to be ‘hallowed’ by a ‘love that breathes not without awe’. A ‘love that adores, but on the knees of prayer / By heaven inspired’, that ascends on the ‘wings of praise’ and pays ‘A mutual tribute to the Almighty’s Throne’. No such sentiments intrude on the 1805 text, which asserts
the existence of a ‘higher’ more ‘divine’ feeling of love, and then qualifies that assertion with something of a final definition of Imagination:

This Love more intellectual cannot be
Without Imagination, which, in truth,
Is but another name for absolute strength
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
And Reason in her most exalted mood.
This faculty hath been the moving soul of
Our long labour. (XIII 166-172)

To describe Imagination in such superlative terms, and to then re-describe it as, ‘Reason in her most exalted mood’ is, essentially, to define Imagination as the *logos* of the Stoics. ‘This faculty’ is described as having been with the infant Wordsworth at birth, and was then experienced as guiding him, in Nature, before being ‘lost sight of’ later in Wordsworth’s necessary turn to the world of men. When it ‘rose once more with strength’ it is conceived of not only as a power that might act upon the mind of man, but as ‘reflecting in its solemn breast / The works of man and face of human life’ (XIII 180-81). The significance of this act of reflection is crucial, because it represents a shift in the locus of power. The active power of Nature that had ‘impressed’ itself on Wordsworth’s mind in his youth is, itself, ‘impressed’ by images of the ‘works of man’ and ‘the face of human life’. Human creative power, the workings of the human imagination are as necessary to the production of the world of lived experience, as the divine *logos*. The natural progression of human life entails a shift from a state of passivity – one that is reliant on ‘sublime’ Imagination in childhood and youth. As the individual human mind matures and takes responsibility for its own identity it must also create its own ‘imagination’. The individual has to become capable of acting out of his, or her, own creative power or *logos*, which, if developed through the pursuit of virtue (right reason), might become a ‘higher mind’ and experience ‘The feeling of life endless, the great thought / By which we live, Infinity and God’ (XIII 183-4).

This ‘definition’ of the faculty of Imagination as Stoic *logos* is further enhanced by another qualification in which Imagination is also identified with ‘Intellectual Love’ – ‘For they are each in each, and cannot stand / Dividually’ (XIII 186-88). The ‘actualisation’ of this power by the individual requires an act of individual will: ‘Here must thou be, O Man! / Strength to thyself; No helper hast thou here’ (XIII 188-9). Coleridge is obviously in Wordsworth’s mind at this point, though the topic is too painful to be addressed to him directly. If the individual can achieve this integration of divine and human imagination then this will lay the foundation for happiness in future years. If it is achieved ‘to complete the man’, then his soul will have risen ‘Up to the height of feeling intellect’. This state of mind is achieved through a *blending* of divine and human faculties. ‘God’ does not solely direct or decree this process – the sublime *logos* is humanised and ‘softened down’ through contact with human world, and the perfected man ‘Shall want no humbler tenderness’ because ‘his heart’ will, ‘Be tender

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11 Careful attention to the terminology used here, and to the concepts that are outlined, must preclude any Kantian notion of Imagination, since Kant’s philosophy does not allow Nature any such status, nor does it allow for human social experience to construct the true nature of existence.
as a nursing mother’s heart’, his life full of ‘female softness…little loves…delicate desires…mild interests and gentlest sympathies’ (XIII 206-10).

The abstraction of Wordsworth’s description here is then given a more concrete representation in an example from Wordsworth’s life that illustrates this process as it takes place at a human level. The lines that follow the definition of ‘Imagination’ describe how Dorothy’s female presence had served to ‘soften down’ Wordsworth’s over-strong and over-enthusiastic youthful, male, imagination:

I too exclusively esteemed that love,
And sought the beauty, which as Milton sings,
Hath terror in it. Thou didst soften down
This over-sternness; but for thee, sweet Friend!
My soul, too reckless of mild grace, had been
Far longer what by Nature it was framed,
Longer retained its countenance severe, (XIII 224-230)

The touching tribute to Dorothy that follows was foreshadowed in Book X (908-930) where Dorothy’s presence, during the Racedown period was acknowledged with gratitude:

She in the midst of all, preserved me still
A Poet, made me seek beneath that name
My office upon earth, and nowhere else
And lastly, Nature’s self, by human love
Assisted, through the weary labyrinth
Conducted me again to open day (X 919-924 my emphasis)

In both these references to Dorothy’s assistance, Coleridge is also mentioned. In Book X he is briefly acknowledged, even though he had yet to become a major influence at that time. In Book XIII it is necessary, at this point, to acknowledge his role once more, immediately prior to the grand concluding passage declaring: ‘And now, O Friend! this history is brought / To its appointed close’ (269-70).

Coleridge is firstly addressed as a ‘most loving Soul!’ who sheds ‘the light of love’ from his ‘gentle spirit’. Earlier, in Book X, Wordsworth had acknowledged Coleridge for having lent ‘a living help / To regulate [his] soul’ (X 907-8), and he is again thanked for his ‘mild’ influence, in the tribute paid to his friendship. But at the same time that he is thanking Coleridge, Wordsworth also offers a subtle rebuttal of his religious beliefs as he describes a cosmos in which religious enthusiasm is balanced by:

reason, duty and pathetic truth;
And God and man divided, as they ought,
Between them the great system of the world
Where Man is sphered, and which God animates (XIII 266-8)

Coleridge would not have approved of the ‘great system of the world’ that Wordsworth defines here. Wordsworth’s ‘reason, duty, and pathetic truth’ refer to Stoic reasoning. Coleridge conceived of his ‘God’ as a supreme sovereign Power, a Logos existing beyond the world of man. His God would never divide that power with man in any such form of mutual cooperation. The affairs of ‘Man,
Nature and Human Life’ all take place in a world totally separate from the world of Coleridge’s Divinity.

Having acknowledged his appreciation of Dorothy’s and Coleridge’s love, Wordsworth finally presents what appears to be the climax to his narrative – his announcement that he considers himself now ‘capable’ of producing his planned epic, *The Recluse*. And what he has managed to achieve and demonstrate in writing his Address to Coleridge should be sufficient proof.

And now, O Friend! this history is brought To its appointed close: the discipline And consummation of the Poet’s mind, In everything that stood most prominent, Hath faithfully been pictured; we have reached The time (which was our object from the first) When we may, not presumptuously, I hope, Suppose my powers so far confirmed, and such My knowledge, as to make me capable Of building up a Work that should endure. (XIII 269-278)

The claim is worthy of a triumphant exclamation – given that it asserts Wordsworth’s ethos as a capable poet, endowed with sufficient ‘power’ in his ability to deliver an address, (*oratio*) and sufficient ‘knowledge’ for his words to have authority (*ratio*). I have already commented on the significance of this passage as humbly demonstrating the fulfilment of a natural process and asserting the attainment of a habitual power that has become a character virtue. The claim is a significant one. But, typically, Wordsworth immediately undercuts the significance of his assertion with the statement in the following line, ‘Yet much hath been omitted …” And in reading on, the reader discovers that this section of the poem actually stands apart from the main body of the text, in a stanza of twenty lines that presents a carefully balanced antithesis.

Yet much hath been omitted, as need was; Of books how much! and even of the other wealth Which is collected among woods and fields, Far more: For Nature’s secondary grace, That outward illustration which is hers, Hath hitherto been barely touched upon, The charm more superficial, and yet sweet, Which from her works finds way, contemplated As they hold forth a genuine counterpart And softening mirror of the moral world. (XIII 279-288)

The first ten lines affirm Wordsworth’s ethos as a capable poet worthy of producing an epic – while the second ten lines present a lament for what he has failed to address sufficiently. ‘Books’ are named in a metonymic substitution for human knowledge and then ‘the other wealth’, (perhaps the ‘common’ wealth) to be found ‘among woods and fields’. He then announces his neglect of ‘Nature’s secondary grace’, something he acknowledges that he has barely touched upon. Her charm, ‘more superficial and yet sweet’ holds forth, however, a genuine counterpart / And softening mirror of the moral world’. It would seem that there is a mood of regret coupled with the one of triumph, and a sense that something
now needs to be done to address this lack of attention to ‘Nature’s secondary grace’ which is given a more explicit title a few lines later as ‘Fancy’:

Yes, having tracked the main essential Power,  
Imagination, up her way sublime,  
In turn might Fancy also be pursued  
Through all her transmigrations, till she too  
Was purified, had learned to ply her craft  
By judgement studied. Then might we return  
And in the rivers and the groves behold  
Another face… (XIII 289-296)

Having ‘tracked the main essential Power / Imagination, up her way sublime’ in describing his youthful life, Wordsworth now turns, to briefly address the needs of the other, lesser, manifestation of ‘imagination’ – the other pole of the polarity that Coleridge had defined in his 1802 discrimination of ‘imaginations’. ‘In turn might Fancy also be pursued’, her actions purified, her judgements steadied. In contemplating the need to treat Fancy as extensively as he has treated Imagination, Wordsworth produces a passage that continues for some forty lines, acknowledging the necessary influences of the human world and providing a rationale for the argument of the 1805 text that justifies the workings of human Fancy alongside the activities of ‘sublime’ Imagination. This turn to the workings of Fancy also describes the direction of Wordsworth’s actual poetic career which, at the time, had been involved with the ‘small’ poems, on humble subjects, that make up many of the Poems in Two Volumes. Alongside those ‘simpler’ poems stand the series of famous Odes, each of them presenting a Stoic argument for the need for the individual to face up to experiences of ‘this world’, and to take hold of his or her individual Fate in an active act of will.

In returning to ‘the rivers and groves’, Wordsworth gives them voice, that they may call upon ‘the more instructed mind’ of the poet, who can fancifully ‘link their images with subtle skill’. In the lines that follow, Wordsworth declares his intention to work with the forms and definite appearances of human life, and with the lesser appearances of Fancy, and with soothing conceptions of ‘delight’, rather than higher forms of meditation or heightened thought. These ‘softer’ representations of nature recall the voice of the Derwent in the opening lines of the poem – the ‘beauteous Stream’ whose ‘ceaseless music’ composed Wordsworth’s thoughts ‘to more than infant softness’, giving him:

Among the fretful dwellings of mankind,  
A knowledge, a dim earnest of the calm  
That Nature breathes among the hills and groves. (I 282-5)

The mood of Book XIII shifts here, into an acknowledgement of human feelings and human capacities – the world of ‘human nature’ that is often overlooked, ‘the marvellous world / As studied first in my own heart, and then / In life among the passions of mankind’ (XIII 308-310).

13 See Jared Curtis’ study of these poems: Wordsworth’s Experiment with Tradition: The Lyric Poems of 1802.
14 I suggest an allusion here to Virgil’s O fortunatos nimium passage in Georgics II.
Having made this turn to human nature and the workings of Fancy, Wordsworth then makes a necessary acknowledgement: ‘(this justice bids me say)’. He acknowledges the need for a formal education to direct the growth of the innocent mind which will otherwise be assailed by conflicting passions and led astray. Such discipline, as taught by an education in the liberal arts, provides the mind with a ‘hardy independence’ enabling it ‘to stand up / Among conflicting passions …to endure…Unchecked by innocence too delicate / And moral notions too intolerant’ (313-24). Most importantly, such an education teaches the mind to keep:

In wholesome separation the two natures.  
The one that feels, the other that observes (XIII 330-1)

Wordsworth’s approach in the original 1805 text is rhetorical and ‘even handed’ in the manner in which he deliberately presents both sides of the question as he attempts to treat, on the one hand, Imagination, and on the other hand, Fancy. The structure of his presentation betrays its ‘rhetorical’ rather than ‘logical’ approach, as he thinks in terms of a dialogue between two competing voices rather than a dialectic that will ultimately subordinate one term, while elevating the other. Wordsworth’s careful structuring of his argument in Book XIII of The Prelude, which reaches its climax in the carefully balanced twenty line stanza, reinforces his belief in the relationship between the two powers, Imagination and Fancy, rather than the differentiation between them argued for by Coleridge. It is essential to Wordsworth’s argument that the two powers work in tandem, as he attempts to articulate a complex relationship in which ‘sublime’ Imagination is tempered by ‘beautiful’ Fancy, whose more human attributes soften down the more vehement passions of a ‘strong imagination’. Wordsworth frames his argument utilising terms provided by Edmund Burke in his Philosophical Enquiry, but he also uses an original, classical, representation of that dynamic found in Cicero’s Tusculan Disputations, and also in Quintilian’s De Institutione Oratoria.

Cicero’s treatment of the emotions in the Tusculans, and Quintilian’s distinction between ethos and pathos in De Institutione Oratoria share a common understanding of human nature and human development originating in Aristotle. Their re-description of the basic binary distinction between Emotion and Reason originating with Plato (according to his transcendental philosophy), produces a dynamic relationship between the more vehement, frenzied, and uncivilised outbursts of emotion that can overturn the mind – and the milder, well-mannered, controlled and civilised, states of ‘reasonable’ emotion that make up the ‘beauties’ of human life. It was this basic dynamic that supplied Edmund Burke with the grounds for his influential Philosophical Inquiry which, as a characteristically eighteenth-century work, developed what had once been an ethical concept into an aesthetic one. For Cicero, and for Aristotle, the distinction to be drawn is between two states of mind, the one ruled by the passions, the other by reason. The former is forceful and expresses vehement

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15 The construct is fundamental to ancient Greek forms of thinking in which the terms *men* ‘on the one hand’ and *de* ‘on the other hand’ are used extensively, and the search for oppositions is structured into the heart of the language. Cicero’s focus on Greek philosophy introduced him to Aristotle’s belief that a philosopher should be able to pursue both sides of a question, and when rhetoricians argued *in utramque partem* their more impassioned delivery would be accompanied by appropriate hand gestures.
emotion – the latter is well-mannered and civilised. And the difference between them, unlike the
distinction made by Plato between Reason and Emotion, is one of degree not kind.

III. Pathos and Ethos

It was Quintilian’s treatment of this topic that Dockhorn was commenting on when he
described Wordsworth’s use of the ‘ethos-pathos formula’ that Lindenberger later identified as
playing a significant role in the composition of The Prelude: ‘The progress from pathos to ethos is
Wordsworth’s image of the history of his own life, and as such provides a pattern of organisation for
The Prelude…..The mature Wordsworth is, as it were, a synthesis of the two principles, with an
emphasis on ethos’ (On Wordsworth’s Prelude 36-7). Although I might quibble over the use of the
term ‘synthesis’ here, I accept Lindenberger’s description of the dynamic, and the manner in which it
played an essential part in the argument of The Prelude. Lindenberger concluded his discussion of
Dockhorn’s thesis by stating:

the pathos-ethos dichotomy was obviously not a rigid formula which Wordsworth used to
determine the form and meaning of his work in advance. Rather we might view it as a
somewhat loose set of associations – its very looseness is evident in the way he and his
predecessors could retain the same general category for such varied notions as Longinus’
association of the “sublime” with greatness, and Burke’s with terror – which Wordsworth
could take for granted as a normative, universal way of viewing reality. In the unselfconscious
ease with which he could voice these concepts, both in his criticism and his poetry, he reveals
himself as more closely akin to the writers of the eighteenth century than to any poet since his
time. (38-9)

Wordsworth’s use of the ethos-pathos formula did allow him to make loose sets of associations that
were not strictly logical. But they were also tied to a very specific understanding of human
psychology that originated in ancient philosophy, and I suggest that Wordsworth’s use of the formula
was actually quite rigidly applied. Although that original, classical understanding was reproduced in
debates that took place in the eighteenth century, and was revised by Enlightenment thinkers
attempting to define a new science of the mind, I argue that Wordsworth’s own knowledge of these
associations originated in his reading of the original form of this dichotomy, as set down in antiquity.
In The Prelude he put the ‘pathos-ethos dichotomy’ to extensive use in what has to be described as an
unimaginative use of a set formula. But it was one he could rely on to invent a coherent and consistent
‘argument’, about imagination, one that could be maintained as a controlling theme in the composition
of a thirteen book poem.

Lindenberger points out that Wordsworth’s use of the formula is most clear in the two
‘summarising’ Books – VIII and XIII – and that once this dynamic is identified, it provides a key to
reading the whole poem. Several of Wordsworth’s apparently paradoxical positions in the poem can
be better understood by realising the extent to which he exploits this formula, which divides emotional
experience into gentle and strong representations of feeling. By the time readers of The Prelude reach
Book VIII, the first of the two summarising Books, they may have already realised that Wordsworth is
continually qualifying his descriptions of experience according to whether they are forceful or gentle, grand or tender, wild or mild, severe or soft, sublime or beautiful. If not, Wordsworth assists them in discovering that understanding, as he foreshadows the argument in the final Books of the poem by announcing that the ‘Love of Nature’ must lead to ‘Love of Man’. In the Book VIII ‘Retrospect’, country life is first contrasted with that of the city, with Wordsworth expressing the feelings of ‘deep devotion’ that he had felt towards Nature when ‘In that great City’ (London) with all its ‘wretchedness and vice’ (VIII 62-3). In reviewing the benefits he had received from Nature – who had trained his habits among the woods and mountains, taught him love, and inspired him with ‘motions of delight’ – Wordsworth writes that the exaltations of ‘joy and love’ that he experienced in nature in his early childhood were ‘not vehement, / But calm and mild, gentle and beautiful / With gleams of sunshine...(VIII 86-8). The vocabulary Wordsworth is using here is suggestive of the *ethos-pathos* formula, but it also uses the vocabulary of Cicero’s treatment of the emotions in Book 3 and 4 of the *Tusculan Disputations*. Wordsworth’s use of the word ‘gleams’ suggests that he is drawing on Cicero’s distinctive terminology in the *Tusculans*, not just Quintilian’s in *The Institutes*.16

Nature’s power, as experienced in Wordsworth’s early childhood, is perceived as a benign, calm, and gentle influence. The point is made that ‘she’ was not perceived as a ‘vehement’ presence – the passions experienced in her presence are beautiful, and not sublime. A few lines later Wordsworth experiences feeling of delight that are quickly qualified as ‘bland’ (VIII 101-2), and these simple pleasures of pastoral delight are praised for their ‘beauty’. ‘Beauteous the domain / Where to the sense of beauty first my heart / Was opened’ (VIII 119-121). These fair native regions are then contrasted with the pleasures of some exotic setting – suggestive of Coleridge’s Xanadu – in order for Wordsworth to be able to make a comparison, one that also allows him to then declare:

But lovelier far than this, the paradise  
Where I was reared; in Nature’s primitive gifts  
Favoured no less (VIII 144-6)

Wordsworth’s paradise is described as a place in which Man is described as a ‘free, man working for himself, with choice / Of time and place and object’, a situation of ‘simplicity, / And beauty and inevitable grace’ (VIII 152-3; 157-8). But the comparison does not necessarily *privilege* the characteristics of the beautiful over the more ‘sublime’ description of the exotic setting, with which it is contrasted. Both scenes can produce feelings of ‘joy’ and these are described as the ‘two principles of joy’ which both play a part in the education of the young mind. And although Wordsworth appreciated the pastoral beauties that he had glimpsed as a child, it was in fact:

images of danger and distress  
And suffering, these took deepest holds of me  
Man suffering among awful Powers and Forms  
Of this I heard, and saw enough to make  
The imagination restless. (VIII 211-15)

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16 I qualify this assertion in Chapter 10 when I discuss Wordsworth’s knowledge of the *Tusculans*. 
Here the reader will remember that Wordsworth’s early childhood was ‘fostered alike by beauty and by fear’, and that ‘fear’, as an experience of the sublime, also contains a feeling of awe-ful ‘joy’. Wordsworth describes his youthful mind negotiating a course influenced by these ‘two principles of joy’, unable yet to distinguish the virtues and vices of either. It is only later, as a man, looking back over his life that he is able to make ‘moral’ judgements about the course of his life as he reviews it with an adult mind. After a period of youth, when nature had been ‘all in all’ it was only after ‘twenty three summers’ had passed, (revised to twenty two in the 1850 text), that man became the central focus of his affections. This would suggest the end of 1792 when he engaged in the activities of the revolutionaries in France; and it is this period that is the focus of the next two Books of The Prelude.

Books IX and X form something of a historical digression, a fall into history and a record of ‘Man’s unhappiness and guilt’, after which Wordsworth returns, wistfully, to seek some hope in nature, having suffered: ‘utter loss of hope itself / And things to hope for!’ in the world of men. In his dejection Wordsworth rallies his thoughts: ‘Not with these began / Our song, and not with these our song must end’ (XI 1; 6-8). It seems, at first, that he was recommending a return to the state of mind of the ‘glad preamble’ with which the poem began, as he addresses the breezes, brooks and groves – the places of inspiration for the dreaming poet. He finds that Nature still offers her beauties and, ‘in Nature still / Glorifying’, he finds ‘a counterpoise in her’ (XI 32-3). But his passion for her, ‘fervent as it was / Had suffered change’. He finds himself no longer able to lose himself in nature and have ‘a music and a voice / Harmonious as [her] own’ (XI 20-1). A necessary separation from nature is acknowledged, one that has the virtue of enabling him to gain a new appreciation of nature’s operations, having been able to distance himself from the ‘aching joys’ and ‘dizzy raptures’ of his earlier involvement. At the beginning of Book XII the ‘fear’ and ‘beauty’ of Nature are re-described as a balance between pathos and ethos, a description set out in a carefully composed 14 line ‘sonnet’ in which the power of individual genius is described as echoing that of Nature:

From nature doth emotion come, and moods
Of calmness equally are Nature’s gift:
This is her glory; these two attributes
Are sister horns that constitute her strength;
This twofold influence is the sun and shower
Of all her bounties, both in origin
And end alike benignant. Hence it is,
That Genius, which exists by interchange
Of peace and excitation, finds in her
His best and purest friend; from her receives
That energy by which he seeks the truth,
Is roused, aspires, grasps, struggles, wishes, craves,
From her that happy stillness of the mind
Which fits him to receive it when unsought. (XII 1-14)

The dynamic that exists between the pathos of emotional states of mind and the ethos of civilised, moods of calm, is not such that one can ever replace or dominate the other. As ‘sister horns’, they construct the horns of a dilemma that can only be resolved by going through them. Both sun and
shower are necessary for growth, both are benignant. And as too much sun, by itself, leads to drought, and too much rain to flooding, extreme states of both are vicious – they must work in tandem to produce a virtuous mean. Nature here still plays the role of source and origin of all benign experience. Genius finds in her ‘His best and purest friend; from her receives/ That energy by which he seeks the truth’, and she too is the source of ‘that happy stillness of mind’ – the sense of pure, mild, joy so central to Wordsworth’s peace of mind. In the lines that follow Wordsworth acknowledges that:

not in vain
I had been taught to reverence a Power
That is the very quality and shape
And image of right reason; that matures
Her processes by steadfast laws; gives birth
To no impatient or fallacious hopes,
No heat of passion or excessive zeal,
No vain conceits; provokes to no quick turns
Of self-applauding intellect; but lifts
The being into magnanimity   (XII 23-32)

Wordsworth’s mature understanding of Nature’s power was gained after he had realised that the ‘aching joys’ and ‘dizzy raptures’ of his youthful enthusiasm were states of excessive emotion, more manic than mantic. I argue that what he had learnt from ‘Nature’, or rather about ‘Nature’ by 1798 when he wrote ‘Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey’ was gained from his reading in Cicero whose philosophy is based on the pursuit of ‘right reason’ that is underpinned by ‘steadfast laws’ to be found in Nature. It was only when he had learnt to ‘soften down’ his strong emotions with the help of Dorothy’s feminine presence, and Cicero’s manly intellect, that he could then describe himself:

Thus moderated, thus composed, I found
Once more in man an object of delight
Of pure imagination, and of love
And, as the horizon of my mind enlarged
Again I took the intellectual eye
For my instructor, studious more to see
Great truths, than touch and handle little ones.
Knowledge was given accordingly; (XII 53-60)

This ‘Knowledge’ provided Wordsworth with his ‘philosophy of life’, and the grounds for his argument with Coleridge over ‘Imagination’ in The Prelude, where, in defining Imagination also as ‘Reason in her most exalted mood’, he equated the term with the Stoic logos. I propose that Wordsworth’s use of the word ‘Imagination’ in The Prelude, makes greater sense if understood according to Stoic logic rather than according to Coleridge’s transcendental logic – or his understanding of the logos as defined in St John’s Gospel. Wordsworth’s argument with Coleridge over imagination in The Prelude obviously becomes clearer, if it is understood according to Wordsworth’s logic. Rather than repeat A.A. Long’s description of Stoic logic here, I refer the reader back to the extracts in Chapter 3, Section II.

17 In De Legibus Cicero stresses that just laws, setting out ‘right reason’, are solely the product of Nature.
Chapter 6

Romantic Imaginations

I. Empiricism and Transcendentalism in the Poetry

My argument about the classical voice of the poet in *The Prelude* necessarily contradicts all the foundational critical analyses of the poem, which were based on the 1850 text in which later revisions to key parts of the ‘original’ poem had led to a loss of the integrity of the argument addressed to Coleridge. In fact Wordsworth did not alter a great deal to do with the representation of his character, but his revisions did alter the precision of the original argument, and he muddied the waters by adopting a Christian transcendentalist position at odds with his earlier, principled, representation of a stoic, classical humanist ethos. As a result, the carefully structured rhetorical dialectic that defined the original ‘Address’ was altered in key places and the finer points of the argument over ‘imagination’ were obscured. The brief summary of those changes in the Preface to the Norton *Prelude* touches on the concern that is most important to this study:

In his successive revisions Wordsworth smoothed out what had come to seem rough spots, clarified the syntax, elaborated the detail, and most consciously, had toned down, by touches of Christian piety, the poem’s more radical statements of the divine sufficiency of the human mind in its interchange with Nature.’ (NP xii)

In *The Mind of a Poet*, Raymond Havens made a point of studying the 1850 text, having decided to honour Wordsworth’s later intentions, and refusing to follow Ernest De Selincourt’s preference for making the 1805 text normative.¹ And other critics who based their reading on the ‘official’ published text will have found a different argument to the one presented to Coleridge in 1805. I have, therefore, not been concerned with arguing against the ‘canon’ – or with wilfully reading against the grain of established opinions for the sake of a more sophisticated theoretical argument. Critical opinions on Wordsworth’s understanding of ‘imagination’ in *The Prelude* will depend on the text that is being read. My argument has focused specifically on the 1805 ‘Address to Coleridge’ with the aim of achieving a better understanding of the argument that Wordsworth originally intended. It has also been part of my enquiry to try and understand ‘both sides of the question’, and in doing so, to trace the development of the idea – expressed most forcefully by Meyer Abrams and re-iterated by Jerome McGann and Clifford Siskin – that Wordsworth is the ‘exemplary’ British Romantic poet and *The Prelude* an ‘exemplary’ Romantic poem. In this concluding chapter to the first part of this study I present something of a reception history of *The Prelude* in order to account for the way in which twentieth–century scholarship accepted Wordsworth as a ‘Romantic’ and came to understand the topic of ‘imagination’ according to Coleridge’s definition of the term.

¹ See Havens’ comments in his Preface in which he quotes Wordsworth’s comments to Dyce, ‘You know the importance I attach to following strictly the last Copy of the text by an author’(*Mind of the Poet* xiii-xv).
As has already been noted, when later nineteenth-century critics first grappled with the published *Prelude* they quickly turned to Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria* for clarification of what Wordsworth was intending when writing about ‘imagination’ in the final section of his poem. As contemporaries of Tennyson they puzzled over a work composed half a century earlier, and considered it more as a curiosity of Wordsworth’s radical youth than as a masterpiece. But nearly half a century later, in the first major study of the poem, Émile Legouis celebrated Wordsworth’s ‘Imagination’ in no uncertain terms, as a transcendental power of the mind. And in defining his own views about Wordsworth, he also expressed a sincere debt to Coleridge:

To be complete, an appreciation of Wordsworth’s theory of poetry would involve a systematic statement of the laws of poetics in general…. Almost an entire work, moreover has already been devoted to it - a volume so admirable in its critical chapters as to be almost a standard work, and in any case greatly superior to anything which has since been written on the same subject; I mean the *Biographia Literaria* of Coleridge. (444)

Legouis’ reliance on Coleridge was to prove disastrous to his intention to write about Wordsworth’s imagination. His ‘Study of The Prelude’ was highly regarded and extremely influential. It would largely define attitudes towards the poem, and readings of Wordsworth’s understanding of Imagination, in the early years of the twentieth-century. Although it might not be widely read today, Legouis’ study contains a number of opinions, based on his comprehensive scholarship, that still remain commonplaces of Wordsworth criticism. Some of his own personal assertions were presented with such conviction that they came to assume canonical authority, and later twentieth-century critics have continued to reproduce them as self-evident facts of the matter. Legouis’ scholarship was exceptional for its time, and all later biographers were indebted to the detail he brought to his study of Wordsworth’s early life. But his critical judgement was overshadowed by the awe with which he celebrated Wordsworth’s ‘Power of the Imagination, which alone can penetrate reality’ (xii).

Legouis can be credited with having laid out the necessary critical foundations for the development of the High Romantic criticism that would later see Wordsworth defined as the great poet of the imagination. Many of the ideas that inform Abrams’ studies, especially those relating to belief in the ‘creative imagination’, can be found in Legouis’ work. *The Early Life of William Wordsworth* is necessary reading for anyone contemplating a critical study of *The Prelude*, in order that they may discover the basis for so many of the later assumptions about the state of Wordsworth’s mind, that have been taken for granted on the basis of Legouis’ authority. Legouis interprets the meditation on Snowden in the last Book of *The Prelude*, as some kind of mystical, ecstatic vision; Wordsworth is a ‘seer’, one of the elect, an ‘unrecognised prophet’ who speaks ‘with the tones and

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4 The Libris reprint, published in London in 1988 has a useful Introduction by Nicholas Roe.

5 A study of the Table of Contents to Legouis’ book gives a good idea of the orientation of his interpretation of Wordsworth’s text. His layout, his chapter headings, and the descriptions given of the sections within the chapters, provide an eloquent snapshot of his particular ‘Romantic’ perspective, as he charts the course of Wordsworth’s life according to the narrative of *The Prelude.*
almost in the words of Christ’ (472), and this power and authority are given him by virtue of his ‘imagination’.

Legouis’ study reproduces the Victorian frame of mind and a world-view influenced by such writers as Carlyle and Mill, Arnold and Pater. It is also the first study that explicitly focuses on, and offers, a psychological analysis of Wordsworth’s mind. But Legouis failed to appreciate that when Wordsworth mentioned ‘happiness’ he was more likely to be referring to a state of mind achieved by the virtuous pursuit of eudaemonist philosophy, than to a feeling of enthusiastic elation. He, also, placed great emphasis on Wordsworth’s use of the term ‘joy’, which he associated, like Coleridge and Arnold, with ‘great happiness’. In Legouis’s reading, Wordsworth’s identification with the character of the ‘happy man’ – the 

beatus vir

– is translated into that of the genial ‘man of feeling’. He also failed to distinguish the significant change in Wordsworth’s character that marks the turning point of The Prelude. In his introductory remarks he set out a very romantic representation of Wordsworth’s ethos, one that translated his actual eudaemonist principles into something quite opposite:

The poet’s object is precisely that which everyone seems ready to abandon as an idle dream: it is the recovery of happiness. He designs to increase the joys of life, and, though not denying the existence of its sorrows to transform them into peace. He preaches no political or social reform. Whether the existing forms of society endure or are destroyed, is for him at this time a matter of secondary importance. Nor does he speak in the name of any religion… The one thing of true importance is the cultivation of the feelings, which, in the individual, may, and ought to be, developed as to be capable of the greatest possible amount of enjoyment. Already, in this world of pain, there are privileged beings whose eyes behold with quiet rapture the splendours of nature, whose ears detect her harmonies, whose hearts are thrilled spontaneously and with delight by all tender and lofty emotion. (4-5 my emphasis)7

Legouis’ representation echoes the ideals of a decadent Epicurean tradition, something quite opposed to Wordsworth’s Stoic principles, and a reflection of the influence of European Romantic ideals that had developed over the course of the nineteenth century. This Romantic paradigm gradually eclipsed the influence of the eighteenth-century classical humanist manners that had defined Wordsworth’s own ethos, and which he had deliberately pursued as a well-mannered poet, whose good character was important to his professional success. Such values could still be recognised by critical minds in 1805 when the poem was originally completed. They were more difficult to discern when the revised poem was finally published, and its content considered something of a historical curiosity. But by the time Legouis was writing his criticism – almost a century after Wordsworth had began work on his masterpiece – the times had changed so considerably that the classical values that had shaped Wordsworth’s mind were no longer transparent to a mind like Legouis’.

Another significant aspect of Legouis’ study was his belief that Wordsworth’s history of his early life was simply a literal record of events that had actually happened to him. In taking

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6 It would seem that Jerome McGann’s characterisation of Wordsworth in The Romantic Ideology also drew on Legouis’ authority. ‘Wordsworth imprisoned his true voice of feeling within the bastille of his consciousness. Wordsworth made a solitude and he called it peace’ (91).

7 Legouis failed to recognise the essential difference between laetitia and gaudium that informs Wordsworth’s classical appreciation of joy. Wordsworth discriminates between ‘tender and lofty emotions’; the difference is crucial to his poetic theory and his poetic art. It is not through ‘increasing the joys of life’ that one arrives at peace, or by being capable of the ‘greatest possible amount of enjoyment’.
Wordsworth’s text at face value, he failed to appreciate that the poem was more ‘sentimental’ than ‘naïve’, and that Wordsworth had structured the poem according to the dictates of a controlling theme. Although the poem is ‘autobiographical’, it is also allegorical. It presents a narrative defined according to an example provided by another very popular late eighteenth-century text: James Beattie’s *The Minstrel, or the Progress of Genius*, which was modelled, in turn, on a theme set out, earlier, by James Thomson in *The Castle of Indolence: An Allegorical Poem*. Both works reproduce a classic theme, one widely recognised by those who had received a ‘liberal education’. They represent the ancient debate concerning the relative values of Nature and Art – whether genius was simply a product of Nature, an innate predisposition – or whether it was also dependent on Art, something that improved on Nature, producing a Second Nature. ‘Art’ was something acquired through Education, and in the Preface to *The Excursion* Wordsworth would later explicitly comment on fact that he had retired to his native mountains (to Nature) in 1800 in order to consciously ‘examine how far Nature and Education had qualified him’ to ‘construct a literary work that might live’ (*PW* V 2).

Both Thomson’s and Beattie’s works originally glorify Nature and suggest, naively, that genius can do without Art. But as both poems proceed with their narratives, the tables are turned, and both writers reveal that their works are written to expose the folly of youth and its attitude of mind – one that would glorify both indolence and enthusiasm, in a narcissistic celebration of innate genius. Such an attitude also represents a rejection of any form of social or political cohesion. Both Beattie’s and Thomson’s poems discourse on political philosophy and present republican arguments that define the nature of true Liberty, rather than the false concept of liberty entertained by young Edwin, and by the inhabitants of the Castle of Indolence. Both poems confront the folly of youthful minds that are only concerned with satisfying their own desires and are, therefore, incapable of civilised life. The inhabitants of Thomson’s castle are freed from their illusions by the efforts of the Knight of Arts and Industry while the Minstrel commands Edwin to undertake a serious course of study in the liberal arts if he is to experience true liberty of mind.

Wordsworth’s poem on the growth of his own mind is deliberately constructed to represent his mature appreciation of this topic. In demonstrating his awareness of his own youthful folly he represents himself to his reader as a man of virtue, a man capable of recognising the vicious nature of youthful idealism, if it is taken to extremes. Values that Wordsworth had once celebrated as virtues from the ‘golden’ perspective of his youthful, enthusiastic mind are later acknowledged as vices, when viewed from the more sober perspective of manhood. Thomson’s, Beattie’s, and Wordsworth’s moral judgements are all based on ethical ideals that are relative, and reflect an Aristotelian appreciation of virtue–ethics. In following the examples of Beattie’s, and Thomson’s allegories, Wordsworth’s narrative needed to include a significant *krisis* - a turning point that marked a transition from his youthful attitude of mind to one capable of recognising the follies of youth’s self-centred, narcissistic, fancies. The turning point of *The Prelude* occurs when Wordsworth dramatises a particular sequence of events that relate to his frustration with Godwin’s philosophical method, and declares, dramatically, that he had ‘Yielded up moral question in despair’ (X 901). In the 1850 text that Legouis would have

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8 ‘Expostulation and Reply’ and ‘The Tables Turned’ in *Lyrical Ballads* treat this theme in a playful manner.
been reading, Wordsworth provides a further clue by amplifying the sense of despair and commenting more explicitly on the major change that occurred at this time:

This was the crisis of that strong disease,
This soul’s last and lowest ebb. (1850: XI 306-7)

Legouis, whose romantic reading of the poem failed to perceive Wordsworth’s classical subtext, took Wordsworth’s over-dramatic representation of his state of mind in 1795 too literally. He interpreted Wordsworth’s ‘crisis’ as some form of mental illness, in keeping with his psychological approach. As a result, he paints the Racedown period as a time of misery when Wordsworth (represented as a rather pathetic, weak-willed, and despondent ‘son of Rousseau’) was nursed back to health by Dorothy. Legouis also read Dorothy’s love as a mixed blessing, as he continued to apply his psychological approach. He believed that her feminine presence kept Wordsworth’s mind enfeebled, and that he needed to be rescued both from his despair, and from her influence, by Coleridge in 1797. He concludes his chapter on Dorothy, and the situation at Racedown, by stating, ‘It was Coleridge who provided, or rather assisted [Wordsworth] to find, the only thing still needful to make him the poet he finally became, namely, a philosophy’ (319).

George Harper, author of the first major critical biography of Wordsworth, generally praised Legouis’ study but questioned several aspects of his biographical detail. Where Legouis idealised Wordsworth’s record of his life, Harper preferred to historicize it. Travelling to France for his research, he uncovered significant details about Wordsworth’s involvement with ‘The Friends of the Constitution’ in Blois in 1792 and – more shocking to Legouis – his affair with Annette Vallon, and the existence of his French daughter Caroline. Harper credited Wordsworth with far greater intellectual powers in the later 1790s, and he considered the influence of Godwin to have been significant. He thought it was ‘impossible to exaggerate the value of Godwin’s ideas to Wordsworth’ (Harper 181), and his chapter on Godwin presents one of the most useful summaries of Godwin’s views at the time. But he was highly critical of Wordsworth’s ‘philosophy’ in the final books of The Prelude. In his opinion, it would have been better if the poem had ended with the French Books. He expressed his dismay at what he saw as Wordsworth’s rejection of the ‘old psychology’ with its linkage between intellect, feeling and will, and its replacement by a belief that ‘the mind is one’. He also regretted the loss of the pantheist principles he saw exhibited in ‘Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey’, and believed that Wordsworth had sacrificed his own integrity by adopting Coleridge’s transcendentalist beliefs:

One of the purposes of The Prelude, painfully and redundantly achieved, is to renounce this pantheism, for it is nothing less. Wordsworth was travelling with Coleridge, with German

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9 William Wordsworth: His Life Works and Influence (1916)
10 Legouis was embarrassed by the realisation that Wordsworth’s ‘autobiography’ was not the straightforward history he had thought it to be. And although he was able to excuse Wordsworth as a poet because ‘the affections (not the passions), and the purified senses were the basis of his optimistic doctrine’, he censured him for having ‘maimed his autobiographical recollections’ (Early Life, 480) These comments were made in an Appendix he felt obliged to add to the second edition of his book.
Harper’s original criticism of *The Prelude* was based on the 1850 text, which can be more readily interpreted as representing Coleridgean ideas about Imagination. Harper’s critical opinion helped to embed the myth, convincingly set out by Legouis, that Wordsworth believed in the same concept of ‘The Imagination’ as that defined by Coleridge, German philosophy, and his age.

Arthur Beatty, author of *William Wordsworth: His Doctrine and Art in their Historical Relations* (1922), strongly contradicted Legouis’ claim that Wordsworth was a ‘son of Rousseau’, and credited him with far greater intellectual understanding. Beatty was the first scholar to take Wordsworth’s theoretical writings more seriously and attempt to account for the origin of the theory of the prefaces to *Lyrical Ballads*. He believed that Wordsworth’s ideas had their source in eighteenth-century philosophical enquiry, and identified Wordsworth as a ‘reactionary’ – someone who looked back for solid foundations to his thinking, turning to Locke’s empiricism in general, and the work of Hartley on ‘Association’ in particular. Beatty’s argument in favour of the influence of Hartley’s theory of the ‘Association of Ideas’ on the theory of the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* remains a critical commonplace. My own argument here questions the validity of those claims while, at the same time, recognising the importance of Beatty’s early work in stressing Wordsworth’s intellectual prowess. Beatty and Harper both recognised that Coleridge considered Wordsworth to possess a formidable intellect. Any question of ‘influence’ was mutual or even, as Harper believed, weighted in favour of Wordsworth.

But these early challenges to Legouis’ authority were to be countered, in turn, by H.W. Garrod, and later by Melvin Rader – two influential critics who both stressed the significance that Coleridge played in assisting Wordsworth in 1797. In his 1923 study, *Wordsworth*, Garrod argued particularly strongly for Wordsworth’s debt to Coleridge, and many of the assertions that he made were taken for granted by Wordsworth criticism over the next few decades. Although ‘a degree diffuse’, he considered Legouis’ *Early Life* could ‘still be regarded as the best book upon Wordsworth that there is’ (190), and in discussing the significance of *The Prelude* he wrote:

In this poem, and elsewhere, Coleridge may fairly be thought of as the guardian angel of Wordsworth’s poetical genius. Perhaps, indeed, Coleridge’s greatest work is Wordsworth. If there was any medicine for the decline of power that stole over Wordsworth’s poetry after 1807, it was perhaps to be sought from Coleridge. From Coleridge Wordsworth has derived elements of his metaphysics; and his genius died of a metaphysical atrophy. It is hardly an accident that the period of the decline of power coincides with the period in which Wordsworth’s gradual estrangement from Coleridge began’. (29-30)

This passage gives a good indication of Garrod’s bias in favour of Coleridge. He made a point of emphasising Wordsworth’s strangeness: ‘*The Prelude* is, in fact, the history of a consciousness highly abnormal; and it is only in proportion as we realise this, that we can understand either Wordsworth

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11 Reference here is to the 1929 edition, in one volume.
himself or his poetry’ (35). Later in his study he wrote that Wordsworth’s ‘consciousness apprehends things in a fashion essentially super-normal’ (95).

Garrod represents Wordsworth as a kind of ‘visionary’; his poetry is ‘essentially mystical. But whereas the mysticism of other men consists commonly in their effort to escape from the senses, the mysticism of Wordsworth is grounded and rooted, actually, in the senses’ (105). He asserts that ‘The work of Wordsworth’s effective period is consciously dominated…by what may be called his metaphysic of the imagination’ (143), and followed Legouis in making ‘the Imagination’ the central focus of Wordsworth’s ‘doctrine’. The ‘ultimate source’ of which is, ‘of course, the writings of those German philosophers whose opinion so powerfully influenced Coleridge’ (131). Since ‘Coleridge had placed Wordsworth’s feet in the path of philosophy’ (137), Wordsworth was at a loss to produce any good poetry once he was no longer available to advise him. According to Garrod, the last forty years of Wordsworth’s life were characterised by ‘philosophic and poetic poverty…in the main lamentably dull and drab, the most dismal anti-climax of which the history of literature holds record’ (138).

Having spent some time attempting to define Wordsworth’s understanding of Imagination Garrod conceded that, ‘When all is said and done, his theory of the interaction of sense and imagination hangs in the air’ (143); and he finally gave up the attempt by concluding, ‘The truth perhaps is that the imagination would not be what it is if we could say what it was; si deprehenditur, perit – its grandeur would be departed in being known’ (171).

In the Preface to the 1926 two-text edition of The Prelude Ernest de Selincourt expressed his praise for Legouis’ ‘exhaustive and illuminating’ Early Life; acknowledged Harper’s ‘admirable’ biography; and voiced his indebtedness to Garrod’s ‘brilliant study’ (DSP vii-ix). In his Introduction he acknowledged Beatty’s exhaustive treatment of Wordsworth’s debt to the eighteenth century, and endorsed the claim that Hartley provided Wordsworth with the philosophy of life he sets out in The Prelude. ‘But’ de Selincourt adds, ‘it is Hartley transcendentalized by Coleridge and at once modified and exalted by Wordsworth’s own mystical experience’ (lvi). De Selincourt saw Wordsworth placed in a dilemma between his need to define an empirical sense of self, and his earlier predisposition to trance states – states of mystical elation in which ‘the light of sense goes out’. He was also sympathetic to the view that Coleridge played a major part in providing Wordsworth with the ideas he expressed in The Prelude, and was particularly critical of Godwin’s influence. He wrote of Wordsworth’s ‘revulsion from the intellectual arrogance and self-sufficiency of Godwinism’, and believed that he took some time to recover from his experience of Godwin while at Racedown.

Arthur Beatty’s positive representation of Wordsworth’s intellectual abilities was to be challenged more directly, by Melvin Rader in his major study of Wordsworth’s ‘philosophy of mind’.

12 Garrod picks up on the materiality of Wordsworth’s concepts, but does not discover his stoicism.

13 For a study of the development of this particular myth see Willard L. Sperry, Wordsworth’s Anti-Climax. Sperry attributes Wordsworth’s theory to Locke, Hartley and, most specifically, John Alison (p.129).

14 A view shared by Mary Moorman. Raymond Havens was dismissive of Godwin’s influence and F.E.L. Priestley, in his authoritative Introduction to the 1949 edition of Godwin’s Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, appears to have listened to Havens. He maintained that, ‘It is hard to believe that the influence of Godwin on Wordsworth was at all significant, or that the poet received from Political Justice anything more than he gave’ (103). Peter Marshall in his more recent study of Godwin reiterates Priestley’s opinion.
Presiding Ideas in Wordsworth’s Poetry (1931). Rader allied himself with Garrod in believing it was Coleridge’s ideas that enabled Wordsworth to produce the dramatically different kind of poetry he came to write in 1798, the year of the Lyrical Ballads. Rader’s contribution to this debate turned the focus from the empirical particulars of biographical detail, to discussion of more abstract philosophical principles. He took the philosophical high ground (as Coleridge had done in Chapter XII of Biographia), and pointed out that ‘We can scarcely speak of Wordsworth’s ‘philosophy’ unless we stretch the meaning of the word’. In supporting Coleridge’s ‘indispensable’ role in shaping Wordsworth’s mind, Rader endorsed both Legouis and Garrod’s reading of events. But while Legouis actually gave Wordsworth more credit for having his own ideas, Rader finds him totally lacking in originality, and completely dependent on Coleridge’s intellect at the time of their meeting in 1797:

Not only profound affection, but the breakdown of convictions rendered Wordsworth’s mind highly impressionable. When he fell under the sway of his friend’s intellect, he was just emerging from a stage of extreme intellectual disorganization. This was his ‘soul’s last and lowest ebb’, when his faith in Godwinism had crumbled and he had given up ‘moral questions in despair.’ The crisis occurred in 1795, but the poet’s bewilderment gave way slowly. It was precisely at this most strategic of all times that Coleridge extended aid. At the very period when Wordsworth was yearning for light, a friend appeared with a wealth of philosophical knowledge and an eager proselytising spirit. (Presiding Ideas 122)

Rader’s study shows just how effectively Legouis’ opinions had been incorporated into mainstream Wordsworth criticism, and taken for fact.

In 1941, Raymond Havens’ detailed study of the 1850 Prelude – The Mind of a Poet, focused on the more mystical aspects of Wordsworth’s poem and Havens, like Legouis, turned to psychological explanations, rather than philosophical ones, to define Wordsworth’s experiences. Unlike Legouis, he was able to draw, tentatively, on theories of the unconscious to help in his analysis – as Herbert Read had also done in his 1930 study, Wordsworth. Havens made the point that he would ‘stress rather than minimize the transcendental in Wordsworth’ (1.2). His transcendental focus was to be balanced, in turn, by George Meyer’s Wordsworth’s Formative Years (1943). Meyer’s approach, like Beatty’s and Harper’s, gives Wordsworth credit for developing his own intellect and arriving at his own ideas independently of Coleridge, and well before the Alfoxden period. He also stressed that Wordsworth’s so-called ‘mystical’ concepts had their origin in ideas about the relationship between man, nature and God discussed in the works of the classical writers that Wordsworth was known to have read – a relationship that was also discussed in the republican political texts he was reading in the early 1790s. Meyer also believed that ‘The moral crisis which Wordsworth claimed to have experienced at Racedown has no real experience outside the pages of The Prelude’ (177).

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15 Garrod had written: ‘The fact is that Wordsworth is something of a philosophical shirker’ (Wordsworth 172).
16 In the Introduction to their edition of Lyrical Ballads A.L. Brett and A.R. Jones follow Rader closely. Wordsworth is described as having experienced ‘something approaching a mental breakdown’ (xxiii).
17 In Wordsworth: The Chronology of the Early Years 1770-1799, Mark Reed acknowledged references to such a crisis, but was unable to pin-point an actual time when it might have occurred.
The debate about Wordsworth’s empiricism or transcendentalism was given a further philosophical turn in Newton P. Stallknecht’s *Strange Seas of Thought, Studies in William Wordsworth’s Philosophy of Mind and Nature* (1945).18 Stallknecht announced his study to be a work of philosophical rather than literary criticism, and explored both sides of the mind / nature equation. But he also acknowledged the significance of Wordsworth’s mystical turn of mind. He was one of the few people to consider the influence of the Stoics, though he preferred to follow Coleridge’s route, via the Neo-Platonists, to account for such ideas. In 1953 Abbie Findlay Potts published *Wordsworth’s Prelude; A Study of its Literary Form*, which provided an analysis of the literary sources that could be seen to have influenced the ideas represented by Wordsworth. Potts’ study is invaluable, and remains necessary reading for anyone concerned with the scope of Wordsworth’s intentions in *The Prelude*, and her research reveals something of the breadth of his background knowledge of literature. Potts had earlier been a student of Lane Cooper, one of the few North American scholars to recognise the truth of Wordsworth’s classical voice when the mainstream critics were listening, instead, to Coleridge’s ventriloquism. Her study largely ignored the debate about imagination’s status as an empirical or transcendental concept, something that was becoming a preoccupation of Romantic critics. In *On Wordsworth’s Prelude* (1963), Herbert Lindenberger similarly avoided reading the poem according to that polarisation as he focussed instead on Wordsworth’s use of classical rhetoric and the *ethos-pathos* formula. Believing that ‘the poem wavers quite explicitly between two areas of reference…the poem as personal history and as prophetic utterance’, Lindenberger saw Wordsworth finding ‘a mode of language and organisation to encompass both areas at once’. Rather than attempting to pursue a particular thesis that might produce any definitive interpretation of the poem’s claims about ‘imagination’, Lindenberger’s approach, like that of Geoffrey Hartman, was more phenomenological. Acknowledging that, the ‘thought structures and literary sources’ of *The Prelude* ‘had been done once and for all by Havens and Potts’, he offered, instead, ‘thirteen ways of reading *The Prelude*’. But in the same year that Potts’ study was published by Cornell, Oxford University Press published Meyer Abrams’ *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*. Four years earlier C. M. Bowra’s influential essay ‘The Romantic Imagination’, published by Harvard University Press, had quietly ushered in the era of High Romanticism.19

Abrams acknowledged that Bowra’s thesis about the significance of the ‘creative imagination’ being ‘closely connected with a peculiar insight into an unseen order behind visible things’ was one on which, he too, had based his own study.20 In developing his thesis that Wordsworth be considered the visionary, founding member (along with Coleridge), of a new expressive form of poetry, Abrams drew heavily on Coleridge’s representation of Wordsworth and, as has been argued here, many of the ‘Romantic’ values attributed to Wordsworth can be seen, on closer reading, to have originated in

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18 Stallknecht had written an earlier essay on ‘Wordsworth and Philosophy: Suggestions Concerning the Source of the Poet’s Doctrines and the Nature of his Mystical Experience ‘in *PMLA* 44.4 (1929): 1116-1143.
19 Bowra’s concern that the Romantic poets had ‘a peculiar insight into an unseen order behind visible things’ closely echoes Legouis’ and Garrod’s assertions about Wordsworth’s ‘visionary’ or ‘mystical’ capacities. *Mirror and the Lamp*, p. 313.
20
Coleridge’s mind. The Mirror and the Lamp was to have a remarkable influence on both the study of Romanticism and the study of Wordsworth; and it was largely as a result of the High Romantic approach pursued by Abrams, supported by Harold Bloom, and partially endorsed by Geoffrey Hartman, that Wordsworth’s reputation as Britain’s premier Romantic poet was defined and established in the middle years of the twentieth century. Bloom enthusiastically endorsed Bowra’s and Abram’s belief that the ‘High Romantics’ had ‘a common tendency…(at their most concentrated and intense), to insist that Imagination or creative power is autonomous’. Hartman’s sophisticated argument in Wordsworth’s Poetry 1787-1814, published in 1964, in which he later stated he ‘basically describ[ed] Wordsworth’s consciousness about consciousness’ was actually far more complex than that in its focus on the concept of ‘anti-self-consciousness’, and a perceived conflict between ‘Nature’ and ‘Imagination’. In addition to setting out his phenomenological reading, Hartman also provided a detailed analysis of earlier Wordsworth criticism, making his book the most comprehensive study of Wordsworth of his era. But these approaches all failed to address what Wordsworth himself understood by ‘imagination’, as they also assumed he shared a common understanding with Coleridge. Their readings of Wordsworth were based on a later nineteenth-century interpretive paradigm pursuing post-Kant philosophical ideals and a Hegelian appreciation of ‘dialectic’ – one quite foreign to the classical notion of dialectic that Wordsworth followed.

In his second major study of Romanticism, Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature (1971), Abrams again used Wordsworth’s work to develop his thesis as he argued that The Prelude should be read as something of a Romantic bildungsroman. He also saw the Prospectus to ‘The Recluse’ as ‘an indispensable guide’ to understanding the design of Wordsworth’s poetry, ‘his one explicit detailed exposition of his grand structural scheme’ (20). He believed that the Prospectus stood as ‘the manifesto of a central Romantic enterprise’, and The Prelude (which he also described as an ‘exemplary’ Romantic poem) was used to demonstrate his thesis about ‘the secularisation of inherited theological ideas and ways of thinking’ (12) – a natural form of Supernaturalism. Despite the hegemonic influence of the High Romanticists, the matter of Wordsworth’s empiricism or transcendentalism continued to be debated, though the transcendentalists had seemingly won the day. In 1961 H.W. Piper had expanded on the distinctions of formal philosophy by arguing for a greater appreciation of Wordsworth’s pantheism. In The Active Universe: Pantheism and the Concept of Imagination in the English Romantic Poets, Piper argued that Wordsworth demonstrated his appreciation of a ‘one life’ philosophy quite independently of Coleridge, pointing out, as Meyer and other earlier critics had also done, that Wordsworth’s

21 As Seamus Perry noted in a recent re-appraisal of Abrams’ study, the real model for Abrams’ ‘expressive Romantic’ is actually Coleridge: ‘The Mirror and the Lamp’ Essays in Criticism 54.3 (2004): 260-282.
24 In Wordsworth: The Sense of History, Alan Liu expressed a concern to displace Hartman’s influence.
25 Abrams can justify his thesis by maintaining that he is discussing the 1850 text - but his argument imposes beliefs on Wordsworth that he did not hold in 1805. To what extent he later held the beliefs that Abrams defined for him is a question that lies beyond the scope of this study.
‘pantheism’ owed much to his reading in Virgil and Ovid, and to ancient classical beliefs about nature spirits and genius loci.

The discussion of influences that contributed to Wordsworth’s ‘philosophy’ in The Prelude was renewed in the late 1950s with a second edition of Stallknecht’s study being published, while Beatty’s and Rader’s books were both republished in the 1960s. In 1973 this seemingly perennial topic was summarised again by Alan Grob, in The Philosophical Mind: A Study of Wordsworth’s Poetry and Thought. Various other studies might be added to this list, but the process could be said to have come to a conclusion with Keith Thomas’ recapitulation of the same old dynamic: Wordsworth and Philosophy: Empiricism and Transcendentalism in the Poetry (1989). Thomas summarises the approaches of the earlier studies, but also includes Derrida and the arguments of postmodernist and new historicist theory in his study. But he too, stresses that, ‘The role of Coleridge is not to be underestimated…Wordsworth’s philosophical development up to 1804 is essentially Coleridge’s’ (Wordsworth and Philosophy 16). One final study worthy of mention, whose author has tirelessly attempted to re-orientate Wordsworth studies away from the High Romantic reading proposed by Abrams and to recognise Wordsworth’s classical voice, is John O. Hayden’s William Wordsworth and the Mind of Man, The Poet as Thinker (1992).

As Thomas noted, the arrival of deconstructionist theory called for an end to the kind of logocentric enquiry favoured by Coleridge and Wordsworth, in their differing appreciations of the logos, and Postmodernist theorists might argue that the whole exercise was futile – to believe that such an enquiry could arrive at any final conclusion was itself an act of pure imagination. With the arrival of postmodernism, Wordsworth’s claims about imagination in The Prelude have attracted theorists eager to improve on what they discerned as the blinkered readings established by tradition. Such deconstructionist approaches have usually been more concerned with questions of ‘language’, than history or poetic authority. They produce readings in which language is freed from its referential capacity, freed from the authority of the author who spoke or wrote the ‘text’, and disconnected from the historical circumstances in which the words were composed. This free play of language might be compared with the freedom experienced by the inspired poet, who wanders, ‘free as a bird’, at the beginning of The Prelude (1850) and is represented as incapable of composing his words.

The great debate as to whether Wordsworth’s understanding of ‘Imagination’ was based on Empiricist or Transcendentalist principles is a classic example of the way in which the study of Wordsworth has largely been defined according to concepts that fit with Coleridge’s philosophical ideals, and his particular methodology, but which actually ignore those held by Wordsworth. If, as I argue here, Wordsworth was committed to Stoic beliefs in his discussions ‘On Man, on Nature and on Human Life’, then he did not figure his reality according to the logic and the binary dualisms implicit

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26 Beatty’s study was reprinted in 1960, and Rader’s, in a revised form, in 1967.
27 See also Hayden’s Polestar of the Ancients: The Aristotelian Tradition in Classical and English Literary Criticism.
28 Most recently Simon Jarvis has reopened the debate about Wordsworth as a philosopher in Wordsworth’s Philosophic Song. His study is, among other things, a riposte to both the claims of theory and a further critique of the kind of arguments about ideology presented by Jerome McGann and Marjorie Levinson. In Wordsworth and the Poetry of What We Are, Paul Fry also focuses on philosophical questions.
in Coleridge’s method. Nor, as he clearly told Crabb Robinson, had he any interest in German metaphysics. But Coleridgean-orientated criticism continues to practise such a method of thinking and, as a result, has continued to misread Wordsworth.

Recent Wordsworth criticism has reversed the traditional editorial principles pursued by Ernest De Selincourt in the Oxford Poetic Works, and upheld by Raymond Havens in The Mind of a Poet. Stephen Parrish, as Chief Editor of the Cornell Wordsworth; Jonathan Wordsworth, in his work on The Prelude; Stephen Gill, as editor of Oxford ‘Standard Authors’ edition of Wordsworth; and Nicholas Roe in his Penguin edition of Wordsworth’s Selected Poetry have all published the earliest versions of Wordsworth’s works and not the final texts that Wordsworth had revised. They all justify their editorial positions as intending to represent the original, authentic, historical, Wordsworth – the man who wrote the poems in a particular historical context. I argue, however, that much of that ‘original’ Wordsworth still remains undiscovered today, even after the attempts made by recent historicist criticism to uncover more about the ‘Hidden Wordsworth’. I suggest that our contemporary ‘pre-established codes of decision’ – the enduring legacy of the ‘romantic ideology’ that continues to define the paradigm by which we read Wordsworth – makes it impossible to recover his actual ethos. These assumptions continue to define a youthful, Romantic, Wordsworth who sadly lost his nerve after producing his best, and most Romantic poetry during his ‘great decade’ – thanks largely to Coleridge’s necessary assistance. Much of the ‘evidence’ for defining such an ethos in the past has been based on romantic readings of the text of his greatest poem, rather than paying closer attention to historical evidence. More recent ‘new historical’ approaches have claimed to address that problem, but many of these more enlightened critics continue to interpret Wordsworth according to the ‘authority’ of Wordsworth’s own descriptions of events, as found in The Prelude. Their reading of that text is, I argue, too often coloured by their sympathy for Wordsworthian values that were actually defined by Coleridge. It therefore matters a great deal how the text of The Prelude is interpreted, and whether readers of the earlier text acknowledge that it addresses an argument to Coleridge arguing against his understanding of Imagination. It was an argument that set out to refute Coleridge’s belief that Wordsworth’s best poetry was the product of the workings of ‘a synthetic and magical power to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of Imagination’. In Part 2 of this study I present my grounds for asserting that Cicero provided Wordsworth with a ‘one–life’ philosophy that was opposed to many of Coleridge’s Christian principles and his later more ‘critical’ philosophical ones. Wordsworth’s ‘radically Different’ appreciation of imagination was based on the Stoic principles he had discovered in Cicero’s philosophical works, and which provided him with the grounds for his argument of The Prelude (1805).

29 Wordsworth told Crabb Robinson the he had ‘never read a word of German metaphysics, thank Heaven’. Correspondence of Crabb Robinson with the Wordsworth Circle, ed. Edith Morley, 1. 401. Later, in 1844, he is reported as saying, ‘Kant, Schelling, Fichte; Fichte, Schelling, Kant: all this is dreary work and does not denote progress’, Memories of Old Friends, being Extracts from the Journals and Letters of Caroline Fox, ed. H.N. Pym, p. 215
Part Two

Chapter 7

Songs of Innocence and Experience:
The French Books of The Prelude

I. Wordworth’s Sense of History

In this second part of the thesis I present my rationale for focussing on Cicero as a significant influence on development of Wordworth’s classical imagination and his Roman – rather than Romantic – ethos. My argument proposes that Wordworth made a particular study of Cicero’s philosophical works after leaving London for Racedown in 1795, having made a deliberate choice to retire to the country and undertake a period of solitary study. He would have earlier read Cicero at school and at University and would have discussed his political works when engaged in conversation with Beaupuy in France. But I have reason to believe that it was at Racedown that he pursued a more detailed reading of Cicero and found his writings on philosophy to provide answers to many of the ‘moral questions’ that he had not found in Godwin’s philosophy. Wordworth would have read Cicero at school, and Ben Ross Schneider discusses Cicero’s influence on Wordworth’s education at both Hawkeshead and Cambridge in his study Wordsworth’s Cambridge Education. He points out that Cicero played a significant part in any grammar school education; his orations and letters were a staple for the study of Latin and rhetoric. The most influential of Cicero’s works studied at school was De Officiis, a handbook on ‘morals’ for young gentlemen, written originally for Cicero’s son.1

Schneider proposes that Wordworth used De Officiis as a guide when writing his Lines Written as a School Exercise at Hawkeshead (PW 1 259-261), and he shows how Wordworth’s ‘exercise’ is constructed using Cicero’s text. In De Officiis Cicero sets out the four cardinal virtues of ‘Truth, by which we discern right action; Justice, our obligation to our fellow men; Courage, which enables us to carry out moral decisions; and Propriety, which teaches us to subject our passions to our reason and to live in harmony with nature’.2 These values were still being taught to ‘gentlemen’ in the eighteenth, and even nineteenth centuries as a moral norm. De Officiis was a perfect text for teaching

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1 Neil Wood notes that classicist A. E. Douglas described De Officiis as ‘the most influential secular prose work ever written’. It was read throughout the Middle Ages and ‘was possibly the first book of classical antiquity to come from a printing press. From the sixteenth to the nineteenth century it was staple fare for young European pupils, a universally accepted manual for gentlemanly conduct. Apart from Cicero’s position on moral obligation, the work is crucial because of its portrait of an ideal gentleman and the attitude expressed toward labour and various vocations’ (Cicero’s Social and Political Thought 68). Wordworth’s own copy of De Officiis is in the Wordsworth Trust Library (Jerwood Centre) at Grasmere.

2 See Wordsworth’s Hawkeshead Education pp. 71-6 & 184-5. Schneider gives a useful synopsis of the significance of Cicero’s moral concepts, and in his concluding chapter he again emphasises Wordworth’s debt to Cicero, to Stoicism, and to the Greek and Roman writers (245–8).
grammar school pupils moral values, assisting them in their language studies through the example of Cicero’s rhetoric, and preparing them for the teaching of moral philosophy at University.³

Had Wordsworth gone to Oxford he would have studied the philosophy of Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics (considered, then, to comprise the three main schools of ancient philosophy), and the curriculum would have been focused more on the Classics. But Cambridge was more progressive, placing greater emphasis on Locke, Newton and Mathematics, and on contemporary moral philosophy, rather than that of the ancients. Wordsworth would have been taught Paley’s Moral Philosophy, published in 1785 which, as Schneider points out, emphasised a morality based on enlightened ‘self-interest’. This was at odds with Cicero’s classical republican mores which placed social goods before individual ones, emphasising the interest of society as a whole. Schneider suggests that Wordsworth inevitably fell in with the times and pursued a moral philosophy that centred on the belief that enlightened self-interest would lead to enlightened social action, and that whatever influence Cicero’s Offices may have had at Hawkeshead, Wordsworth would have been more influenced by Paley’s eighteenth-century moral philosophy during his time at Cambridge.

But Wordsworth’s beliefs at that time were not the product of any great questioning or any careful study of classical philosophy since his main interests were not philosophical or political, but poetical. While at Cambridge he identified more readily with the sensibilities of the so-called ‘pre-romantic’ poets, continuing to develop the interest his teacher William Taylor had stimulated at Hawkeshead, in studying the works of Milton, Thomson, Young, Collins and Gray. Taylor’s successor Thomas Bowman was also interested in poetry, and can be credited with introducing Wordsworth to the works of James Beattie and the Warton’s.⁴ At Cambridge Gray’s ‘Bard’, Collins’ ‘Poetical Character’ and Beattie’s Edwin might all have appealed as models for Wordsworth’s own sense of poetic identity. Neglecting Mathematics, which he had excelled in at Hawkeshead, he took up Spanish and Italian, focussing on what interested him, rather than following the honours curriculum. Books III and IV of The Prelude clearly record his early poetic enthusiasm and his indulgence in states of ecstatic rapture, blissful reverie, and moody melancholia as he sought poetic inspiration in the mountains of Cumbria or by the banks of the Cam where he also mused on becoming a Druid initiate.⁵ During this period he was clearly romantic in his sympathies, allying himself with the ‘pre-romantic’ sensibilities of the poets he had learnt to identify with at school. He would probably have

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³ Adam Potkay notes that Addison used De Officiis to supply mottoes for The Spectator fourteen times (Fate of Eloquence 11).
⁴ Taylor’s successor, Thomas Bowman, had an equally important role in continuing to provide Wordsworth with books - tours, travels, histories and biographies, as well as poetry. He lent Wordsworth Cowper’s Task when it first came out, and Burns’ Poems. Wordsworth wrote a letter to Bowman’s son at the time of his father’s death, telling him how Bowman had introduced him to ‘Langhorne’s poems, Beattie’s Minstrel & Percy’s Reliques’ and that through other books or periodicals he ‘became acquainted with the poetry of Charlotte Smith & the two Wartons’. Bowman’s son also notes other significant books that Wordsworth borrowed: George Sandys’ Travels in the East and his translation of Ovid’s Metamorphoses; Fox’s Book of Martyrs; and Evelyn’s Forest Trees. See T.W. Thompson, Wordsworth’s Hawkeshead, Ed. R. Woof, p. 344.
⁵ De Selincourt records earlier variants of a passage in Book III in which Wordsworth described himself as, ‘A youthful Druid taught in shady groves/Primeval mysteries, a bard elect’ or alternatively as ‘a young Initiate who has seen/Thrice sacred mysteries mid Druid groves.’ (DS Prelude 75-76)
neglected the study of Cicero at Cambridge as he turned his attention to his bardic vocation and the study of romance languages, something made easier by his good knowledge of Latin.

In 1792 Michel Beaupuy would have reintroduced Wordsworth to Cicero’s works as he attempted to teach him political philosophy by the banks of the Loire, as recorded in Book IX of The Prelude. Cicero’s De Legibus and De Republica were the foundational texts of republican political theory. Cicero had drawn on Plato’s Republic and Laws to produce works that focussed on Roman mores and in which Plato’s philosophical idealism was displaced by Stoic concepts of virtue and of Nature. De Republica, contained the classic description of the ‘balanced constitution’ as defined by Polybius, the model idealised by ancient republicans, and which later republics attempted to emulate. In De Legibus, Cicero set out his appreciation that all civil law must be based on the laws of Nature, and asserts that the wise man who pursues the path of philosophy will be able to come to an understanding of the divinity of Nature as his own mind attains divine powers of understanding. When Wordsworth returned from France he would have had a general knowledge of eighteenth-century French political theorists and the works of important historical figures, such as Machiavelli and Grotius, and much earlier, Cicero and Polybius. But, as he reports in The Prelude, he had not paid sufficient attention to Beaupuy’s teaching about political philosophy. When he actually became involved in the activities of the revolution, he did so as an enthusiast.

He returned to England fired up with millenial fervour, in an inspired state of mind that he later identified as manic, and bordering on madness. In Book X of The Prelude he relates how his enthusiasm had led him into error, to a fanatical belief that he was actually possessed by a divine ‘influx’ as a prophet of the revolution who believed his actions on behalf of Liberty to be virtuous. It was only after he had suffered an inevitable mental collapse from such a state of extreme elation that he was later able to recognise that he had acted in a manner very similar to that of Robespierre. He was then able to acknowledge that ideals he had thought virtuous at the time were, in fact, vicious. That realisation was salutary, and led him to question all such enthusiastic states of mind, even poetic ones. But although shocked by events in France, where people he had met had been executed, he did not abandon his republican ideals. He transferred his allegiance to the English Republicans, while still hoping that a true republican voice might emerge from the in-fighting between the factions in France. Meanwhile he turned his attention to making a careful study of republican political principles, an activity that would have inevitably led him to a more detailed study of De Republica and De Legibus. The record of his experiences in Book X is difficult to follow, and reflects something of his confused and manic state of mind at the time. It is a confessional piece and argues a defence of his actions appealing ‘to equity and reason’ as he attempts to explain and justify that his radicalism had been carried out in the name of the principles of true Liberty.

The revisions to An Evening Walk carried out at Windy Brow in 1794 suggest that Wordsworth had already been reading in Cicero’s philosophical works by this time, as he defines

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6 Parts of Cicero’s De Republica were known to eighteenth-century readers, but the text, like that of De Legibus was incomplete. It was not until the early nineteenth-century that a more complete text of De Republica was discovered, one that allowed scholars to have a better idea of the form of the original work. One part of De Republica that was already well known was ‘The Dream of Scipio’.
pantheistic beliefs, and makes reference to Stoic theories of the emotions, both of which are to be found in Cicero’s works. His references suggest some knowledge of the Tusculan Disputations, and there is reason to believe that he had also read De Oratore by this time. Dorothy’s remarks about the ‘virtuous’ and ‘happy’ character of the inhabitants of Windy Brow in a letter of this period reflect the influence of her brother’s republican ideals. (EY 115). In letters to William Matthews, Wordsworth also reveals that he had been reading extensively, and thinking deeply, about ‘moral questions’ as he developed a better understanding of political philosophy and the need to clearly define the nature of ‘justice’. That reading, which probably included the work of Rousseau, led him eventually to Godwin’s Enquiry concerning Political Justice, and its influence on General Virtue and Happiness published in 1793. In early1795 Wordsworth travelled to London to meet Godwin, who was then at the height of his fame, and was introduced to Godwin’s circle of friends. For a while he participated in the philosophical discussions of Godwin and his circle but, as he dramatically relates in The Prelude, he ultimately found Godwin’s method impossible, and writes of having ‘Yielded up moral questions in despair’ (X 901). In the autumn of 1795 Wordsworth left London for Racedown Lodge in Dorset. Although many critics have been convinced by Wordsworth’s rhetoric that he was indeed in a state of great despair at the time, the historical evidence does not support this reading. Wordsworth took advantage of a generous offer of rent-free accommodation and went into ‘retirement’ in the country with Dorothy, choosing a place of ‘solitude’ in order to engage in a period of intense study. As part of that study he had the opportunity to read extensively in Cicero’s philosophical works, and my reasons for suggesting this particular influence are given in this second part of my thesis.

In the next two chapters I focus on Wordsworth’s ‘sense of history’ in the French books of The Prelude, in order to arrive at a better understanding of his political beliefs and associations during the period from when he arrived in France in December 1791 to when he retired to Racedown. My concern is to provide a historical context for my claim that Cicero became a significant influence on Wordsworth’s mind during the Racedown period, and to obtain a better understanding of the nature of Wordsworth’s republican sympathies. When Wordsworth left London and Godwin, he was still looking for some authority who could provide him with a genuine definition of ‘political justice’ – a ‘wise man’ whose philosophy could reconcile vicious extremes and find a ‘just’ middle way, a path of true virtue. I argue here that Wordsworth’s reading in Cicero offered him concepts of political justice that he felt to be truly virtuous, and that Cicero’s own ethical example as an Academic Sceptic sympathetic to Stoic concepts of virtue, offered him a role model. I also argue that Cicero’s philosophy provided Wordsworth a cure for his ‘despair’ by enabling him to identify and diagnose the true nature of his ‘strong disease’.

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7 Godwin’s full title reflects the classical eudaemonist principles that underpinned his study. The title to the second edition published in Nov 1795, was slightly altered to Enquiry concerning Political Justice, and its Influence on Morals and Happiness. The emphasis on ‘morals’ rather than ‘virtue’ probably reflected a reaction against the misuse of the term ‘virtue’ by the republicans in France.

8 He travelled via Bristol, staying with the Pinney family, the owners of Racedown, for a month. It was while he was in Bristol that he met both Coleridge and Robert Southey for the first time.
Wordsworth’s ‘history’ of his life in *The Prelude* is certainly not one setting out to describe ‘what actually happened’, as Legouis had thought. *The Prelude*, as a poem, offers a ‘Fained Historie’ rather than a ‘true historic’; a distinction made by Bacon in his *Advancement of Knowledge*. In addition to poetic licence, Wordsworth ‘invents’ various ‘arguments’ to express particular opinions and to emphasise the allegory he was concerned to construct. As historiographers have always stressed, ‘what actually happened’, as a ‘historical record’, is always coloured by the character of the person narrating the history. Edmund Burke’s appreciation of the way things were in England in the early 1790s was very different to William Godwin’s - as the history of *Caleb Williams, or The Way Things Are*, dramatically reveals. The course of Wordsworth’s narrative in *The Prelude* is pre-determined by the moral tale that he is concerned to relate to Coleridge, in which his daemonic, youthful, prophetic over-imaginative genius is ‘softened down’ and humanised through his necessary engagement with the world of men and history.

As Alan Liu has noted, Wordsworth’s ‘sense of history’ was strongly coloured by his reading in the ancient historians, whose works he is known to have read with interest, and which he recommended as worthy of serious study to Mrs Clarkson in 1805. Plutarch’s *Lives*, for instance, focussed far more on details about the characters who made history than on events *per se*. The introduction to ‘Dryden’s’ translation records that: ‘it is not primarily as a historian of cities that Plutarch writes, but as a biographer and a moralist. To see in his characters “duty performed and rewarded; arrogance chastised; hasty anger corrected” and above all virtue triumphant, such are his interests’. Wordsworth’s own ‘history’ is a history of the development of his new character as ‘a man speaking to men’ and was ‘designed’ (*Prelude* XIII 412) with another character, Coleridge, in mind. The history Wordsworth writes in *The Prelude* is about the growth of his character, it is a representation of his ethos, and should not be read as a reliable catalogue of historical events. However much those events shaped his mind, they are also made to fit the concerns of the moral history, and the moral argument that he constructed and addressed to Coleridge. Wordsworth read history as Plutarch did. In his *Parallel Lives* Plutarch aimed to reveal his subject’s character, and thereby improve his reader’s character. His biographies had a moralising function, as did *The Prelude*,

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9 In reply to a request from Mrs Clarkson, Dorothy replies ‘William scarcely knows what books to recommend to you but you cannot go wrong, he says, if you read the best old writers – Lord Bacon’s *Essays*, his *Advancement of Learning* &c., for instance, and if you are fond of History read it in the old memoirs or old Chronicles’ (EY 662).

10 In his essay, ‘The Lake Poets: William Wordsworth.’ Thomas De Quincey recorded that Plutarch’s *Lives* was Wordsworth’s favourite book (excepting books of poetry). He also noted that Wordsworth was aware of ‘the inaccuracy and want of authentic weight attaching to Plutarch as a historian: but his business with Plutarch was not for purposes of research: he was satisfied with his fine moral effects. De Quincey, *Collected Writings*. Ed. Mason. II. 288. Given Wordsworth’s early interest in Rousseau, it is also worth noting that Rousseau had written that ‘Plutarch, above all was my favourite author’. (Confessions Book 1). In his *Four Letters to M. de Malesherbes* he related how he had got his hands on Plutarch at the age of six, and knew him by heart at the age of eight, having read all his ‘novels’ (i.e. his *Lives of Illustrious Men*). He related that his reading caused him to ‘shed buckets of tears...From that reading, my heart acquired this heroic and romantic bent which has done nothing but increase until now and which has made me completely disgusted with everything, except that which resembles my fantasies’.

For these references see C.E. Butterworth’s notes to *The Reveries of a Solitary Walker* p 59.

which concludes with Wordsworth defining his ethos as that of a person of sufficient moral standing to be ‘capable’ of writing a major epic.

In a discussion of Plutarch’s sense of history in his *Parallel Lives*, Tim Duff notes that:

the concept of moralism, like its content is not transcultural. Ancient Greek has no term equivalent to our abstract ‘moralism’ or ‘morality’. The nearest equivalents are terms relating to character, such as ἰθος (‘character’) or ἠθική αρετή (character virtue). In Greek thought character had an ethical element, conceived of in terms of right and wrong, virtue and vice, in terms of conformity to or divergence from moral norms, and this was revealed by deeds. Ancient conceptions of character were therefore less centred on the private, inner world of the individual; more with actions and their evaluations. The link in ancient Greek thought between character and action is seen in the very word for virtue αρετή, which has connotations also of excellence and success: military and political success and failure was, for many Greeks, a central feature of character. For Plutarch, then, understanding of character was less about what somebody was like, more about recognising right and wrong deeds; its consequence was a desire to judge and evaluate.

In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth sets out the representation of his character, or ethos, according to just such an understanding, and it is important to him that he is defining a classical ‘moral’ position in his argument with Coleridge. In basing his own ‘morality’ on the examples found in Cicero’s philosophy he is adopting a Roman understanding of Greek ethics, and concerns with ethos play a major part in his work. Once this is fully understood, it becomes nonsensical to read the poem as an exemplary Romantic text if the intention is to provide a critical understanding of Wordsworth’s representation of his ‘own’ mind. In the French Books, in particular, he has a difficult task justifying his own ‘ethos’ or ‘morals’, having supported the French cause with great enthusiasm, and for far longer than many other liberal-minded sympathisers had been prepared to do once it had degenerated into the Reign of Terror. Book X sees Wordsworth present a defence of his morals, acknowledge the folly of his youth, and then make a disastrous turn to Godwinian reason that concluded with him retiring to Racedown.

Those who have attempted to define ‘what actually happened’ in Wordsworth’s life in the early 1790s will find little to guide them in *The Prelude*, and Wordsworth himself cautions his reader in Book XIII:

Since I withdrew unwillingly from France,
The story hath demanded less regard
To time and place; and where I lived and how,
Hath no longer been scrupulously marked. (XIII 334-7)

There is a certain disingenuousness here, since events in France were also not ‘scrupulously marked’. In Book IX of *The Prelude* Wordsworth hides his own amorous activities behind the tale of another pair of lovers, and also represents himself as innocent of any involvement in revolutionary activity before he returned to Paris in the autumn of 1792. But while Book IX seems to declare his innocence,
Book X finds him offering up a significant defence and justification for his involvement with the revolution, and declaring an ongoing allegiance to republican principles. The curious dichotomy between protests of innocence and inaction in Book IX, and the representation of his energetic engagement with republicanism in Book X, suggests that scrupulous attention to historical detail was never a priority in Wordsworth’s narrative.

Mary Moorman’s two-volume biography of Wordsworth expanded on both Legouis’ and Harper’s earlier work, adding the results of a substantial amount of research completed since Harper’s time to provide a better appreciation of Wordsworth’s life. More recently Stephen Gill described his biography, *William Wordsworth: A Life* as a further update, adding further detail, rather than claiming to supersede Moorman’s extensive coverage. But Gill also wanted to assert three personally held convictions about Wordsworth’s life that had directed the focus of his study. He suggested firstly, that Wordsworth’s own record of the events of the first thirty years of his life should not be taken at face value. Secondly, that too much attention had been paid to the ‘visionary’ Wordsworth, and too little ‘to the imperious self-willed Wordsworth, who wanted to be recognised as an intellectual power’. Thirdly, that more attention needed to be paid to the second half of Wordsworth’s life, the period when he actually attained his fame as a poet. I agree with the importance of all Gill’s convictions, and although the third area lies outside the period covered in this study, I argue that the key ideas that produced Wordsworth’s later success were all established by 1800.

**II. ‘Man is, by nature, a political animal’**

In 1793, on his return to England, Wordsworth’s mind was in a state of some agitation as he took on the identity of a republican enthusiast. The first piece of writing he produced at this time, his ‘Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff’, was wisely suppressed. It was followed, within the year, by *A Night on Salisbury Plain*, in which personal experience and political concerns blend together to present a confused picture of both the affairs of the state, and the state of Wordsworth’s mind. The final section of Book XII of *The Prelude* provides a commentary on Wordsworth’s sublime state of mind at that time. He reports how, as he wandered on Salisbury Plain, he had experienced an ‘influx’ of divine power, seen visions of the past, and had believed that his experiences then, were further evidence of his sense of prophetic election. After wandering the Plain he had proceeded to Bristol, then crossed the Severn estuary, and travelled up the Wye valley in the state of dizzy rapture described later in ‘Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey’. During the course of the five long years that had succeeded those earlier wanderings, he came to abandon the role of an enthusiast, as either a bard or a radical republican and, by 1800, he was defining his poetic spirit according to a very different set of beliefs, based on political reasoning rather than prophetic authority.

Wordsworth’s theory of poetry, as defined in 1800, and made more explicit in 1802, was founded on a moral philosophy that cannot be divorced from its political origins. Wordsworth’s answer to his question ‘What is a poet?’ in the 1802 additions to the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, is answered by the statement that he is ‘a man speaking to men’. His particular abilities are then
described in a paragraph that shows that he is no ordinary ‘man’. But the initial ‘definition’ is a political statement, and can be associated with a famous passage from Aristotle in his Politics. The passage presents a formal definition and names ‘man’ – as zoon politikon – as the creature that is capable of speech. Such a ‘man’ is therefore able to communicate and discuss issues without recourse to force, and has the capacity to construct a civilized polity. Aristotle’s definition distinguishes between ‘man’, defined as a speaker, and two other alternatives. Those who are in the category ‘not men’ are described, on the one hand as ‘barbarians’, and on the other hand as ‘gods’. The key passage is in Book 1 of the Politics where Aristotle is summarizing his opening discussion and moving towards some sort of definition of man as a ‘political animal’:

Hence it is evident that the state is a creation of nature, and that man is by nature a political animal. And he who by nature and not by mere accident is without a state, is either a bad man [barbarian] or above humanity [a god]; he is like the ‘Tribeless, lawless, heartless one’, (Homer, Iliad IX 63) whom Homer denounces - the natural outcast is forthwith a lover of war; he may be compared to an isolated piece at draughts.

Now, that man is more of a political animal than bees or any other gregarious animals is evident. Nature, as we often say, makes nothing in vain, and man is the only animal who has the gift of speech. And whereas mere voice is an indication of pleasure or pain, and is therefore found in other animals (for their nature attains to the perception of pleasure and pain and the intimation of them to one another, and no further), the power of speech is intended to set forth the expedient and the inexpedient, and therefore likewise the just and the unjust. And it is characteristic of man that he alone has any sense of good and evil, of just and unjust, and the like, and the association of living beings who have this sense makes a family and a state.14

My assertion that this passage played an important role in the impulse behind Wordsworth’s theory of poetry will not be seen as too eccentric by classicists appreciative of Aristotelian modes of thinking, or to Renaissance scholars. But it will not be so transparent to Romantic critics who believe in Abrams’ definition of Wordsworth as an expressive visionary, freed from the constraints of classical form. Wordsworth’s republican sympathies, however, led him to appreciate the influence of the Roman moralists and their political ideology, and key words and passages in Aristotle’s Politics (and his Ethics and Rhetoric) become enshrined in later classical republican political theory.15 The first point made by Aristotle in the above passage is that ‘the state is a creation of nature’; it arises out of a natural process in which men come together cooperatively as social beings. The means by which they do this is through their capacity for speech. ‘Speech’ in contrast to the utterances of animals is an activity that has a specific end. It enables men to define ‘the expedient and the inexpedient’, the ‘just and the unjust’. This gives man alone the ‘sense of good and evil’, and the ability to make up a family and, by extension of this principle, a ‘city’ and a ‘state’.

Although Wordsworth was initially taught political theory by Beaupuy (though at the time he failed to consolidate his learning), he became a revolutionary enthusiast later, inspired by Grégoire’s millennial expectations. In Paris he witnessed the debates of the French republicans as they attempted to define a new French constitution in late 1792, at a time when classical models were again being

14 Aristotle, The Politics. Bk 1 1253a. Trans Jowett. An alternative translation for lines 2-3 above reads ‘He who is incapable of society, or so complete as not to want it, is a beast or a god’.
15 All three works were in Wordsworth’s library at Rydalm Mt.
proposed. It was only later, when he was back in Britain that he began to think more carefully about Beaupuy’s teaching and to pursue a more balanced understanding of republican principles. He would then have become more aware of the works of the English republicans, ‘Great men’ like Sidney, Marvel, Harrington, Vane and Milton; men who had already defined such principles in an English context in the seventeenth century. Harrington’s *The Commonwealth of Oceana*, Sidney’s *Discourses*, and Milton’s political works were all being read by the Girondins in Paris whose leader Brissot had visited Britain in the 1780s. Montesquieu had also thought that the English compromise between pure republicanism and a monarchy could serve as a model for France. But Wordsworth was only able to consolidate his understanding of classical republican principles when he had abandoned his earlier support for the French cause, which had been based on enthusiasm, rather than knowledge. Back in England in 1794-5, after his period of manic inspiration in the summer of 1793, he appears to have been reading carefully in English republican texts. Caroline Roberts’ *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman*, documents the continuity of classicism in the Whig mind from the end of republicanism to the beginnings of democratic radicalism, and Wordsworth’s comments in his letters to William Matthews at this time, reflect his growing allegiance to the political ideals of the English republicans. In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth links his final rejection of the French revolutionary cause and his radical republican period with his turn to Godwin, who was also associated with an important group of Dissident intellectuals in London. I believe that after a further period of confusion in London, he abandoned active political debate and engaged in further private study at Racedown in order to come to his own understanding of political justice.

My argument, like that of J.G.A. Pocock in his discussion of eighteenth-century political thought in England, is based on Wordsworth’s use of key terms and concepts which betray his indebtedness to classical humanist principles and, in particular, the pursuit of virtue as understood by republican political theorists. Moreover, because that school of thought was represented to the western world through the works of one particular man, and because that man, Cicero, was a hero of the British and French republicans, it becomes relatively straightforward to look for, and find direct echoes of a number of Cicero’s key concepts and ideas in Wordsworth’s works, something that suggests Wordsworth made his own careful study of Cicero’s actual texts. One ideal of the Roman Republic was that all important political decisions were to be made through debate in the Forum and the Senate, and Cicero sacrificed his life for this political ideal. He was assassinated for continuing to oppose consuls who chose to rule by use of military force rather than allow for free debate. His head, tongue and hands were nailed up in the Forum as an example to those who thought they had a right to

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freedom of speech. In Cicero’s time the speech of the ‘political man’ was silenced by the ‘barbarians’, the lovers of war who chose to rule by the sword.17

Books IX and X of The Prelude form a distinct unit. Their ostensible purpose was to record the influence of the events of the French Revolution on Wordsworth’s life and to justify his involvement with the Revolution to the reader. They are an intriguing mixture of candid confession and a carefully constructed evasion of the facts. If any section of The Prelude was going to be carefully edited before the poem was published for the reading public it would have been Book X in which Wordsworth admits to having been an ardent supporter of the French cause. More outrageously, he declared that he had continued to support the Revolution long after other liberal-minded Englishmen had made a point of distancing themselves from any involvement. But he does not extensively edit his text and, later, Macaulay famously remarked that, ‘The poem is to the last degree Jacobinical, indeed Socialist. I understand perfectly why Wordsworth did not choose to publish in his life-time’.18 Macaulay misses the point however. Wordsworth is not simply relating events; he is also presenting an argument and pleading his case with his reader. There are mitigating circumstances that explain his involvement in the Revolution, and he remains unrepentant because he still upholds the principles behind the republican ideals that he held at the time.

In his pleading he excuses himself on two counts. Firstly, he argues that his actual support was for the ideal of a republic; and he cannot be held accountable for the actions of those revolutionaries who betrayed those ideals. Secondly, he also enters a plea of ‘insanity’, suggesting that he was not in his right mind at the time; he admits to being carried away by an overzealous enthusiasm and states that he felt he had had a prophetic insight into events. And in a further, final plea, intended to extract the greatest sympathy from his readers, he suggests that he had collapsed ‘in despair’ when he had later attempted to find some firm place of judgement in Godwin’s philosophy and then found it could offer no certain foundation on which to base his ideals. Book X concludes with this dramatic dénouement and acknowledges that Dorothy (and in the 1805 text, Coleridge) then helped him regain his health.

The French books are presented to the reader in the form of a defence given by someone who knows that the onus is on him to justify his actions, and in Book X he represents himself at one point in a state of some agitation, pleading in long orations:

Before unjust tribunals, - with a voice
Labouring, a brain confounded, and sense
Of treachery and desertion in the place
The holiest that I knew of, my own soul  (X 378- 381)

17 When Wordsworth made a point of discussing his political opinions candidly in his letters to William Matthews in 1794, expressing his concern to uphold the principle of freedom of speech, I suggest he had Cicero’s example in mind (EY 125).
This activity takes place at night, in his dreams, in his imagination, as he considers the horrors of the Reign of Terror. The dreams occur not only at the time of the Terror but for months, even years afterwards. His description is prefaced by the claim that his words are ‘bare truth’, addressed to Coleridge: ‘As if to thee alone in private talk’ (X 372-3). He is suggesting that he is not being over-dramatic here, that he was genuinely distraught, or maybe had a bad conscience about something he had done in France. Book X shows Wordsworth engaged in forensic rhetoric, and the political and moral principles Wordsworth defines in Books IX and X would have originated, in the main, from Cicero’s writings. Beaupuy was a member of the Girondins, the party most influenced by Classical republican ideals, and when Macaulay noted aspects of ‘socialism’ in Wordsworth’s text he was recognising Wordsworth’s use of Ciceronian principles, and his belief that the virtue of the state came before that of the individual. This makes both Kantian and Marxian analysis of Wordsworth’s thinking problematical when it comes to a discussion of ethics.

III. The Prelude, Book IX: Residence in France

In Book IX of The Prelude Wordsworth represents himself as distant from and disengaged with the political events of the time. Kenneth Johnston relates how he had the good fortune to arrive in Paris with a letter of introduction to Jaques Brissot, leader of the Girondins, who introduced him into the Assembly, and a meeting of the Society of the Friends of the Constitution. But the political issues of the day seem to have been beyond his concern; he reports on events as if a tourist, and relates that he had felt a need to put on ‘the guise / Of an enthusiast...Affecting more emotion than I felt’ (IX 66-7; 71). He confesses that he was moved more by the beauty of Le Brun’s Magdalene, than by the enthusiasm of the revolutionaries. By representing himself as more touched by the tenderness and tears of beauty, than affected by the sublime ruin of the Bastille, he makes an emotional appeal to the reader here, one that also defines his own ethos. He represents himself as naïve, and wanting knowledge in order to understand the intricacies of the political situation. He is more ‘amused and satisfied’ by the ‘novelties in speech, / Domestic manners, customs, gestures, looks / And all the attire of ordinary life’ (IX 81-5), than concerned to take notice of the effects of the Revolution. He acknowledges that this may seem strange, but declared himself ‘unprepared / With needful knowledge’, and compares his situation to someone who has ‘abruptly passed / Into a theatre, of which the stage / Was busy with an action far advanced’ (IX 92-5). He is not unacquainted with the ‘master pamphlets of the day’; speeches delivered in the Assembly were printed for immediate circulation. But he cannot contextualise the current situation, and represents himself as too ignorant to make any sense of this glut of information. Lacking that context and sufficient language skills at the

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19 David Bromwich speculates on this possibility in Disowned by Memory.
20 The problem with Marxism is dealt with famously by Alasdair MacIntyre in After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory. In contrast to Marx, Kant’s moral philosophy depends upon the action of an individual will and a totally abstract process of pure reasoning that ignores concerns with human history.
21 See Kenneth Johnston, The Hidden Wordsworth, p. 211.
time, he is unable to unpack sufficient meaning, and he proclaims: ‘all things were to me / Loose and disjointed, and the affections left / Without a vital interest’ (IX 105-7).

Leaving Paris after only five days, he travels to Orleans where he admits that he had initially joined in the entertainments of the aristocracy who seemed intent on ignoring what was going on. He initially shared accommodation with Royalist troops whose only political concerns were purely reactionary and ‘bent upon undoing what was done’ (IX 136). They tolerate Wordsworth’s presence as a youth and as an Englishman who has no knowledge of political affairs, and they attempt to win him over to their side. In such discussion Wordsworth represents himself as:

untought by thinking or by books
To reason well of polity or law,
And nice distinctions, then on every tongue,
Of natural rights and civil; (IX 200-4)

But he does propose to his Royalist companions that he has natural republican sympathies engendered by the environment he grew up in and the political values he had been taught in his liberal education. He expresses a belief in ‘mountain liberty’ and proclaims a natural republicanism that ‘hail[s] / As best, the government of equal rights / And individual worth’ (IX 246-8). He then meets Michel Beaupuy, whose character epitomises the poetic fancies that Wordsworth believed in as a youth. ‘Meek though enthusiastic’ (IX 299) his enthusiasm is committed to human concerns. He is a true nobleman wandering through events ‘in perfect faith’ as if ‘through a book, an old romance, or tale / Of Fairy’ (IX 305-7) and bound to service of the poor: ‘Man he loved / As man’ (IX 312-3). He can therefore be seen as an antitype to the aristocratic attitudes of Burke. He was a philosopher as well as a soldier, raised in a family descended from Montaigne on his mother’s side. The family library contained all the important texts of the philosophes of the eighteenth century, and his brothers were similarly engaged in political reform.22 As a Girondin he would have drawn directly on Greek and Roman political models, as well as the writings of the English Republicans. He attempts to teach Wordsworth classical philosophy and an understanding of the virtue-ethics of Aristotle that stress virtue as an activity in which man (vir), is in service to man, and such service is an act of virtue.

It is Beaupuy who appears to provide Wordsworth with the vocabulary that he had been looking for in order to understand and debate the politics of the Revolution. Wordsworth writes:

Oft in solitude
With him did I discourse about the end
Of civil government, and its wisest forms;
Of ancient prejudice, and charted rights
Allegiance, faith, and law by time matured,
Custom and habit, novelty and change;
Of self-respect, and virtue in the few
For patrimonial honour set apart
And ignorance in the labouring multitude.

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22 ‘The house at Mussidan in which they were born contained a huge library, where not one of the great authors of the eighteenth century was missing, and the folios of the Encyclopaedia towered above the rest.’ Legouis, Early Life of William Wordsworth, p. 202.
For he, an upright man and tolerant,
Balanced these contemplations in his mind (IX 327-337)

This passage provides the educated reader with evidence of a fairly comprehensive political studies course, provided by a tutor who knows the intricacies, the checks and balances, the ethical considerations, and the complexities involved in the constitution of a just civil polity. In his study *Dissenting Republican, Wordsworth’s Early Life and Thought in their Political Context*, Leslie Chard suggests that Beaupuy’s philosophy was:

a composite of eighteenth-century French and seventeenth-century English political thought; and that the latter was probably as influential as the former, for an un-idealistic view of the masses, a belief in ‘chartered rights’, in ‘virtue of the few’, and in ‘law by time matured’, are all commonplaces in the writings of the English Republicans. (77) 23

In Book IX Wordsworth then relates several of the topics relating to political thought that he and Beaupuy discussed as they walked by the Loire, and the reader might assume that he had received the knowledge and advice he needed to be able to engage in the ideals of the Revolution and become, himself, a man of action, dedicated to a just cause. But in actuality, according to Wordsworth’s narrative, Beaupuy’s teaching does not have this direct effect. Wordsworth writes that he did not grasp all this information at the time, nor did he choose to act upon it immediately. After his first reference to Beaupuy’s teachings, he notes that ‘at that time’ when he ‘was scarcely dipped / Into the turmoil, [he] had a sounder judgement / Than afterwards’ (IX 338-40). At the time of his conversations with Beaupuy he still felt connected with his sense of his natural republicanism, a feeling that had led him to triumph over the arguments of the other Royalist officers (IX 217-267). But having sung Beaupuy’s praises he then admits that, in fact, the natural poet in him triumphed over the natural republican. He reveals that while he had been in ‘earnest dialogue’ with Beaupuy his mind was actually elsewhere. As they walked in conversation through the ‘wide forests’ of the Loire landscape he confesses that he had, ‘slipped in thought / And let remembrance steal to other times / When Hermits, from their sheds and caves forth-strayed’ (IX 445-7). Although he has painted a picture of extensive ‘dialogue’ with Beaupuy it seems the conversation was rather one-sided since:

The width of those huge forests, unto me
A novel scene, did often in this way
Master my fancy, while I wandered on
With that revered companion. (IX 464-7)

23 Chard develops ideas first set out in Zera Fink’s essay ‘Wordsworth and the English Republican Tradition.’ *JEGP* XLVII (1948): 107-26. Apart from the ubiquitous influence of Rousseau, Fink suggests that Condorcet and Montesquieu were influential. Fink’s *The Classical Republicans* is the classic text for discussing these beliefs, and the manner in which English seventeenth-century republican ideology was carried forward to influence the theory and practice of the Whig oligarchy in the eighteenth-century. In countering Legouis portrayal of Wordsworth Chard wrote, ‘Above all this study is a reassertion of the mature Wordsworth’s strength of mind. It shows that his later philosophy was reached, not by blind gropings of a sick and tormented mind, but by deliberate intellectual endeavour’ (*Dissenting Republican* 15).
When Beaupuy points out a historical site, Wordsworth, romantically, brings it to life in his imagination, and furnishes a story to go with it. At the beginning of Book IX he had portrayed himself unenthusiastically pocketing a stone from the ruins of a ‘castle’ (the Bastille) in Paris as a souvenir; towards the end of the book he represents himself (re) building castles in the air by the Loire, as he imagines himself living there in times gone by. Again he expresses a lack of commitment to the Revolution, and it seems that any concern with direct action was frustrated by a poetical rather than a political imagination.

In Book IX, Wordsworth is careful to distance himself from any engagement with political activism. He presents himself standing aloof from any revolutionary enthusiasm and represents himself, still, as a poetic dreamer. He also makes a distinction between the dangerous, extremist, enthusiasm of some of the revolutionaries and the milder, considered enthusiasm of Beaupuy, based on sound reason, not passion. All that he had learnt about republicanism is depicted as having occurred in conversation with Beaupuy. It is almost as if he were modelling a Godwinian ethos in which philosophical conversation between two people might better serve to resolve political issues than the activities of political assemblies. His meeting with Beaupuy finally furnished him with all the information he needed to understand the political principles of classical republicanism. But at the same time his own mind was still more engaged with poetry than politics; he remained a romantic rather than a republican. It is true that at a practical level he understood the issues, and was woken from his ‘dreams of chivalric delight’ with a shock when Beaupuy pointed out the ‘hunger-bitten girl’; and he accepted that her example was a worthy cause for taking up arms. He admitted ‘I with him believed / Devoutly that a spirit was abroad / Which could not be withstood’ (IX 519-521). This spirit would address the issues of the times: poverty, exploitation, aristocratic privilege, corruption, the abuse of power and the paramount need to give everyone a ‘strong hand in making their own laws’ and a transparent system of justice (IX 519-542). But having proclaimed this need, Wordsworth then turns away from any further discussion of his personal involvement in the political events that historicist critics have suggested he was surely engaged in, both in Orleans and Blois:

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Having touched this argument
I shall not, as my purpose was, take note
Of other matters which detained us oft
In thought or conversation, public acts,
And public persons and the emotions wrought
Within our minds by ever-varying wind
Of record and report which day by day
Swept over us; but I will here instead
Draw from obscurity a tragic tale.    (IX 542- 550)
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Instead, he turns from affairs of history to affairs of love, in what can readily be seen as an ‘evasion of history’. He turns away from providing any details of his involvement in what is now known to have been a turbulent and shocking escalation of conflict in Orleans, to instead tell a poetic tale of disappointed romance. Although obscure, it is perhaps a fitting end to a Book that represents Wordsworth as untouched by either the affairs of men, or the affections of woman. Although he is
acquainted with the facts of political life by Beaupuy, and learns a practical lesson in other ‘facts of life’ from Annette, he does not engage with politics, or get engaged to Annette. She is, of course, not mentioned. But Book IX is not about history, Wordsworth is still excusing himself from the blame of acting irresponsibly towards Annette by representing himself as a romantic poet, living in another world of his own ‘making’, one primarily concerned with his own imagination. It seems that there is a rather laboured antithesis set up to contrast the ‘innocence’ of Wordsworth in Book IX with the feelings of guilt that follow in the wake of his passionate support for the revolutionary cause as set out in Book X.

IV. The Prelude, Book X. The French Revolution:

True Knowledge Leads to Love

I am he who once tuned my song on a slender reed; then, leaving the woods, I forced the nearby fields to obey the ever-greedy tiller of the soil, a work pleasing to farmers; but now for the roughness of Mars.

Book X opens with a preamble that sees Wordsworth leaving Orleans on ‘a beautiful and silent day’ and travelling through a georgic landscape. There is absolutely no reference to the political upheaval and the bloodshed that had been taking place in Blois or Orleans. He travels:

through scenes
Of vineyard, orchard, meadow-ground and tilth,
   Calm waters, gleams of sun, and breathless trees
Towards the fierce Metropolis (X 4-7)

Rural life maintains a restful calm, its industrious citizens are busy producing the fruits of their labours as Wordsworth heads to the city, and his song turns to more heroic matter.24 Events in Paris had escalated, the king had fallen, a Republic had been declared, and the September massacres had seen many innocent victims lose their lives. Wordsworth was aware of recent events in Paris and would have known of the riots in Orleans in early September and the skirmish in Blois that saw a baker murdered. He notes, with irony, that these events, when ‘the senseless sword / Was prayed to as a judge’ (X 33-4) were considered, soon after, to have been actions of a regrettable past. ‘Seen but once!’ (X 36). But the revolutionaries were splitting into factions and beginning to fight among themselves during a complex and tumultuous period in which the speeches in the Assembly, and later in the Convention, became acrimonious. Words and their meanings became critical at this point; just how a speaker represented events; how he justified past actions; how he persuaded future ones; how he dealt with opposing views became, in time, not just a matter of policy direction, but a matter of life and death.

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24 Wordsworth follows the rota Vergilii, as he moves from his pastoral dreaming by the Loire, through an agricultural landscape, towards the city, and war. The epigraph is from alternative opening lines to the Aeneid, found in an early edition of the poem, but which are now no longer attributed to Virgil.
Wordsworth arrived at the city ‘inflamed with hope’ (X 38), believing that the declaration of the Republic would solve France’s woes. The influence of Beaupuy, and his involvement with the ‘Friends of the Constitution’ in Blois had determined his allegiances to the classical idealism of the Girondins. Although he had refused to represent his actual engagement in revolutionary activity at the end of Book IX it seems, as Roe and Johnston have proposed, that after Beaupuy had left Blois, Henri Grégoire became the primary influence on Wordsworth’s actual, growing revolutionary fervour. It was Grégoire who had refused the need to debate the abolition of the monarchy at the National Convention in September. His strong sentiments saw him elected as President of the Convention in November, and Roe describes him as ‘the immediate catalyst of the French Republic’. It seems that while Beaupuy provided Wordsworth with his knowledge of political philosophy, it was Grégoire whose speeches inflamed his passions to the extent that his poetical enthusiasm was transformed into a political one.

Later, at the time of writing The Prelude, Wordsworth is too ashamed to give details of his vehement support for Grégoire, although he is quite prepared to give full credit to Beaupuy’s influence. The reasons for this distinction provide a clue as to his more considered and long-term political beliefs, in contrast to those he held during his period of enthusiastic radicalism. Roe sees Grégoire’s ‘visionary republicanism’ as building on Beaupuy’s ‘revolutionary militarism’, and argues that Grégoire provided a source for the millenarian claims found in Descriptive Sketches. The poem, composed in Blois in late 1792, was intended to be a record of Wordsworth’s tour of the Alps in 1790. But as it was being written, events of 1792 were being incorporated into the text. In Dissenting Republican, Chard notes that ‘Descriptive Sketches is a virtual index of Wordsworth’s gradual awakening to [Republican] political ideals, for at the opening is only a hint of radical fervour, while by the end Wordsworth is enunciating a full and fairly specific political credo’(91). Wordsworth’s poetry was becoming history, and Wordsworth himself becoming a prophet of the new era. Chard points out that the detail of Wordsworth’s ‘Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff” could only have been written once Wordsworth had understood these principles. In the year immediately following his return from France he maintained an enthusiastic belief that the revolutionary cause was working its way towards the establishment of a genuine republic based on the classical model, revised according to the example of the Venetian republic. This was the model on which the seventeenth-century English Republicans had also based their hopes and the Girondists had, in turn, drawn on their writings and those in the eighteenth century who continued to support ‘the good old cause’.

Wordsworth maintained a close interest in events in France up until his move to Alfoxden, when his friendship with Coleridge led to a focus on more poetic concerns. In his final months in France it seems he was indeed ‘pretty hot in it’ (the expression he used later in his life in remarks to J.P. Muirhead). But in Book X he is careful not to give too much detail about his actual actions, something that has become a focus of some interest in recent studies. James Chandler, and more

25 Wordsworth drew on Grégoire’s speeches recorded in the Moniteur (xiv. 492) when he later wrote his Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff in which he contrasted one Bishop with another, placing Watson in a bad light when compared with Grégoire – a man ‘of philosophy and humanity’.

26 Reported by Roe in Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years, p. 44.
recently Kenneth Johnston and David Bromwich, have all speculated, like Roe, on what Wordsworth was doing and where, exactly, his political affiliations lay. Johnston, Bromwich and Roe all find strong cause to believe that Wordsworth hid a guilty secret about some action he may have performed that led to the betrayal of another. Bromwich even goes so far as to suggest he may have been guilty of someone’s death either directly or indirectly. The concern of all these writers is to account for the argument of *The Borderers* with its unusual focus on the nature of guilt and the ambiguity of moral judgement.

Wordsworth’s Preface to the play, with its concern to explore the topic ‘that sin and crime are apt to start from their very opposite qualities,’ is highly suggestive of some sense of personal guilt, and a need to find some form of exculpation. I do not believe, however, that it is necessary to find a ‘body’ in order to prove Wordsworth guilty. I think his ‘guilty secret’ can be understood more simply, and more realistically, as a concern about ‘self-abuse’ and strong feelings of remorse as he came to realise the extent to which his enthusiasm, as both a poet and a revolutionary, had been a form of madness. His single-minded commitment to the ideals of the Revolution had led to the state of mind that he would later attribute to the character of the Solitary in *The Excursion*. Despite the heading ‘Residence in France’, Book X spends little time dwelling on events in Paris; they are recorded in the first 189 lines. The remaining 851 lines agonise over the consequences of Wordsworth’s inspired support for the revolution. Looking back, in 1797, when he had managed to arrive at a more objective analysis of his identity, and distance himself from his over-identification with the ideals of the Revolution, he names his sin as ‘Pride’ in a disguised reference to his own experience, in the poem ‘Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree’.

It is in Book X that Wordsworth admits that he had been a strong supporter of the French revolutionaries, and that he had returned to Britain expecting a new era to dawn there also. His enthusiastic support for the Revolution was based on a passionate identification with republican ideals and a personal belief that he had been called on by a higher power to support a millenarian movement. As events in France turned bloody he held on to his ideals, and Britain’s declaration of war only served to deepen his principled patriotic support for republicanism. He recognized that Robespierre posed a threat to the cause, but he still continued to argue for republican ideals, rejoicing, with ‘A hymn of triumph’ (X 544) at the news of Robespierre’s execution and hoping that the revolution might still attain its end. His letters to William Matthews during this period provide evidence of the depth of his concerns and the sincerity of his beliefs, as well as demonstrating his knowledge of the principles on which the revolution should have been based. Inevitably, he finally had to let go of his identification with the French cause, holding on to the ideal, but acknowledging the human failings. In coming to terms with the nature of his own error, he would later allude to Aristotle’s passage about the nature of political man in the *Politics* as he recognised he had been acting like a ‘god’. He identified his fault as ‘Pride’, the most vicious of the classical ‘vices’; and the end result of his self-centred manic idealism had been his isolation. He felt himself to be like the ‘Tribeless, lawless, heartless one’ described by Aristotle, an outcast who might be compared to an isolated piece at

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27 *Disowned by Memory* p. 17.
draughts. As a consequence he could also be seen as a ‘lover of war’, having failed to find a place of compromise through speaking more openly with other men and having believed, instead, that he had been granted a special, prophetic insight into the truth – as he later relates in more detail in Book XII.

In ‘Lines Left upon a seat in a Yew-tree’, Wordsworth defines his own situation as he describes the fate of the solitary figure whose circumstances are related in the poem. In responding to a distinctively oblique question as to ‘who he was’, he tells the reader ‘I well remember’; and he remembers ‘well’ because the circumstances relate to his own experience, though hidden behind the fiction that they belong to another character. He later related that the poem was ‘Composed in part at school at Hawkeshead’ and that the individual referred to was a local personality (IFN 36). But although attributed to another man (later identified as the Rev Braithwaite), I suggest the ‘Lines’ are a record of Wordsworth’s own life as he looked back over the previous few years, reflecting on his own involvement with the revolution in France. The character description draws heavily on his own recent experience, and will later be used to define the character of the Solitary in The Excursion (who Wordsworth also maintained was modelled on Joseph Fawcett). The virtue of such a character is his idealism, but like all virtues in the Aristotelian understanding of the term (and Aristotle’s appreciation of human nature), it is closely allied with a vice. Human nature is such that feelings of genuine, honourable Pride or ‘Glory’ can, all too easily be transformed into a negative sense of Pride as ‘self-love’. ‘Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree’ provide evidence of Wordsworth’s conscious attempt to analyse his own motives, and to take into account Aristotle’s strictures about the nature of political man. Wordsworth ‘well remember[s]’ his own life experience:

He was one who own’d
No common soul. In youth by genius nurs’d,
And big with lofty views, he to the world
Went forth, pure in his heart, against the taint
Of dissolute tongues, ‘gainst jealousy,
And scorn, against all enemies prepared,
All but neglect: and so, his spirit damped
At once, with rash disdain he turned way,
And with the food of pride sustained his soul
In solitude. (ll 12-21 in Lyrical Ballads 1798)  

28 David Bromwich stresses the fact that Wordsworth was no passive bystander in Paris in late 1792, nor could he be considered a moderate; the Girondins with whom he associated in his connection with Brissot and Beaupuy were the party of war. Wordsworth himself, both at the time and later in the Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff, accepted Roland’s justification for the September massacres as set out in his Letter to the Assembly of September 3rd (Disowned by Memory 82-4).

29 It is generally accepted that although Wordsworth may have begun a poem about this particular spot, while still a schoolboy, but most of the poem published in Lyrical Ballads was written in 1797.

30 An 1800 variant reads: All but neglect. The world, for so it thought,
Owed him no service: he was like a plant
Fair to the sun, the darling of the winds
But hung with fruit which no one, that passed by,
Regarded, and, his spirit damped at once
With indignation did he turn away.
In feeling that his voice had not been heard he then resents his ‘neglect’ and in an act of strong pride (hubris) is disdainful of society. In time this ‘lost man’, cut off from social interaction consoles himself in his meditations, ‘feeding his fancy’ on visionary views and slowly fades away and dies, leaving behind him ‘this seat, his only monument’. The lines left on this ‘seat’ (sedes) present a ‘thesis’, an ‘argument’ about the dangers of self-love, one that warns young men ‘whose heart the holy forms of young imagination have kept pure’ to be wary of the sin of pride. If they presume that they have a special vision of things, a special understanding of nature – that their own views are the truth of the matter – then they must temper this knowledge with an equally strong sense of humility for:

he, who feels contempt
For any living thing, hath faculties
Which he has never used; that thought with him
Is in its infancy

The man who looks only on himself, looks only on ‘the least of nature’s works’, and is likely to fall victim to another vice, that of scorn. By contrast:

true knowledge leads to love,
True dignity abides with him alone
Who, in the silent hour of inward thought,
Can still suspect, and still revere himself,
In lowliness of heart.

The solitary’s solipsism can be described as a pathology; one that Freud would later define as ‘Narcissism’. But while Wordsworth’s tale can be read by twenty-first century readers as a psychological study it is, in its original context, primarily a moral tale. In Book X of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth relates how he had come to appreciate that his reliance on inspired states of mind had placed him ‘above humanity’. In the 1850 text he uses stronger language, when describing his ‘strong imagination’ – his inflated attitude of mind – as a ‘strong disease’ (*Prelude* 1850: XI 306). But he also argued that there were mitigating circumstances; he had genuinely believed that he was a ‘chosen son’, a prophet even – having experienced what he perceived at the time to be an ‘influx’ of divine power as he crossed Salisbury Plain in 1793 and saw visions of the past. At Racedown, Wordsworth came to appreciate that what he thought to be mantic inspiration was in fact manic ‘inflation’ – the term is used by Carl Jung in his Analytical Psychology to define someone in the grip of a ‘god’ (an unconscious psychological complex), and who acts out an ‘archetypal’ pattern of behaviour in which passionate feeling prevails over reasoned thinking.

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31 ‘…if we wish to track down some argument we ought to know the places or topics [locos = locations] - the name given by Aristotle to those ‘regions’ [sedes = literally ‘seats’] so to speak, from which we can draw arguments. Therefore we may define a place [topos/locos] as a location of an argument, and an argument as a course of reasoning that firmly establishes belief about doubtful issues’ Cicero, *Topica* I. 7-8.

32 Jung’s accommodation of the ‘spiritual’ in a modern ‘materialist’ worldview has led to the charge that his approach is ‘mystical’ in contrast to Freud’s supposedly ‘scientific’ claims. Jung stated that in the modern materialist paradigm ‘the gods have become diseases’. Freud’s model of the psyche sets up an unending conflict between reason and emotion, while Jung idealised the relationship, hoping for an accommodation, a
‘Lines Left upon a seat in a Yew-Tree’ provide valuable evidence that Wordsworth was able to identify the nature of his ‘strong disease’ during his period of reflection and study at Racedown and had managed, during that time, to pursue his own form of self-analysis. In the latter half of the 1790s he learnt to balance his inner vision with that of the outer world, and transform his poetic identity from that of an inspired solitary dreamer, ignored by the world, into a man whose voice, like that of Cicero, would be heard by the world as he learned to become a ‘man’ of real virtue and to speak words that would have authority over other men.\textsuperscript{33} It was during his own reflections on the revolution in France during the Racedown period that he had gained a better sense of political justice and learnt to fully appreciate the follies of his youthful enthusiasm, something revealed in his subsequent treatment of events in Book X of \textit{The Prelude}.

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blending of the two differing attitudes of mind that he saw acting in a compensatory relationship. Freud’s model of the dynamics of the psyche defines an interminable \textit{agon}. Jung’s was more romantic and suggested an individual’s life task was to find a resolution; a process he described as ‘individuation’ that led in turn to an appreciation of a more genuine sense of Self.

\textsuperscript{33} It is also possible to read into the poem an implied criticism of Rousseau’s philosophy, and its significant influence on some of the French revolutionaries.
Chapter 8
Moral Questions

I. Virtue, Equity, and Reason

The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language. Thus...the revolution of 1789 to 1814 draped itself alternatively as the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire.¹

At the beginning of Book X, Wordsworth announces himself arriving in Paris ‘inflamed with hope’ and ranging the city ‘More eagerly that [he] had done before’(X 40). When visiting the levelled site of the Bastille the previous December, he had expressed a lack of understanding about the course of the revolution. By October 1792 he had been taught some of the political principles and ideals of the revolution and could be expected to understand what was going on. But as he crossed the blackened square of the Carrousel, the site of a massacre and of funeral pyres, he was confronted instead by realpolitik; and he again declares his inability to comprehend the nature of the actual events. They seem to him like a book written in a foreign tongue that he cannot read and whose leaves, although inscribed with history, are therefore mute (X 49-54). In the section that follows he relates his feelings of ‘substantial dread’ as he lay in bed at night vividly imagining the recent horrific events. He states, again, that at the time, he had no possibility of objectively judging what was right or wrong:

these are things
Of which I speak, only as they were storm
Or sunshine to my individual mind
No further      (X 103-6)

At this point the narrative is interrupted as he makes a distinction between how he ‘saw’ things then, compared with his later understanding at the time of writing. ‘Let me then relate that now / In some sort seeing with my proper eyes...’ (X 106-7). From the vantage point he has at the time of writing he can see clearly what was about to happen, but at the actual time he had no idea; and again he stresses that his motivation was not dictated by any conscious rational choice. He indicates that he believed he was caught up in an apocalyptic event, relating that he almost prayed that the gift of tongues might fall on those plain, truthful souls worthy of liberty through their patient exercise of reason, and that men might ‘arrive / From the four quarters of the winds’ (X 122-3) to assist France in this time of great need.

¹ Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.
The actual situation at the National Convention at the end of 1792 had reached a crisis point. After the removal of the King and the declaration of the Republic, debate had turned to definition of the form of that Republic, and by the time the National Convention opened in November most discussion was in favour of the models provided by the classical republics. Harold Parker points out that one key subject for debate was the need to create a virtuous society, for ‘without virtue a republic could not endure’. The pursuit of ‘Virtue’ was recognised to be the aim of every citizen if the ideal of a just republic was to be achieved. But just how ‘virtue’ could be defined, and by what means it could be achieved, was contentious. Wordsworth would have witnessed the beginning of the long and increasingly acrimonious debates that centred on defining and creating a virtuous society, and he would return to England with that debate weighing heavily on his own mind. Earlier debate had discussed the beliefs of men like Montesquieu and Rousseau and the earlier record of Plutarch that had idealised the Greek republicans and stressed their pursuit of virtue. Once it was understood that the classical republics declined when virtue decayed, then the creation of virtue become the primary aim of the logical minds of Robespierre and Saint-Just who set about initiating a program in which love of one’s country, and of its laws, would produce virtue in its obedient citizens. (Parker 164). Wordsworth had left Paris before this debate developed into open hostility between the factions, but he had witnessed the beginnings of more open conflict, something signalled by Louvet’s denunciation of Robespierre. Robespierre succeeded in evading Louvet’s accusations by preparing a clever and eloquent reply that enabled him to continue his hold on power. It was a speech Wordsworth would have read, noting the way mere words, eloquently delivered, could be used to direct the minds and hearts of the multitude, and just how an effective speaker could make a crowd believe that they held a common vision.

Just over a year after his reply to Louvet, Robespierre would declare that ‘Terror is nothing other than justice, prompt, severe, and inflexible; it is therefore an emanation of virtue’.

Later, in many of the speeches made in 1794, ‘virtue’ would become linked with Robespierre’s and Saint-Just’s vision of the ideal republic, founded on the example of their equally idealistic vision of antiquity:

What is the fundamental principle of a democratic and popular government, that is, the essential motive which supports it and makes it move? It is virtue: I speak of the political virtue which accomplishes so many prodigies in Greece and Rome, and which ought to produce far more astonishing ones in republican France; of that virtue which is nothing else than the love of our country and of its laws.

It was Richard Price’s sermon in ‘On the Love of Our Country’ in 1789 that had provoked Edmund Burke’s dramatic response in his Reflections on the Revolution in France that led, in turn, to the

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2 Harold T. Parker, The Cult of Antiquity in the French Revolution: A Study of the Development of the Revolutionary Spirit p. 120. Much of the following section draws on Parker’s description of the revolutionaries’ identification with Classical ideals.

3 Such laws, as decreed by the state, had no authority in Cicero’s political thinking unless they were founded on the true understanding of virtue originating in Nature.


5 Moniteur, No 139 (7 February 1794). Parker, p. 166.
radicalisation of political opinion in Britain in the early 1790s. The topic was a controversial one, given the government’s failure to address the needs of the increasingly influential and well-educated Dissident faction and other, more radical, elements were quick to respond to Burke’s notions of a just society. In France, in November 1792, the revolutionaries found themselves in conflict as they attempted to define the virtues of their new republic. Factions formed along lines that reproduced the differences between ancient Sparta and ancient Athens. Others like Brissot, upheld ancient Roman models and a ‘cult of antiquity’ developed with the heroes of the revolution identifying themselves strongly with the heroes of the past.

Brissot, who had been Wordsworth’s original contact in Paris in 1791, was also known as the ‘French Cicero’, and Parker traces his rise to power from his early days when he had hoped to become famous as a lawyer. In defining his aim of becoming an exceptional orator, Brissot had idealised the example of Cicero:

Cicero [he said] completely realised the portrait of [the] encyclopaedic orator. Philosopher, politician, poet, orator, lover of the beaux arts, Cicero was everything, shone in everything. Young orator, if this brilliant model does not inflame you, if you do not burn with the noble desire to follow him, all is up with you; you will never be more than a mediocre lawyer. 6

Brissot had hoped, like Cicero, to bring to the bar ‘a knowledge of literature and a taste for the sciences’. 7 In reality he found himself frustrated by the length of his apprenticeship and by regulations that made the realisation of his vision impossible. Instead he carefully re-read Cicero’s De Oratore, and selected key passages of Cicero’s text to imagine a vision of Roman society where his wish for a career would have been gratified. This work Un indépendant à l’ordre des avocats (1782) proposed that in Cicero’s day Brissot would have been free to pursue a career that allowed him to engage in free speech on all manner of topics. He would have had the freedom to speak not only at the bar but also to the people, the politicians, and the lawmakers and to rise by virtue of merit even to the position of consul like Cicero, the first man in the state. 8 Brissot’s vision of the possibilities open to ‘a man speaking to men’ with eloquence would not have been lost on Wordsworth. 9 Quite possibly, Brissot’s detailed exposition of De Oratore had inspired Wordsworth to study that work when he had the leisure to do so after his return to England.

In November 1792, Brissot’s republican ideals were encountering their severest challenge yet as Robespierre and Saint-Just called for the death penalty for the king. The Girondins preferred that he should first be brought to the bar to face justice before a court. The king’s death was probably inevitable either way, though exile might have been an option. But the important question of the moment was how ‘justice’ was to be decided. Wordsworth records the split between the ‘indecision’ of the Girondins, ‘whose aim seemed best’ (X 113-4), and the ‘impiety’ of those who chose ‘the straightforward path’. He represents his own views as confused, but he also admits to being completely caught up in the events of the moment. He states that, had he felt himself capable, he

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7 Brissot, Un indépendant à l’ordre des avocats (1782) p. 345. Parker, p. 49.
8 Parker, pp. 50-51.
9 Christopher Wordsworth records his brother’s connection with the Brissotins in his Memoirs I. 76-7.
would have been willing to ‘have taken up / A service at this time for cause so great, / However
dangerous’ (X 135-137). But he excused himself on the highly significant grounds that he was ‘little
graced with power / Of eloquence’ (X 132-3). What he observed, from listening to the eloquence of
those who did have such ‘power’, was the fact that a single voice could control the opinion of the
masses.

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\begin{align*}
\text{Inly I revolved} \\
&\text{How much the destiny of man has} \\
&\text{Still hung upon single persons} \quad (X 137-9)
\end{align*}
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Robespierre’s eloquent defence of his own position after his denunciation by Louvet
demonstrated how the power of eloquence could be abused; how rhetoric could indeed make the
worse cause seem better; and how a ‘bad’ man speaking well could pervert the course of justice.
Wordsworth represents himself reflecting on the situation, thinking about the ‘example given / By
ancient lawgivers’ and rehearsing the classic debate as to whether rule by individuals will
automatically lead to despotism, as Polybius had suggested, or whether a virtuous man does exist who
can maintain honest rule. And in recalling the ‘other side’ of this argument he records the opinion that
‘tyrannic power is weak’ and will inevitably fail, and that in fact:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{nothing hath a natural right to last} \\
&\text{But equity and reason; that all else} \\
&\text{Meets foes irreconcilable, and at best} \\
&\text{Doth live by variety of disease.} \quad (X 173-76)
\end{align*}
\]

The argument would have been topical in 1804, as Napoleon exercised his ‘paramount’ power, but
failed to show evidence of a ‘paramount mind’ that might install a just government. But as
Wordsworth represents himself debating these issues with himself, he is also beginning to prepare a
defence of his actions in the early 1790s by appealing to ‘natural rights’ based on ‘equity and reason’.

Our ability to interpret Wordsworth’s text in Books IX and X depends upon our recognition
that he is presenting a case that seeks to justify his involvement with events in France in 1792, as well
as explaining his continued support for the Revolution on his return to England, long after other
liberally minded radicals had turned away in horror. He argues that he had acted from a genuine belief
in the political principles of a genuine republic, and he also suggests that he was not in his right mind
when he became involved with events in Paris. He makes the point that he could have taken a more
active role, but the facts of the case are that he didn’t. Instead, he returned home. And having
demonstrated his honesty, he makes further emotional appeals by describing himself as ‘insignificant’,
‘obscure’ and ‘mean’ (X 131-2), and even as someone who might have become a ‘poor, mistaken and
bewildered offering’ (X 197): a sacrifice on the altar of Liberty.

In these passages he is arguing his position through an appeal to an equitable judgement that
might accommodate the personal aspects of his case. An appeal to equity balances any appeal to
reason, and places events in a human rather than logical context. In *Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical
Tradition*, Kathy Eden gives a succinct description of ‘equity’ as understood in the art of rhetoric.
Eden’s study traces the way in which orators like Quintilian and Cicero became expert at the ‘art of accommodation’, representing situations in an interpretive manner, creating a hermeneutic that enhances the perspective of the defendant’s case while, at the same time, distorting that of an opponent.10

Ancient rhetoricians...elaborated the principles of interpretation alongside the arguments for an equitable judgement where equity (Gk epikeia, Lat aequitas) was understood as the mitigating corrective to the generality and consequent rigidity inherent in the law. Designed, in contrast to legal statute, as a flexible measure, equity could take into account the infinite particularity of human events by investigating the agent’s intentions and thus could accommodate each individual case. (2)

Wordsworth is not going to such great extremes here, but he is making an appeal to equity, since reason cannot adequately represent his case. He speaks as if he were a classical orator educated in the tradition of Roman oratory as exemplified in the practical argumentation of Cicero and Quintilian. In the ‘French books’ Wordsworth is asking his readers to consider his own case and accommodate his errors, making a special focus on matters of right and wrong, of good and evil; and he often represents himself in a state of bewilderment. We are not going to be told the actual facts of the case, something that was very clear with regard to Book IX: the ‘facts’ of the case will be the ones that suit the needs of Wordsworth’s argument.

II. ‘If prophecy be madness’

After Wordsworth left France at the end of 1792 there is indeed very little evidence offered with ‘regard / To time and place; and where [he] lived’ (XIII 335-6); readers are presented with a confused record of a conflicted mind that finally collapses in ‘despair’. He returned to London, published Descriptive Sketches, wrote his ‘Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff’, and spent the summer as a man of leisure, travelling in the south of England and the Isle of Wight with William Calvert who could afford such luxury. The two men separated after an accident with their carriage on Salisbury Plain, where Wordsworth wandered in the manic state of mind described at the end of Book XII, before heading up the Wye to seek sanctuary with Robert Jones again in North Wales. It is possible that he returned to France once again during this period, but his movements can be traced to various places in Cumbria in 1794.11 He describes himself leading ‘an undomestic wanderer’s life’ during this period (XIII 343), before settling down as a companion to William Calvert’s brother Raisley, who was dying of consumption. After Raisley’s death he headed for London, in February 1795, enthused by the prospect of meeting William Godwin.

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10 See also, Quentin Skinner’s extensive treatment of this topic in Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes, and in essays in Visions of Politics, especially ‘Moral ambiguity and the Renaissance art of eloquence,’ Vol. 2. 264-285.

11 I tend to dismiss the possibility that he went back to France and witnessed the execution of Gorsas.
In his more manic enthusiastic state of mind, during the earlier part of this period, he relates that he had identified directly with the role of ‘the ancient Prophets’, denouncing those who resisted the coming of the revolution (X 402-409):

So did some portions of [their] spirit fall  
On me, to uphold me through those evil times,  
And in their rage and dog-day heat I found  
Something to glory in, as just and fit. (X 410-14)

In lines that follow he gives a fuller description of his frenzied state of mind, one that probably relates to the period when he was wandering on Salisbury Plain. There then follows the rather drawn out record of the news of Robespierre’s death,12 which he receives at a time when he still appears to be in high spirits, and the news is duly celebrated with his spontaneous ‘hymn of triumph’. After this significant event, Wordsworth believed that the revolution would then continue in its true course:

in the People was my trust  
And in their virtues which mine eye had seen,  
And to the ultimate repose of things  
I looked with unabated confidence (X 578-581)

The mood of his mind is still described as enthusiastic. He records how he still believed that the ‘triumphs’ of the ‘young Republic’ would ‘be in the end/ Great, universal, irresistible’. This ‘faith’, based on ‘passionate intuition’ (588), is then acknowledged as a state of youthful excess, closely aligned with ‘Nature’, which is here defined as a ‘Power’ without control by ‘habit, custom [or] law’ (611). He admits how critical he had been of those in England who opposed the revolution, and though still critical of the actions of the government at the time of writing, he acknowledges that ‘since juvenile errors are my theme’ (638), he will not dwell on their mistakes, since he is focussing on confessing his own. He does, however, still charge that they ‘Thirsted to make the guardian crook of law / A tool of murder’ (647-8) and had sought ‘to undermine / Justice, and make an end to Liberty’ (656-7).

As time goes by, his state of mind appears to moderate, but not his political principles. He relates how, in France – as was typical of youth – he had been ‘led to take an eager part / In arguments of civil polity’ (X 660-1) and that, as an enthusiast, he saw everything in a golden light. He also relates, again, that he was even prepared to die for his deeply held convictions. Though later he would understand that they ‘were not thoroughly understood / By reason: nay, far from it’ (X 674-8). But the little knowledge he had gained from ‘general insights into evil’ and from ‘books and common intercourse with life’ led him then to begin:

To think with fervour upon management  
Of nations, what it is and ought to be,  
And how their worth depended on their laws  
And on the constitution of the state (X 686-9)

12 Robespierre was executed in July 1794, a year after the Salisbury Plain visions.
Gradually his ideals are becoming more defined by his growing knowledge of political philosophy rather than by his enthusiasm, though the ideals of the revolution are again hymned in the famous passage beginning: ‘O Pleasant exercise of hope and joy!’ (X 690).\(^{13}\) His paean concludes with a call for the establishment of heaven on earth, attained through the establishment of a virtuous government that will ensure happiness for all, according to principles operative in this world, not through appeals to any higher one. This is followed by another confession of his enthusiastic and inspired state of mind, one that saw everything from the golden side:

An active partisan, I thus convoked  
From every object pleasant circumstance  
To suit my ends; I moved among mankind  
With genial feelings still predominant. (X 737-40)

This section concludes with a passage that would appear to offer further convincing evidence that the philosophical concepts he later uses to define and justify his argument with Coleridge, are based on his adaptation of Stoic philosophy:

In brief, a child of Nature, as at first,  
Diffusing only those affections wider  
That from the cradle had grown up with me,  
And losing, in no other way than light  
Is lost in light, the weak in the more strong (X 753-7)

The references to being a child of Nature, to the cradle, and to one weaker light being replaced by a stronger, can be seen as explicit references to the Stoic ‘cradle argument’.

At this point in the poem Wordsworth signals the waning of his youthful state of mind as the realities of the ‘historical’ situation become too conflicted. Once open war was declared against France he finds himself unable to hold onto any value judgements. Change was no longer ‘A swallowing up of lesser things in great / But a change of them into their opposites’, and ‘What had been a pride, was now a shame’ (X 758-70).\(^{14}\) The time when ‘Frenchmen had changed a war of self-defence / For one of conquest’ (X 793-4) marks the turning point for Wordsworth’s support of France. However, he still refused to give up his republican beliefs or take the ‘shame’ of being seen as a ‘false prophet’. Instead he relates how he became even more firmly entrenched in his republican convictions at this time, appealing to classical virtues (old tenets) after having despaired of those of the French:

roused up, I stuck  
More firmly to old tenets, and, to prove  
Their temper, strained them more; and thus, in heat  
Of contest, did opinions every day  
Grow into consequences, till round my mind  
They clung, as if they were the life of it. (X 800-805)

\(^{13}\) Later published as ‘French Revolution, as it appeared to Enthusiasts at its Commencement’ in The Friend, Oct 1809.

\(^{14}\) Here again Wordsworth describes a transition in which a ‘virtue’ is translated into a ‘vice’ according to principles defined in Aristotle’s virtue-ethics.
It seems that at this time he seriously engaged in a spirited defence of classical republican ideals, and that he had been involved in some heated debate (contest) with some other un-named parties. But he also suggests that he had come to realise the extent to which his ‘opinions’, at this time, had grown into obsessions. It is at this point, when he finally admits his attitude was manic, that he portrays himself turning to William Godwin’s influential argument in his Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and its influence on General Virtue and Happiness (1793):

This was the time, when, all things tending fast
To depravation, the philosophy
That promised to abstract the hopes of man
Out of his feelings, to be fixed thenceforth
For ever in a purer element
Found ready welcome. (X 806-11)

Wordsworth captures the hubris of this moment with an ironic shift in register as his comments move from a description of the past to a judgement made at the time of writing:

Tempting region that
For Zeal to enter and refresh herself,
Where passions had the privilege to work,
And never hear the sound of their own names. (X 811-14)

Godwin’s reasoning ignores the passions, but they cannot be repressed in actuality. They are still there, at ‘work’, but are not acknowledged in Godwin’s philosophising. Wordsworth admits, ‘speaking more in charity’, how Godwin’s ‘dream’:

Was flattering to the young ingenuous mind
Pleased with extremes, and not the least with that
Which makes the human Reason’s naked self
The object of its fervour (X 815-19)

Wordsworth then slips back into heavy irony that, in itself, reveals the extent to which he later felt he had been taken in by Godwin at the time. In a passage that reveals the connection between Godwin’s philosophy and The Borderers, Wordsworth begins with an echo from the tragedy of Hamlet and ends with a quotation from his own tragedy. There is little question that in this passage he identifies himself as the villain, Rivers in The Borderers, having succumbed to what he later saw as an outcome of following Godwinian principles. Godwin would not have agreed, arguing that he was more concerned to argue, debate, and prove the issues of the day, than simply follow his own intellect.

What delight!
How glorious! in self-knowledge and self-rule
To look through all the frailties of this world,

15 The report that Coleridge first met Wordsworth at a debating society at which he had been impressed by Wordsworth’s eloquence ties in with this representation. Coleridge did not hear him when he was most ‘heated’, but later in Bristol in 1795. He must, however, have still been ‘pretty hot in it’; an entry in the Farrington Diary records that ‘On one occasion Wordsworth spoke with so much force and eloquence that Coleridge was captivated by it and sought to know him’. Farrington Diary, ed. Greig Jones. VI. 36.
And, with a resolute mastery shaking off
The accidents of nature, time, and place,
That make up the weak being of the past,
Build social freedom on its only basis,
The freedom of the individual mind,
Which, to the blind restraints of general laws
Superior, magisterially adopts
One guide, the light of circumstances, flashed
Upon an independent intellect. (X 818-830)

After Wordsworth finally realised how isolated he had become in his fanatical support of the
French republican cause, he had turned to Godwin’s rationalist philosophy in the hope of finding his
bearings again, and ‘reason’ did briefly become the necessary antidote to his enthusiasm. Godwin’s
philosophy served the purpose of rescuing him from his manic state of mind, and his method required
that Wordsworth think more seriously about his own convictions, and question his own motives. But
he was to find that ‘human reason’ as defined by Godwin was not sufficient to answer his own
particular questions about the true nature of justice.

III. Political Justice

Godwin’s Enquiry concerning Political Justice, and its influence on General Virtue and
Happiness was among a number of studies of political philosophy that Wordsworth was reading in
1794. Whatever eighteenth or seventeenth-century texts he may have been reading according to Leslie
Chard; whether those of French philosophes or the English republicans, he would most likely have
also read Cicero’s De Legibus and the extracts of De Republica available to eighteenth century
readers, since both were foundational texts of classical republican political philosophy. Given his
connection with Brissot in France he may well have read De Oratore by this time as well. His letters
to William Matthews during this period provide evidence that he was reading and reflecting on
political philosophy and concerned with defining his own particular position with some sense of
precision.¹⁶ In contrast to the manic picture presented in Book X, his correspondence with Matthews
is well reasoned, and during the course of 1794 he shows that he has spent some time defining his own
political principles. Far from expressing his views with enthusiastic fervour, he plans to set up a
journal, to be called The Philanthropist with Matthews, and to write articles aimed at educating the
public about the virtues of true republicanism. He is critical of the government for their draconian
treatment of those who had dared to speak openly of their political beliefs,¹⁷ and pronounces himself
to be a democrat stressing that ‘it will be impossible’ for him not to ‘inculcate principles of
government and forms of social order of one kind or another’:

Besides essays on morals and politics I think I could communicate critical remarks upon
poetry &c, &c, upon the arts of painting, gardening, and other subjects of amusement. But I

¹⁶ Legouis drew heavily on these letters, as did all subsequent biographers, since they provide the only solid
evidence about Wordsworth’s state of mind, and his thinking, during this period.
¹⁷ Thomas Hardy, Thomas Holcroft, Horne Tooke and John Thelwall had all just been imprisoned on charges of
High Treason.
should principally wish our attention to be fixed on life and manners, and to make our publication a vehicle of sound and exalted Morality. (EY 119)

Wordsworth’s concerns with life, manners, and morality reveal that his views on politics are primarily concerned with republican theories of just government, and after having obviously received a further sympathetic response to those views from Matthews, he writes a far more explicit letter. His comments could be considered outspoken given the suspension of Habeas Corpus and the possibility of mail being intercepted and read. His brother Richard had earlier written expressing his need for caution, and Dorothy had written back assuring him that William was ‘very cautious... and seems well aware of the dangers of a contrary conduct’ (EY 121). Dorothy’s reply suggests William not only knew what he was talking about, but was also prepared, and capable of arguing ‘justly’ according to principles he could defend. And he was prepared to be outspoken in his letters, doing so with careful attention to the political principles he is admitting to, rather than criticising the government. The letter is useful because it demonstrates clearly that by this time he is no longer taking ‘an eager part / In arguments about civil polity’ about things ‘Felt deeply [but which] were not thoroughly understood / By reason’ (X 660-1; 674-5, my emphasis).

In the letter he gives reasons for his position, based on principles that appeal to the benefit of all humanity. He expresses his disapproval of the monarchy and aristocratic government, and is critical of the government’s recent abuses of power. He recoils from the bare idea of a revolution, but fears that the current actions of the government, designed to prevent revolutionary activity in Britain, are counterproductive and more likely to incite it. He calls on all writers to convince the people of the need for a reform of the economy, and a change in the attitude of the government. His argument is based on a belief that there are natural, universal rules of law, laws of nature which, if followed, will produce true liberty and tranquillity.

There is a further duty incumbent upon every enlightened friend of mankind; he should let slip no opportunity of explaining those general principles of the social order which are applicable in all time and to all places; he should diffuse by every method a knowledge of those rules of political justice, from which the farther any government deviates the more effectually must it defeat the object for which government was ordained. A knowledge of these rules cannot but lead to good; they include an entire preservation from despotism, they will guide the hand of reform, and if a revolution must afflict us, they can alone mitigate the horrors and establish freedom with tranquillity.¹⁸ (EY 124, my emphasis)

He declares himself against violence, and believes Britain will only be saved from following in the example of France by:

the undaunted efforts of good men in propagating with unremitting activity those doctrines which long and severe meditation has taught them are essential to the welfare of mankind. Freedom of inquiry is all that I wish for...let the field be open and unencumbered, and truth must be victorious. (EY 124-5)¹⁹

¹⁸ Wordsworth’s comments about natural laws and his hope of establishing ‘freedom with tranquillity’ suggests his reading of De Legibus with its stoic representation of arguments for natural law.

¹⁹ ‘Long and severe meditation’ is an Aristotelian ideal, and one that later informs the theory of the Preface to Lyrical Ballads in 1800, where the poet must have ‘also thought long and deeply’ (MLB 62 159).
After this impressive rhetoric Wordsworth gets down to fine details on content. Instruction on ‘manners’ and ‘morals’ figures prominently, as do representations of the ‘characters’ of those distinguished in the cause of liberty: Turgot, Milton, Sydney, Machiavel & Beccaria are mentioned, and these studies should, ‘as much as possible form a series exhibiting the advancement of the human mind in moral knowledge’ (126). Towards the end of the letter he makes a point of commenting that his work in the proposed *Philanthropist* ‘will relate rather to moral than natural knowledge’ (127-8). It will follow a philosophical method of enquiry based on Socratic principles rather than those of science.

Several of these sentiments and opinions might be seen to have been inspired by Godwin’s *Political Justice* that Wordsworth had also been reading at the time. Godwin’s study appeared, at first, to have encapsulated his own idealism in a philosophical system that justified his own hopes and beliefs. In ‘Of Justice’, Chapter II section II of the 1st edition Godwin had written:

> that the subject of the present enquiry is strictly speaking a department of the science of morals. Morality is the source from which its fundamental axioms must be drawn, and they will be made somewhat clearer in the present instance, if we assume the term justice as a general appellation for all moral duty.20

Many of the sentiments voiced by Godwin reflect the ethical positions taken by those virtuous republicans mentioned by Wordsworth as distinguished in the cause of liberty. His concern to ‘inculcate principles of government and forms of social order of one kind or another’ raises the question of how he would meld his own beliefs in the social principles of republicanism with Godwin’s negative appraisal of all forms of government.

In the next letter to Matthews, Wordsworth expresses his strong views against the current government, who are ‘already so deeply advanced in iniquity that like Macbeth they cannot retreat’. But he makes it clear his own sentiments are not ‘radical’, and he also stresses that he is ‘far from reprobating those whose sentiments on this point differ from my own’. He recognises that many were forced to support the war for reasons of expediency and support the government because they fear anarchy, not because they agree with its policies. He has obviously moderated his more extreme position by this time, taking into account a much broader, more reasonable perspective. He is no longer thinking like an enthusiast, but more like a philosopher capable of seeing both sides of the question. His language is no longer that of a radical republican, its measured prose and its balanced opinions sound more like the author of *Political Justice*, and indeed Wordsworth was eager to go to London and meet and talk with Godwin at the first opportunity.

In *The Language of Politics*, James Boulton provides a careful study of Godwin’s ‘political language’, with a special focus on his relationship to Burke. While Burke is concerned with the pragmatics of the immediate political situation in Britain, Boulton stresses that ‘Godwin was concerned with nothing less than the whole question of man’s moral nature, and hence the nature of

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20 *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*. Ed. Mark Philp. 3. 49.
the political society appropriate to the human condition’. Godwin’s conception is vaster and more philosophical than Burke’s pragmatism: ‘The foundation of morality is justice. The principle of virtue is an irresistible deduction from the wants of one man, and the ability of another to relieve them’. And it is not dependent upon a sense of duty, obligation, promise or reciprocal relationship; it is dependent on a true, philosophical, understanding of the nature of justice, which is not the same as the ‘political’ understanding held by Burke. As F.E.L. Priestley notes, ‘Politics in Godwin is essentially part of morality. All institutions affect man’s virtue and happiness, and the aim of Godwin’s political philosophy, like that of the Greeks, is to discover what form of social organisation will best enable the individual to achieve the good life’. Although there is much in Godwin that originates from his study of the ancients, especially Cicero, his principles were based on a Stoic attitude of mind that was linked with the Platonic idealist tradition, rather than with Aristotelian principles. It therefore reflected the principles of the later Roman Stoics, Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius rather than the pioneering Greeks whose works Cicero had studied. In answering the question, ‘What is it that society is bound to do for its members?’ Godwin writes:

> Everything that can contribute to their welfare. But the nature of their welfare is defined by the nature of the mind. That will most contribute to it, which enlarges the understanding, supplies incitements to virtue, fills us with a generous consciousness of our independence, and carefully removes whatever can impede our exertions. (*Political Justice* 54)

Godwin’s Rationalism, following Plato, placed him at odds with the French sensationalist philosophers, and the starting point for his *Enquiry* originated in a concern to respond to Montesquieu. Godwin understood that the French sensationalists emphasised the rule of the passions: man is motivated by self-love, and the art of government is not intended to enlighten the reason, but to direct the passions by a system of rewards and punishments. Godwin opposed such a position, maintaining that there was an absolute principle of reason that could be discovered by the philosophical mind, and that this should guide all political decisions. In this he owed a debt to the Stoics and their belief in the *logos* as an absolute principle based on the highest form of reason. Godwin based his philosophy on the existence of such a *logos*, and argued that, above all other considerations of human nature, the human being must discover the laws of this highest form of reason and live according to its dictates. In this he was in agreement with Cicero, but for the fact that while he himself was first and foremost a philosopher, Cicero was also both a politician and a rhetorician. Godwin did not believe that political debate in an assembly could resolve matters of political justice; nor was he as appreciative, as Cicero was, of the art of speaking well. In referring to the act of speaking, the ability that Aristotle identified as defining ‘political man’, Godwin declared that ‘the obvious use of the faculty of speech is to inform and not to mislead’:

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21 James T. Boulton. *The Language of Politics in the Age of Wilkes and Burke*, pp. 207-249.
But it is an absurd account of this motive, to say, that my having recourse to the faculty of speech, amounts to any tacit engagement that I will use it for any genuine purposes. The true ground of confidence between man and man, is the knowledge we have of the motives by which the human mind is influenced; our perception, that the motives to deceive can but rarely occur, while the motives to veracity will govern the stream of human actions. (Political Justice I 195)

Wordsworth would later challenge just this assertion in The Borderers, where his character study of Rivers would belie Godwin’s idealism, and can be seen as a direct response to one aspect of Godwin’s Enquiry that Wordsworth could not accept. Rivers, like Robespierre, is a rhetorician who uses words to deceive, and his ‘independent intellect’ to justify his reasoning, and Wordsworth spent many hours attempting to analyse the motives of such a character whose existence, based on observation of actual human behaviour, was at odds with Godwin’s ‘perception’.

But in 1794, having read the first edition of Political Justice, Wordsworth was attracted to Godwin’s ideals, and in early 1795 he travelled to London with the intention of meeting him. On February 27th 1795, he was introduced to Godwin at a meeting of radical intellectuals in London, and this provided him with the opportunity to call on him the following day. Over the next few months he had further meetings with Godwin and was, according to Hazlitt’s later record of events, initially impressed by his doctrine of necessity. Godwin would also have impressed Wordsworth with his knowledge both of the French philosophers, and of the classics, something gained from his studious pursuit of a liberal education in his youth. It is possible he suggested Wordsworth might gain from reading more widely in Cicero, having read all his works as a young man. Alternatively the two men may have discussed Godwin’s novel, Caleb Williams, and the importance of producing realistic characters whose motives were believable. Wordsworth’s fascination with defining the character of Rivers, and then with describing the circumstances of the growth of the Pedlar’s mind, might be seen as evidence that such a conversation had occurred. Godwin prided himself on producing characters whose ‘manners’ were credible and fitted with their actions, and one of the first things Wordsworth would do on arrival at Racedown was to revise ‘A Night on Salisbury Plain’.

The relationship between Wordsworth and Godwin has been the subject of much speculation, but not of any recent detailed critical analysis. There was much that Godwin had to offer Wordsworth at a time when he was looking for guidance, and it seems Wordsworth was initially in awe of Godwin’s intellect. But as time went on he found himself disappointed with Godwin’s (and Holcroft’s) overly rational form of discussion, and began to discover the limitations of the argument in Political Justice. Godwin was himself aware of some of those limitations and was preoccupied, in 1795, with revising the finer details of several of the claims he had made in the first edition, having


24 In The Spirit of the Age, Hazlitt records that Wordsworth was reputed to have told ‘a young man, a student in the temple’ to “Throw aside [his] books of chemistry …and read Godwin on Necessity.”

25 In his passion for the classics as a young man, Godwin had studied the philosophical works of Aristotle, Cicero, Xenophon, and Plato, and devoted a part of each day to their study, spending about six months to read the works of one author. ‘He worked his way through Virgil, Horace, Cicero, Livy, Sallust and Tacitus among the Romans, and Homer, Sophocles, Xenophon, Herodotus and Thucydides among the Greeks.’ Peter Marshall, William Godwin, p.37.
been strongly influenced by his reading of David Hume’s *Treatise on Human Nature*. It is, therefore, likely that he shared some of those revisions with Wordsworth. But the true nature of their actual relationship has been overshadowed by the one that Wordsworth represented in *The Prelude*.

Because Wordsworth chose to express his ‘despair’ over Godwin’s form of rational enquiry in overly dramatic terms, and to represent Godwin’s methodology as the epitome of abstract reasoning, some critics have assumed he was hostile to Godwin and that the two men fell out. But there is no evidence that this ever happened and Godwin remained a friend whom Wordsworth would call on whenever he visited London. Much later, in 1826, Godwin recalled that during the period he was first getting to know Wordsworth he ‘had the honour in the talk of one evening, to convert Wordsworth from the doctrine of self-love to that of benevolence – ask him’. Godwin’s assertion, and his suggestion that Wordsworth be asked to confirm that ‘conversion’, squares with the argument I present here, that Godwin did play a significant part in influencing Wordsworth in 1795. While the record of events in *The Prelude* suggest an antipathy to Godwin, and paints him in a negative light, he in fact acted as something of a catalyst for the change of heart experienced by Wordsworth in 1795. In *The Prelude*, Godwin is described as playing a very particular role in, supposedly, causing Wordsworth great despair. But the passages relating to Godwin in Book X are carefully staged and are exaggerated for maximum dramatic impact to mark a ‘critical’ turning point in the narrative – something that is made clearer in the 1850 text.

**IV. Yielding up moral questions in despair**

The dramatic climax to Book X comes with Wordsworth’s description of his attempt to make a detailed analysis of the human condition according to Godwinian principles, in which he later felt he had:

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sacrificed
The exactness of a comprehensive mind
To scrupulous and microscopic views
That furnished out materials for a work
Of false imagination, placed beyond
The limits of experience and truth. (Prelude X 844-9)
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In *The Prelude*, Godwin’s reasoning is represented as the epitome of all, limited, human reasoning, and Wordsworth expresses his dismay at the fact that he had, for a period, been seduced by the belief that such reasoning could lead to an understanding of higher truth. In a passage that has been widely misinterpreted by psychoanalytical interpretations of the text, Wordsworth describes himself ‘Having two natures in me’ (X 869), as he makes the point that he had believed he had the necessary capacity

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26 Wordsworth would also appear to have studied some of Hume’s ‘Essays’ judging by comments he makes that echo Hume’s thinking. Possibly Godwin’s respect for Hume was mentioned in discussion at the time.

27 Godwin was responding to Hazlitt’s charge that he was a dull conversationalist. See Ben Ross Schneider, *Wordsworth’s Cambridge Education* pp. 222-3.
to engage in an objective analysis of human nature. In referring to these two natures he was not referring to some kind of schizoid condition. He was referring to the basic condition of the normal human psyche, identified most famously by Plato, as being in a state of conflict between the forces of emotion and the dictates of reason. In this passage Wordsworth is in fact concerned to represent his mind as a balanced one, and the passage is intended to let the reader know something of his good character – it is a deliberate representation of his ethos, aimed at securing a sympathetic hearing from his audience. He describes himself as both joyful and melancholy in the preamble to this passage, in order to define the wholeness of his character. He is asserting his credentials as a ‘competent judge’ at a time when he was about to perform a difficult and delicate ‘operation’ with a metaphorical, and metaphysical, dissecting knife:

This… may be said, that from the first
Having two natures in me, joy the one
The other melancholy, and withal
A happy man, and therefore bold to look
On painful things, slow, somewhat, too, and stern
In temperament, I took the knife in hand
And stopping not at parts less sensitive,
Endeavoured with my best skill to probe
The living body of society
Even to the heart … (X 868 – 877)

The passage makes a statement about Wordsworth’s character and his ‘capacity’ to fulfil the task that he had set himself in probing ‘even to the heart’ of society. He defines his balanced state of mind as one of composure in which the joyful, extraverted, passionate, ‘L’Allegro’ part of his personality works in tandem, in ‘mutual interchange’, with the melancholy, introverted, pensive, ‘Il Penseroso’ part. This is the virtuous state of mind of ‘A happy man’, and also describes an Aristotelian ‘happy mean’ between two states of mind that can be destructive and vicious if taken in isolation, and to extremity. Wordsworth also uses hyperbole (again) at this point in the poem to produce the maximum dramatic effect. Having made a point of declaring that he felt he was capable

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28 Two classic examples of such psychoanalytic readings being, Richard Onerato’s representation of Wordsworth ‘character’ in The Character of the Poet: Wordsworth in ‘The Prelude’ and Michael Friedman’s The Making of a Tory Humanist: William Wordsworth and the Idea of a Community. In an earlier essay, ‘The Princely and Contracted Wordsworth: A Study of Wordsworth’s Personality in Terms of Psychoanalytic Ego Psychology’ Friedman described Wordsworth’s character in the following terms: The William Wordsworth who wrote the poetry of his great decade, 1797 to 1807, did not possess a secure or fully developed sense of identity. Instead his ego was torn between two opposite but causally related senses of self, two different modes of perceiving the self in relation to the outside world. He described himself as “Having two natures within me joy the one / The other melancholy” (Prelude X 869-70). The Wordsworth Circle. 9.4 (1978); 406-411.

29 In the Preface to Fleetwood, Godwin uses the image of a ‘metaphysical dissecting knife’ to describe his own enquiry into human motives, and it is tempting to think that Wordsworth intentionally borrowed from Godwin here. Fleetwood was not published until 1805, but possibly Godwin had used the same description in conversation, or had actually discussed Fleetwood with Wordsworth before publication. Wordsworth had read, and been impressed with, Caleb Williams.

30 I refer, again, to Cicero’s definition of hyperbole in his Topica: ‘to speak of something which cannot possibly happen, in order to magnify or minimise something’. It is obviously not possible to ‘probe / The living body of society / Even to the heart’ with a knife. The mature Wordsworth recognises this fact; at the time he had failed to see the impossibility of Godwin’s claims.
of such a task, he then reveals that he was mistaken. In actuality, it was beyond him. The reversal of fortune is thereby heightened; Godwin’s philosophy is painted as more obtuse; and the turning point in the plot of *The Prelude* is exaggerated.31

As he discovers that Godwin’s ‘metaphysical dissecting knife’ is not the right tool for the job, Wordsworth’s investigations led him into a state of some confusion and mental distress.32 But he declines from attempting to convey to Coleridge:

```plaintext
What then I learned, or think I learned of truth,
And the errors into which I was betrayed
By present objects, and by reasonings false
From the beginning, inasmuch drawn
Out of a heart which had been turned aside
From Nature by external accidents,
And which was thus confounded more and more,
Misguiding and misguided            (X 873-879)
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Godwin’s method of enquiry is of no help – it is described as having turned Wordsworth’s heart ‘aside /From Nature’, and he describes himself interrogating society in a seemingly endless and fruitless trial. Earlier in Book X he had recorded how he had felt himself to be ‘pleading before unjust tribunals’, at night, in his dreams. Now the boot is on the other foot, and he finds himself the interrogator, ‘calling the mind to establish in plain day / Her titles and honours’ (my emphasis). But such appeals to reason cannot arrive at any true understanding of the human heart, and the climax of this section of the poem ends in ‘despair’ and apparent collapse, with Wordsworth seemingly forced to leave London to recuperate.

```plaintext
Thus I fared
Dragging all passions, notions, shapes of faith,
Like culprits to the bar; suspiciously
Calling the mind to establish in plain day
Her titles and her honours; now believing,
Now disbelieving; endlessly perplexed
With impulse, motive, right and wrong, the ground
Of moral obligation, what the rule
And what the sanction; till demanding proof,
And seeking it in every thing, I lost
All feeling of conviction, and, in fine,
Sick, wearied out with contrarieties,
Yielded up moral questions in despair,    (X 889-901)
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It is at this point in the poem that he later felt it necessary to add further significant emphasis in the revised text - the version read by Legouis, Harper, Beatty and Garrod:

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31 This passage provides further evidence of the self-centred ‘Pride’ that Wordsworth later recognised as a vice, rather than a virtue.

32 In *The Radical Years* Roe reports on other members of Godwin’s circle who suffered mental strain, and even breakdown, in attempting to pursue the rigorous method demanded by Godwin and Holcroft.
This was the crisis of that strong disease,
This the soul’s last and lowest ebb: I drooped,
Deeming our blessèd reason of lest use
Where wanted most: ‘The lordly attributes
Of will and choice,’ I bitterly exclaimed,
‘What are they but a mockery of a Being
Who hath in no concerns of his to test
Of good and evil; knows not what to fear
Or hope for, what to covet or to shun. (XI 306-314: 1850)

Wordsworth’s spirits ‘droop’ (again) as Samson’s and Coleridge’s had earlier done, and he also describes himself as ‘Depressed’ and ‘bewildered’ (X 321) for good measure. It was these lines that earlier critics read as evidence of some kind of mental crisis; suggestive of the fact that he had suffered something of a ‘nervous breakdown’. But the word ‘crisis’ is not used in the 1805 text at all, and its usage in the 1850 text can, and I think should, be taken as representing a more archaic and more specific understanding of the word. Crisis, when related specifically to ‘disease’ represents the sense of a ‘turning point’, from the Greek Krisis (which can also signify ‘judgement’); and Wordsworth should not be seen as entering into a period of despair and dejection, but as having the opportunity to turn around from a place of despair, caused by the inability of Godwin’s philosophy to provide him with answers to his ‘moral questions’.

The ‘crisis’ is often written about as if it were some kind of sickness in itself; but in this context, linked to ‘that strong disease’, it can be said to signify a healing crisis, the resolution of a state of affairs now recognised as a state of dis-ease of the mind, rather than evidence of prophetic election. Wordsworth’s use of the term is clear once its eighteenth-century usage and its context are taken into account. The whole period, from his return from France, to his retirement to Racedown, can be considered a period during which, on reflection, he later understood his mind to have been diseased. In retiring to Racedown Wordsworth had made a deliberate choice to abandon the via activa for the via contemplative, seizing an opportunity to make his own reflections on the revolution in France, and take stock of his situation. His ‘mental illness’, described as ‘that strong disease’, can also be figured as that of an overly ‘strong imagination’ – as experienced by enthusiasts whether political or poetical. In Wordsworth’s case, his belief in the Revolution as an event of apocalyptic significance, combined with his feeling that he had been granted some sort of prophetic insight, had led to a state of manic ‘inflation’. Once he had regained a more normal perspective on life, he was then able to look back and realise that for much of that period he had not been in his ‘proper’ mind, and had been unable to see with his ‘proper eyes’ (X 107).33

33 In adverting to the difference between what his eyes saw at the time in Paris and his later more mature insight into the nature of things Wordsworth may well have been adverting to the distinction Rousseau made between amour de soi and amour propre in his Discours sur l’inégalité.
Chapter 9

Books

I. ‘Cato’s Letters’ and Beattie’s ‘Minstrel’

However great the influence of Dorothy was upon him, as we have clearly noted, it cannot have been in the direction of furnishing the poet with a philosophy, an aesthetic. And yet during this crucial period of his life he was furnished with both: so the problem of the critic is to cast about in search of the source whence Wordsworth drew his inspiration and his imagination.¹

I think Racedown is the place dearest to my recollections upon the whole surface of the island; it was the first home I had...lovely meadows above the tops of combs, and the scenery on Pilsden, Lewisden, and Blackdown-hill, and the view of the sea from Lambert’s Castle.²

Far from leaving London at a time when his soul was at its ‘last and lowest ebb’, and arriving at Racedown ‘Depressed and bewildered’ (Prelude: 1850 XI. 307; 321), Wordsworth carefully planned his departure from London with the help of Basil Montagu, to whom he had been introduced by Godwin. Montagu had introduced him, in turn, to Azariah and John Pinney, sons of John Pinney (snr), a wealthy Bristol merchant. The Pinney family owned Racedown Lodge, an isolated property in Dorset that was mainly used by the two sons as a ‘hunting lodge’. Wordsworth and Montagu hatched a plan that Wordsworth might be re-united with Dorothy and retire there to engage in study while Dorothy earned a small income looking after Montagu’s son Basil (jnr). Through the generosity of the Pinney sons (but unknown to their father), Wordsworth was offered the house rent-free. In September 1795 he spent a few weeks in Bristol as a guest of his unwitting ‘patron’, before he and Dorothy were reunited, and then set out with the young Basil for Racedown Lodge.

It is clear from remarks made by both William and Dorothy, that the plan to retire to Racedown was intended to provide Wordsworth with an opportunity for study. In fact, it seems that ‘books’ were their consolation for the noted lack of ‘society’, and certain fears about ‘solitude’, that they both voiced in letters written shortly after their arrival. Writing to William Matthews, Wordsworth related, ‘We are now at Racedown and both as happy as people can be who live in perfect solitude. We do not see a soul’ (EY 154). The comments are echoed in a later letter to Francis Wrangham: ‘Racedown...it is an excellent house and the country far from unpleasant but as to society we must manufacture it ourselves’ (159). Dorothy, describing their domestic situation to her dear friend Jane Marshall (née Pollard), writes: ‘We are now surrounded by winter prospects without doors, and within have only winter occupations, books, solitude and the fire side, yet I may safely say we are never dull’ (161). In an earlier letter to Jane about her intended plans she had also reflected on how well the move would suit William, ‘I have great satisfaction in thinking that William will have such opportunities for studying...living in the unsettled way in which he hitherto lived in London is

¹ Arthur Beatty, *William Wordsworth, his Doctrine and Art in their Historical Relations*, p.36.
² Dorothy Wordsworth, (EY’281)
altogether unfavourable to mental exertion’ (149). Something that she had not realised then was the isolation of the spot. But ‘Perfect solitude’ was something Wordsworth obviously appreciated at Racedown, as a contrast to the noise and interruptions of city life.3

It was during his twenty-two month period of retirement at Racedown that Wordsworth’s studies led to a significant change of mind, evident in a significant change in poetic style that was also evidence of something of a spiritual *renovatio*. I discount the beliefs of critics who consider Coleridge’s appearance on the scene was the cause of the important turning point in Wordsworth’s life at this time because neither the timing of events, nor Coleridge’s description of the two men’s relationship, nor the content or style of his writing, fits with notions of a strong Coleridgean influence. Nor, in casting about ‘in search of the source whence Wordsworth drew his inspiration and his imagination’, do I concur with Arthur Beatty’s assertion that the scientific precision of David Hartley’s writings played a key role. From the more detailed record of the events of Wordsworth life available to modern scholarship; from an analysis of the philosophical concepts he was using at this time; from his expression of manner; and from his particular use of language and matters of style, I deduce that source to be the eloquence and wisdom of Marcus Tullius Cicero. It was Cicero’s philosophical works that furnished Wordsworth with answers to the ‘moral questions’ that had not been answered by Godwin.

As a result of his studies, and his reflections on recent events, I believe Wordsworth felt it necessary to develop a more conscious moral attitude. This was a result, not only of the recognition of his sin of ‘Pride’ in relation to his political enthusiasm, but also because he recognised a sense of guilt, and sorrow, over the circumstances of his affair with Annette Vallon, and his inability to provide for her, or his child, at the time. In his remorse, he saw the need to improve his own moral values by making a greater, more conscious, commitment to the republican ideals that he had formerly pursued through an emotional and enthusiastic attachment. In reading Cicero’s philosophical works, I believe he realised a need to commit to the moral ideals described by Cicero, taking on the manners of a classical humanist gentleman, and pursuing a ‘virtuous’ life based on the practical eudaemonist principles of Aristotelian virtue-ethics. At the same time he also developed an understanding of Stoic philosophy; an attitude of mind based on Cicero’s Academic Scepticism; and a concern to develop his poetic art by attending to matters of style or eloquence that Cicero had made his *forte*. In this and the following chapters I comment more specifically on the significant influence that I propose this great orator, statesman, philosopher, and poet, had on the mind of William Wordsworth.

The lack of society at Racedown meant there were few distractions from study, and within a few weeks both William and Dorothy were engrossed in reading. Visits by the Pinney brothers, who obviously enjoyed the company of the philosophical poet and recluse they had the satisfaction of

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3 When Dorothy next found herself living in a city she would remark upon the ‘jarring’ sounds ringing in her ears after the ‘sweet sounds’ of the country: ‘After three years residence in retirement a city in feeling, sound, and prospect is hateful’. (*EY* 223)
supporting, made up for the lack of society. The Wordsworths included a two-hour walk in their daily regime, but it is clear that reading had become a focus for the rest of the day. After the Pinneys’ month long visit in February, Dorothy wrote (to Jane), ‘We have read a good deal while they were with us (for they are fond of reading) but we have not got on with our usual regularity’ (EY 165). And Wordsworth relates to Matthews that, in spite of such distractions as planting cabbages, he has been ‘tolerably industrious in reading, if reading can ever deserve the name of industry, till our good friends the Pinneys came amongst us; and I have since returned to my books’ (169), and he adds, ‘As to writing it is out of the question’.

What Wordsworth was actually reading at this time is a matter of conjecture. What he wanted to read when he first arrived, and was unable to do so at the time, was James Beattie’s The Minstrel or the Progress of Genius. Shortly after his arrival, Wordsworth had written to Matthews with a very specific request – that Matthews might exchange his copy of a volume of Bell’s Fugitive Poetry that contained The Minstrel, for Wordsworth’s copy of Cato’s Letters. This request suggests that he had a particular concern, at this time, to re-read Beattie’s description of Edwin treading ‘the uplands wild’, as he found himself doing at his new location. He had been reminded of a passage in The Minstrel on a recent walk to Lyme Regis ‘over the hills’, during which he relates that he had often stopped ‘listening with pleasing dread to the deep roar of the wide weltering waves’ as they broke on the shore below. I argue that Wordsworth’s wish to have a copy of The Minstrel available to him at this time was highly significant, and that Beattie’s representation of ‘the progress of genius’ played a significant part in assisting him in making an assessment of the progress of his own genius. Wordsworth knew the poem well from his schooldays and had imitated and borrowed from it extensively in his youthful work. He had also, in real life, identified closely with the character of the youthful Edwin, and Dorothy had noted how strikingly similar her brother William’s manners were to those of Edwin when she first met up with him again, after their long period of separation following the death of their father. Writing to Jane Pollard in July 1793 she relates how Wordsworth’s manner was not attractive to her uncles, and in describing his ‘natural disposition’ she writes:

“In truth he was a strange and wayward wight fond of each gentle &c. &c.” That verse of Beattie’s Minstrel always reminds me of him, and indeed the whole character of Edwin

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4 After a visit, the following spring, Azariah wrote: ‘while we were with him he relaxed the rigour of his philosophic nerves so much as to go coursing’.’The Pinney Papers’, Letter Book 13, Bristol University Library.
5 In his letter to Matthews, Wordsworth requests that he ask his shoemaker in London to make him four pairs of strong walking shoes.
6 Cato’s Letters: or, Essays on Liberty, Civil and Religious and Other Important Subjects in Four Volumes by John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon.
7 Racedown Lodge is situated in a hanging valley near the top of a range of hills. Immediately behind the house is Blackdown – an English ‘down’ being an upland area that would originally have been common land. About a mile to the east is Pilsdon Pen, the highest point in Dorset, and a mile to the southwest is Barnard’s Castle. Both places were ancient hill forts with commanding views over the land below and the English Channel to the south, in the distance. The house is near the edge of an escarpment that drops away steeply. It is an isolated and elevated location.
8 The road to Lyme Regis travels along the top of a high plateau before descending steeply into Lyme Regis. Wordsworth boasts of having walked the nineteen miles there and back in one day (EY 154).
resembles much what William was when I first knew him after my leaving Halifax – “and oft
he traced the uplands &c., &c., &c.”. (EY 100-1)

The two passages that Dorothy quotes (which are reversed in sequence) frame a stanza that is
identifiable as one of Wordsworth’s most obvious borrowings from Beattie. It is used in both
Descriptive Sketches (ll 492-509), and the ascent of Snowden passage in The Prelude:

And oft the craggy cliff he loved to climb
When all in mist the world below was lost.
What dreadful pleasure! there to stand sublime,
Like shipwrecked mariner on desert coast
And view th’enormous waste of vapour, tost
In billows, lengthening to th’ horizon round.
Now scoop’s in gulfs, with mountains now emboss’d!
And hear the voice of mirth and song rebound
Flocks, herds, and waterfalls, along the hoar profound! (The Minstrel I. XXI)

John Wilson (Christopher North) was one of the first critics to draw attention to Wordsworth’s
borrowings from Beattie, and Émile Legouis also brought the matter to the attention of his readers.9
But Beattie’s poem has been largely neglected as an obvious influence on The Prelude because
Romantic criticism has focused on Wordsworth’s poem defining the growth of a different kind of
genius, a Romantic one in which the power of ‘the Imagination’ marks an important difference.10

As was noted earlier, Beattie’s poem treated a theme that James Thomson had earlier written
on in The Castle of Indolence, and Beattie also copied Thomson’s use of the Spenserian stanza. The
Minstrel was extremely popular, it went through fifty-one editions between 1771 and the 1820s, and
was regarded as ‘one of the greatest poems of the age’. Its theme struck a chord with well-mannered,
late eighteenth-century readers as it firstly celebrated nature with romantic enthusiasm, and then
demanded that that enthusiasm be directed towards the concerns of mankind – once youth had been
allowed its free rein. The pursuit of ‘self-love’ that was considered necessary to the establishment of a
youth’s identity had then to be turned towards the good of society. ‘Love of Nature’ must lead to
‘Love of Mankind’. Beattie also related that he had experienced similar states of mind in his youth to
those he described for Edwin. As the subtitle, The Progress of Genius indicates, the poem presents a
moral tale. Its matter is carefully constructed utilising the commonplace and neo-classical conceits
expected of a well-mannered, well-read, common-sense philosopher, while the manner reveals
Beattie’s careful attention to matters of style. It is remarkable how many passages in The Minstrel

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9 Wilson later maintained that Wordsworth ‘must …forgo the praise of originality’ for The Excursion because it
contained so many ideas, scenes and characters from The Minstrel. Blackwood’s Magazine XLIV (October
1838) 512.

10 Everard King, author of a study of James Beattie for the Twayne Authors series, has also written several
essays including, ‘James Beattie’s The Minstrel (1771, 1774): Its Influence on Wordsworth’. Studies in
Scottish Literature VIII (1970), 3-29. King argues, convincingly, that while earlier studies of The Prelude
have noted similarities that were largely considered coincidental, Wordsworth’s actual debt to Beattie was
far more substantial.
stuck in Wordsworth’s mind and were reproduced consciously, or unconsciously, in *The Prelude*, having also been used extensively in his juvenile works.

In the first canto of the poem, the young Edwin leaves the haunts of men to wander the ‘uplands wild’, where he attunes his mind to the romantic appearances of nature, and prepares himself for the vocation of a bard or minstrel. Untroubled by the affairs of men and their disputes he learns to sing, to play the harp and flute, and dedicates his life to nature. But in the second canto he meets, and is admonished by a wise hermit, a ‘Sage’ who teaches him that he must gain control over his mind and forgo the ‘gay dreams of fond romantick youth’. Edwin is told he must embrace ‘th’ historick muse’, and the muse of Philosophy, who is invoked to ‘curb Imagination’s lawless rage’. The Sage’s discourse traces the development of society, the birth of politics and philosophy, the growth of art and science and industry, and celebrates the virtues of civic humanism and the pursuit of Liberty – all topics that James Thomson had set out, in greater detail, in his *Liberty*. The poem has a republican political agenda – selfishness is condemned in favour of the pursuit of the common good, and its philosophical position is stoic and eudaemonist in principle: ‘virtue’ is named ‘the child of liberty’, and ‘happiness’ as the child of virtue. In the final stanzas of canto II Edwin is also taught to take care to revise his inspired poetic utterances. He is advised to give due attention to ‘intrinsic worth and just design’ and to avoid the excessive use of ornament, in the pursuit of a simple style.

Edwin – whose character in the first canto suggests him to be something of a ‘son of Rousseau’ – grows up to become a ‘gentleman’ whose values are those of a classical humanist. He has been taught by the Sage to identify the folly of his earlier romantic ideals, and has regulated his enthusiasm by channelling it into the pursuit of the beauties of human life, rather than seeking sublime experiences in nature. The progress of Wordsworth’s genius follows much the same path in *The Prelude*. But Wordsworth’s narrative is complicated by the fact that he had engaged in political action as an enthusiast, lacking a conscious understanding of the complexities of political philosophy and had, as a consequence, fallen into error. His ‘virtuous’ pursuit of Liberty had turned vicious when he had succumbed to the vice of excessive self-centred pride. Wordsworth explored this dynamic – in which virtue borders closely on vice – in his character studies of Rivers and Mortimer in *The Borderers*, as he reflected on his own moral dilemmas in 1796-7.

To read *The Prelude* as a text that echoes Beattie’s, and Thomson’s, treatment of a classic moral theme, and as a commentary on the relative values of youth and manhood, is to present a very different perspective to the canonical one in which Wordsworth is described as a poet of the Imagination, and the poem is read as a celebration of the growth of the mind of a Romantic genius. Coleridge, not surprisingly, was not sympathetic to Beattie’s allegory, and in commenting on *The Minstrel* in his *Shakespeare Criticism*, he remarked that ‘the title ought to have been the *Decay of Genius*, instead of the *Progress of Genius*’.11 His comment succinctly re-states the nature of the ‘radical difference’ between his and Wordsworth’s views about poetry and Imagination. Coleridge obviously believed that Edwin, like Wordsworth, was better off remaining a poet by virtue of his

11 Coleridge’s *Shakespeare Criticism*, ed. T.M. Raysor II 51
participation in ‘the vision and faculty divine’; a great poet by inspiration rather than art; born not made.

*The Prelude* is a confessional work that defines the progress of Wordsworth’s own genius according to the classical humanist ideals held by Thomson and Beattie. The narrative describes the transition from his earlier youthful, romantic, bardic, identity, to his mature understanding of himself as a ‘man’, who has a ‘duty’ to ‘speak’ to other men. The mature Wordsworth is a poet committed to a pragmatic poetics that also has a political agenda. To read the poem as a celebration of his visionary imagination is to fail to recognise the integrity of his actual argument in the poem. The progress of Wordsworth’s genius is described in terms remarkably similar to that of Beattie’s Edwin, and incorporate the particular social values that define Edwin’s final identity. Although studies of *The Prelude* have tended to note similarities with the fall-redemption motif in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, the 1805 text should also be understood within the context of Thomson’s and Beattie’s classical humanist treatment of that theme, something that Milton, as a republican, also shared. Wordsworth’s actual beliefs at the time he was composing the original *Prelude* had more in common with the Hellenistic philosophers than the Hebrew prophets, and the design of *The Prelude* places the fall/redemption motif within a more secular, humanist context. Although Milton’s epic was unquestionably a strong influence, and Wordsworth specifically echoes key motifs in Milton’s text, its representation of a biblical myth was not necessarily the primary influence on Wordsworth’s original design. He also echoes another representation of the archetypal journey of descent and ascent in allusions to Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, in which Virgil acts as a guide – a scenario more suited to Wordsworth’s classical mind.

Unfortunately, the composition of Beattie’s poem was interrupted by the death of a friend, and so great was Beattie’s grief, that the poem was never completed. We do not hear of Edwin going out into the world and applying his learning. Wordsworth’s original plan, in 1804, had been to extend the ‘Two–Part Prelude’ to five Books, and to have concluded the study of ‘the growth of his own mind’ at the time when he would traditionally have been seen to have attained to his ‘majority’ having graduated (though without Honours) from University. But he would have realised that he had not gained the sufficient knowledge of the *artes liberales* that Edwin had achieved through his education, by that time. That knowledge had only been acquired after his second return from France, when he had abandoned his reliance on enthusiasm, studied the classical origins of republicanism, turned to and abandoned Godwin, and read more carefully in Cicero’s philosophy. By incorporating his experiences in France, and acknowledging the follies of his earlier state of mind, he was then able to complete the record of his moral education and be capable, like Edwin, of understanding ‘the still sad music of humanity’. Wordsworth’s example, as set out in *The Prelude*, goes one step further than

12 In this I obviously differ from Hartman’s focus on Milton’s influence, as well as Abrams’ and Bloom’s focus on Wordsworth’s use of Biblical allusions. See also Robin Jarvis’ study, *Wordsworth, Milton and the Theory of Poetic Relations* in which Jarvis focuses on specific biblical references. In the 1850 text Milton’s presence is more palpably felt.

13 Allusions to *The Divine Comedy* also feature in *Peter Bell*, which Wordsworth was working on early in 1802. Coleridge alludes to Wordsworth’s use of Dante in his ‘Verse letter to Sara’.
Edwin in actually applying his ‘knowledge’ and his ‘power’, both in *The Prelude* itself, and in the part of *The Recluse* that he did manage to finish, *The Excursion*.

Everard King’s study of Beattie reveals the extent to which several of Wordsworth’s passages in *The Prelude* closely echo Beattie’s descriptive verse. But equally important, as an influence, are the political ideals, the use of stock *topoi*, and matters of style that add force and variety to a long poem. *The Prelude* adopts the same moral stance as both Beattie’s and Thomson’s works as it sets out a complex argument about the true nature of Wordsworth’s genius, as a poet reliant on both Inspiration and Art, on Nature and Books, on Imagination and Fancy, and on the Sublime and the Beautiful, in a chain of binary distinctions that operate in tandem, not in opposition, defining the basic *ethos-pathos* formula recognised by Klaus Dockhorn. Wordsworth’s argument recapitulates the classical position that Beattie and Thomson also present, in which ‘Nature’ and ‘Culture’ work together. Wordsworth’s mind does not stand out from, oppose, or transcend Nature; it remains a part of Nature, with Wordsworth speaking on Nature’s behalf, *not* as a passive voice-piece (the role of the traditional prophet) but as a poet who consciously *gives voice* to Nature. He is her spokesperson, and uses his particular rhetorical skill, his art of imaginative poetry, to re-present Nature’s voice, a voice that cannot speak for itself.

There has been some confusion about the nature of the term ‘Prophecy’, and the role of the ‘Prophet’ in *The Prelude* because High Romantic interpreters (Abrams, Bloom, and Hartman) have all proposed that Wordsworth’s reference to Prophecy should be related to the tradition of the peoples of the Book. Both Abrams and Hartman treat ‘prophecy’ as if Wordsworth had in mind some Old Testament figure. But it makes more sense also to discuss Wordsworth’s experience according to Hellenistic ideas about poetry and inspiration. Plato’s reference in *Ion* to the poet being out of his right mind and divinely inspired is well known, but in the *Timaeus* he offers a further description that is useful when trying to understand Wordsworth’s experiences, and how he might account for them. The *Timaeus* was one of Plato’s best-known dialogues, and Plato distinguishes between the *mantis*, a ‘seer’ and the *prophetes*, a ‘declarer’. In a famous passage about divination, Plato describes the existence of a mantic power that is located in the liver – the smooth shiny surface of that organ was seen to have the capacity to reflect divine wisdom. This is a literal rendition of the classical idea of the poet as a ‘Mirror’. But Plato points out that the god has given mantic skill [*mantike*] not to the wisdom, but to the foolishness of men:

No man, when in his wits, attains mantic skill that is inspired [*enthēos*] and true [*alēthēs*], but when he receives it, either his intelligence is enthralled in sleep or he is demented by some distemper or possession [*enthusiasmos*]. (*Timaeus* 71e)

When a person is in such a state they are unconscious of what they are experiencing or saying, and therefore Plato records that it was customary to appoint ‘declarers’ [*prophetai*] ‘who can be

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15 Wordsworth had a copy of the *Timaeus*, complete with Coleridge’s annotations. He also shows evidence of having a good knowledge of the *Phaedrus*, with its distinctions between rhetoric and philosophy.
judges \([kritai]\) over the inspired \([enteos]\) mantic utterances, and although some call such \(prophetai\)
‘seers’ they are not, being merely ‘declarers’ of what the seers say’ (72b). Gregory Nagy describes
how in early Greek religion the \(prophetai\) came to occupy an important role as interpreters of the
seers.\(^{16}\) He also confirms the etymological connection between \(mantis\) and \(mania\); the former
describes ‘he, who is in a special mental state’, the latter describes ‘a mental state differing from the
norm’. Wordsworth came to appreciate that he had not been in his right mind when he was
enthusiastically supporting the republican cause, admitting in Book X of \(The Prelude\) that he had
become a fanatic. Coleridge had been reading the \(Timaeus\) in 1801, and it would seem that he and
Wordsworth had been discussing distinctions between the divine madness of inspiration, and actual
mental illness. Chatterton’s example is used by Wordsworth in ‘Resolution and Independence’ in
1802, and later, in \(Biographia\). Coleridge discusses the difference between ‘delirium’ and ‘mania’ in
making an analogy between that difference, which is ‘grounded in nature’, and the one he perceives to
exist between Imagination and Fancy (\(BL\) IV 51).\(^{17}\)

When Wordsworth declares himself to be a ‘Prophet of Nature’ in the final Book of \(The
Prelude\) he can therefore be seen to be speaking more as a Greek \(prophetai\) – an interpreter of Nature
– someone in their right mind capable of mediating on behalf of Nature and not, as in the Hebrew
tradition, someone possessed by God or, in the pagan tradition, speaking ‘things oracular’. The whole
point of the definition set out in the 1802 additions to the Preface to \(Lyrical Ballads\), in which ‘The
Poet’ is defined as ‘a man speaking to men’, is to stress that ‘the poet’ speaks ‘as a man’, not a god,
and addresses his comments to other men in an act of speaking that is conscious and ‘political’, not
unconscious and prophetic. The poet, as ‘a man’ (\(vir\)), speaks by virtue of his own authority.
Coleridge liked to believe that the inspired poet spoke words of truth from a higher source – that he
was something of a ‘divine ventriloquist’ – and these views are the ones defined in the letter to
Sotheby in September 1802. But in \(The Prelude\), Wordsworth is arguing against this conception of the
inspired poet. His own experiences of an unregulated enthusiasm after his return from France had led
him to believe that he actually was some kind of prophet of a new millennium, and he had later had to
recognise that such a form of prophetic enthusiasm was more manic than mantic.

\(II.\) Gill’s ‘Life’ of Wordsworth

When Wordsworth first arrived at Racedown he would have discovered that he had access to
‘a very tolerable library’ (\(EY\) 155), one containing some 470 books. The wide-ranging collection
of political, classical, historical, philosophical, legal, and even religious books, as well as several

\(^{16}\) Gregory Nagy, ‘Early Greek Views of Poetry and Poets’, \(Classical Criticism. Cambridge History of Literary
\(^{17}\) Coleridge makes a distinction that comes from a passage in Shaftesbury’s essay, ‘Soliloquy or Advice to an
Author’ in his \(Characteristics\), though it is not acknowledged.
volumes of poetry, reflected the Old Whig sympathies of John Pinney. Stephen Gill attempts a brief survey of the collection in his *William Wordsworth: A Life* (106) but states that, for all the wealth of material, there are not many clues as to what Wordsworth actually read. He makes some conjectures, stresses that they are only conjectures, and then turns to discuss those readings for which ‘harder evidence does exist’ and which ‘enables us to sense if not the direction of his thoughts, then at least its field of activity’. Gill mentions, in particular, contemporary books supplied by Azariah Pinney that are known to have been sent to Wordsworth. These works obviously have an important bearing on Gill’s study of Wordsworth’s life, and reveal the extent to which he was still very much concerned with events in France. They contain harrowing records of injustice and horror, and Wordsworth would again have been confronted with the discrepancy between his own idealistic support for republican principles, and the facts of the situation in France. Nicholas Roe makes a detailed analysis of the books and other materials sent to Wordsworth later, in March and April 1797, by James Losh (*Radical Years* 240), and the significance of these materials has been a topic of some discussion in a number of recent studies. Their presence establishes the fact that Wordsworth was still concerned with the political situation in France and the continuing debate in England over the turn of events there. But his reading in these works cannot be said to have been the source ‘whence [he] drew his inspiration and imagination’ and which furnished him ‘with a philosophy, an aesthetic…during this crucial period of his life’.

When Gill also acknowledges that Wordsworth ‘did change, or mature, or develop’ to become ‘more completely self assured’ while he was at Racedown, he then attributes this change to the influence of Coleridge – even though his influence could not have been significant during the Racedown period. In writing about Wordsworth in 1796 Gill notes: ‘At a time when he was particularly receptive to stimulus and intellectual nourishment, a new influence had entered his life, one which was soon to matter more than anything else he did or read in this transition year’ (109). Gill does not actually maintain that Coleridge was a major influence at the time – but that he was ‘soon’ to be one. But the distinction is blurred, just as it was by Wordsworth in the 1805 *Prelude*, when he, erroneously, named Coleridge as an influence at Racedown (X 905-8). Gill’s emphasis on Coleridge’s influence can be seen to echo that of Jonathan Wordsworth, who was emphatic in his belief that Coleridge had ‘given Wordsworth far more than he had gained from him’ in their relationship. Most significantly, he believed that Coleridge ‘gave Wordsworth a philosophical basis for his response to Nature, and in doing so made available to him the material of much of his greatest poetry’ (*The Music of Humanity* 200-201). Jonathan Wordsworth’s discussion of ‘The Ruined Cottage’ and ‘The Pedlar’

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18 A catalogue of the library was made in 1793, and a rough and a fair copy are held in the ‘Pinney Papers’ at Bristol University Library. In *Wordsworth: Romantic Poetry and Revolution Politics* John Williams describes the collection as representative of ‘Old Whig texts’ (88). He had also earlier noted, ‘Wordsworth’s version of the ‘one life’ that developed after his arrival with Dorothy at Racedown in 1795 was in keeping ideologically with the eighteenth-century political beliefs of his patron at the time John Pinney’ (8).

19 Gill lists Louvet’s *Narrative of the dangers to which I have been exposed, since 31st of May 1793; Madame Roland’s *An Appeal to Impartial Posterity*; and Helen Maria Williams’ *Letters: Containing a Sketch of the Politics of France…and of the Scenes which have Passed in the Prisons of Paris* (108).

in *The Music of Humanity* is largely coloured by the assertions he makes about Wordsworth’s need of Coleridge’s direction, and the fact that Coleridge provided Wordsworth with a ‘one-life philosophy’ and a theory of imagination. In the concluding chapter of his study he states:

Much emphasis has been laid in this book not only on Wordsworth’s technical development but also on the extent to which his changing views show the influence of Coleridge. Less than two years divides *The Borderers* of spring 1797 from the best passages of *The Prelude*. Without Coleridge this sudden advance would certainly not have been possible. The pantheist assertions of *The Pedlar* and *Tintern Abbey* could never have been made; and if Wordsworth had on his own begun to draw on the isolated memories that compose the early *Prelude*, they would have had neither their present shape, nor the power which they derive from his informing, if by now also decreasing, belief in the One Life. (245)

Gill follows Jonathan Wordsworth’s belief that ‘Wordsworth drew largely on the superabundant store of Coleridge’s reading and thought’ (*William Wordsworth: A Life* 136), and maintains that lines found in Coleridge’s poetry became the basis for Wordsworth’s ideas, as expressed in Ms B of *The Ruined Cottage*. He also stresses the great importance of some of the lines written in March 1798 to define the Pedlar’s beliefs. It was this section of ‘philosophical verse’ that he printed as an Appendix, asserting that ‘Wordsworth never wrote more important lines than these’ (135). I share that opinion, believing that the materials put together to produce the Ms B text of ‘The Ruined Cottage’ form the foundations on which Wordsworth established his own poetic career. But I strongly disagree, as Gill then maintains, that they can be attributed to Coleridge’s mind, and to ‘Coleridge’s most profound conviction’ that ‘The phenomena of the natural world signify, even as they are most wonderful themselves, the transcendental reality’ (136). Wordsworth’s own philosophical position at this point in time did not acknowledge the existence of a transcendental reality. His understanding of any form of ‘divinity’ was one that was incorporated in Nature itself as an inclusive aspect of a universe that was conceived of as solely ‘material’, a ‘one-life’ concept found in the philosophy of the early Stoics.

Having made his point about Coleridge providing Wordsworth with a new transcendental awareness, Gill continues:

The second point to be made about Wordsworth’s revisions to *The Ruined Cottage* is that in glossing his vivid description of childhood and adolescent experiences through the medium of eighteenth century theories of mind, Wordsworth showed that he was prepared to take whatever philosophical formulations seemed to help. Unlike Coleridge he was not a philosopher, nor did he feel the compulsion to eradicate uncertainties which drove Coleridge to a lifetime’s philosophical enquiry. Trying to identify a single ‘philosophy’ in Wordsworth’s poetry by tracing its language to an original philosophic source is fruitless. My argument must suggest otherwise here, proposing that it is possible to trace Wordsworth’s language to an original philosophic source. Coleridge obviously had an influence on Wordsworth’s

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21 These lines include the section beginning, ‘Not useless do I deem / These shadowy sympathies’ that Coleridge sent to his brother George in March 1797, that were quoted in Chapter 3 (*CL* I 397-8).

thinking and provided him with a great amount of information and advice, some of which would have proved useful. But, as was discussed in Chapter 2, Coleridge continually referred to Wordsworth’s ‘great intellect’, and confessed to being lost in admiration at Wordsworth’s mental prowess throughout the first year of their relationship. Both Thomas Poole, who can be relied upon to give an impartial judgement, and Charles Lamb, who had a more emotional attachment, provide further evidence of Coleridge’s great respect for Wordsworth’s intellect. I concur with Paul Sheats’ reading of the relationship between Wordsworth and Coleridge at this time. In commenting on the Alfoxden period Sheats firstly reiterates his primary thesis that Wordsworth’s greatest work was dependent on his earlier study of the classical writers, and then dismisses the idea that Coleridge played any major role in establishing Wordsworth’s poetic success:

The consummation of 1798 has been viewed as a sudden emergence into the sunlight of romantic joy, or a regression into the mists of romantic subjectivism. It has been ascribed to the mystery of poetic inspiration or to the philosophical influence of Hartley or Coleridge. But its most striking characteristic, when viewed in the light of Wordsworth’s earlier work, is the inevitability with which it fulfils and completes the promise of the past…One cannot doubt Coleridge’s immense contribution to these achievements. A brilliant and profoundly generous man, he offered a philosophic and poetic comradeship… He was finally a great poet, whose work throughout this year quite literally interbraids with Wordsworth’s. Themes, motifs, and technical innovations pass from one mind to the other and back again, enriched and transformed at each passage. But at all times the work of each poet remains fully his own, and Coleridge’s influence in no way deflects or distorts the flowering of Wordsworth’s genius, which proceeds with awesome independence…Coleridge’s gift to his friend at the time was not a philosophy, but recognition, encouragement, and love, and it is above all a tribute to the quality of his influence that Wordsworth so completely became himself’.23

Wordsworth was a philosopher – on his own, classical eudaemonist terms; terms that have largely escaped the notice of many critics in their uncritical acceptance of Coleridge’s commentary on Wordsworth. The distinctions Wordsworth makes are perfectly justifiable as ‘philosophical’ statements, provided the critic is prepared to recognise Wordsworth’s intentions, and credit him with his own intelligence, an intelligence that was always ‘radically Different’ from that of Coleridge, and which Coleridge was prepared to accept, and even work with, in the early months of their relationship. It was not Wordsworth whose mind changed radically over the course of the next few years – he remained characteristically consistent to the beliefs he had brought with him from Racedown. As ‘Alfoxden’s musing tenant’,24 he continued to pursue a studious life; one balanced, as at Racedown, with woodland and hilltop rambles. The only difference was that Coleridge now joined him in his excursions with Dorothy, as they ‘wantoned in wild Poesy’ together, in their famous Platonic love triangle. Coleridge was a great source of friendship and love and a fellow poet who could discourse on poetry, but he was obviously not the source of Wordsworth’s intellectual power if, as was the case, he declared himself to be in awe Wordsworth’s great intellect in 1797 and later, in 1804, continued.

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24 John Thelwall, ‘Lines written at Bridgewater…on the 27th July 1797; during a long excursion, in quest of a peaceful retreat’.

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to express his frustration at being unable to influence Wordsworth’s ethos as a philosopher, a ‘happy man’ whose philosophic principles had been established in ‘the first dawn of his manhood’ (CL II 1033-4). So the question posed by Beatty about the need to account for the great change in Wordsworth’s thinking, something that Gill also acknowledges to have occurred at Racedown, remains.

I therefore argue that Cicero was someone Wordsworth was reading during his ‘transition year’ and who did matter greatly to him. Like Gill, I cannot point to any reference that tells me what Wordsworth was reading, nor does Duncan Wu’s research in Wordsworth’s Reading provide such evidence. But my research leads me to make a scholarly deduction, from a study of the evidence in the record of Wordsworth’s life and in his writings, that Cicero provided Wordsworth with a consistent philosophy that he would follow, with almost religious dedication, for at least the next ten years. It was Coleridge, not Wordsworth, who was compulsively addicted to the need to find certainty, and who grasped at ‘whatever philosophical formulations seemed to help’ as he progressed through a number of differing systems of philosophy in his search for ‘truth’, a quest that came to something of a conclusion in his ‘Essays on the Principles of Method’ in The Friend of 1818. According to my hypothesis, Wordsworth would have, indeed, felt no compulsion to ‘eradicate [the] uncertainties that drove Coleridge to a lifetime’s philosophical enquiry’ because ironically (like Socrates), he saw virtue in ‘ignorance’. I believe that by the time he had moved to Alfoxden he had actively adopted a position of philosophical equanimity, one that saw virtue in uncertainty. I suggest that it was Cicero’s own philosophical position, clearly defined as that of an Academic Sceptic, with strong Stoic sympathies, that provided Wordsworth with his own philosophical principles. It was a distinctive philosophical position to hold, and my suggestion that Wordsworth also held it, and knew Cicero’s philosophical works well, is justified in the light of the distinctive language used to define its concepts. They are concepts that Wordsworth applies to his description of the Pedlar’s character in 1797, and which remain in place as definitive of those of the Wanderer in 1814. Moreover, in 1799, Wordsworth took his description of the growth of the Pedlar’s mind, and made it the basis for the early development of his own mind, as he composed the ‘Two Part Prelude’, writing a narrative that conformed to epistemological principles defined in early Stoic philosophy which are most comprehensively described in Cicero’s philosophical works.

III. ‘Parallel Lives’

Plutarch, in his Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans, compared famous Roman characters with their Greek counterparts. Cicero, for instance, is compared with Demosthenes. In arguing for a more critical, historical perspective in the study of Wordsworth and his works, one that considers influences over a period of time that is of a much ‘longer duration’ than that normally considered by Romantic studies, I wish to compare Wordsworth with Cicero here. Specifically, I compare the circumstances of Wordsworth’s retirement from the city to a country house in 1795 with that of
Cicero in 45 B.C.E., in order to place his move to Racedown within a classical republican context that Wordsworth himself might well have entertained. The suggestion may seem too fanciful to a twenty-first century reader, but such associations were commonplace to an eighteenth-century, classically educated, republican mind like Wordsworth’s, especially if, as De Quincey claimed, Plutarch’s Lives was his favourite book.

In 45 B.C.E., Cicero had left Rome for his country villa in Tusculum. He had backed the wrong party in the civil war and his life was at risk. He had managed to avoid the proscriptions that had followed Pompey’s defeat, and had made an uneasy peace with Caesar. But it would have been unwise, and impolitic, for him to remain in Rome. For the time being his political life was over, and he had chosen to retire to his country villa and take stock of the situation. But at the same time as these events his daughter had died in childbirth, the baby a few weeks later, and he was completely overcome with grief. As a leading statesman who had had to confront those who had threatened the state in the Catalinian conspiracy, and had decisively (and ‘illegally’) arranged their execution, he had a reputation to uphold as a strong man. The need to maintain his dignitas and auctoritas meant he could not allow his despair to be known. His poignant daily letters to his friend Atticus during this period reveal his acute distress and, as a means to distract himself, he sought consolation in philosophy, composing his mind by composing a series of philosophical works. In these works, he applied himself to reproducing, for Latin minds, the wisdom of the Greek philosophers. At the beginning of Book II of his De Divinatione, he later set out a convenient list of his philosophical writings, giving a concise description of some of their contents, and I refer to his descriptions in this summary.

Beginning with his Hortensius, a dialogue recommending philosophical study (now lost), he then set out work that would later become known as his Academica, a study of Stoic epistemology that he described as ‘that species of philosophy which I think the least arrogant, and at the same time the most consistent and elegant’. This was followed by De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum a work on ethics described as a ‘thorough discussion...of the chief good and evil which we should seek or shun’, as set out by the ‘various schools’ of philosophy, but again strongly influenced by Stoic concepts. The work opens with a presentation of Epicurean concepts that are discussed, and then contrasted with Stoic beliefs that are shown to be far more philosophical while also embracing political concerns, something the Epicureans reject. The views of the Academy and of the New Academy are then discussed, and the reader is left to make up his or her mind about the values presented – with Cicero claiming to have presented an open-minded debate, while also showing an obvious bias for Stoic values. In the second part of the year, he wrote the five books of the Tusculanae Disputationes in which he ‘explained what most conduced to render life happy’. Since the Tusculans appear to have been of particular interest to Wordsworth I reproduce Cicero’s description of their contents in full:

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25 Cicero’s treatment of how the mind makes sense of the impressions it receives from the senses was still being referred to in philosophical debates in the eighteenth century in the wake of Locke’s attempt to produce a more scientific description of associationism and empiricism to the one originating with Aristotle.
In the first, I treat of the contempt of death; in the second, of the endurance of pain and sorrow; in the third, of mitigating melancholy; in the fourth, of the other perturbations of the mind; and in the fifth, I elaborate that most glorious of all philosophic doctrines – the all-sufficiency of virtue; and prove that virtue can secure our personal bliss without foreign appliances and assistances. (De Diviniatione II 1)

The Tusculans were followed by works on religious topics, De Natura Deorum, De Divinatinatione, and De Fato, and then by social ones, De Senectute, De Amicitia, De Gloria 26 He also produced a further study on rhetoric, his Topica, which described his adaptation of Aristotle’s earlier work. He finished this period of intense activity with De Officiis, his discussion of the offices or ‘duties’ expected of a well-mannered gentleman. The works produced in this incredible burst of intellectual energy reveal the extent to which he had made a serious study of philosophy during the course of his life as he pursued both his oratorical and political concerns. His earlier studies, De Oratore, De Republica and De Legibus had already established his credentials as a ‘wise man’, but it was his later works that established his reputation as a philosopher. In attempting to defend the ideals of the republic after the assassination of Caesar, Cicero had incurred the wrath of Mark Antony for criticising his abuse of power. As a result of his attempt to defend the freedom of speech he was hunted down by assassins and was obliged to offer his head to their swords.

In 1795, Wordsworth left London for a country house in Dorset. He had enthusiastically supported the French republican revolutionaries in France in 1792 and had hoped, at that time, to soon see a republic proclaimed in England. But on his return there he found that the majority of British voters did not share his idealist ‘patriot sympathies’, which were not nationalistic. When England declared war on France, Wordsworth’s sympathies were with the French. But those who spoke out against the King, his government, and its Gagging Acts in 1795 risked losing their lives. To be critical of the King (as Wordsworth had been in his earlier, unpublished, Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff) could be construed as a capital offence. He had already witnessed the Pitt government’s attempt to make an example of those arrested in the 1794 treason trials. Meanwhile, some of those whom Wordsworth had met and supported in France had already lost their heads, others were in prison awaiting execution, and it is possible that he had witnessed the execution of Gorsas. The shock and confusion produced by these events is very evident in the record that Wordsworth gives of them in The Prelude. Although he was isolated at Racedown, he was receiving updates on events in France on a regular basis from his friends.

He had also, to all intents and purposes, lost a ‘wife’ and a daughter, and many critics have noted that significant poems written during this period describe abandoned women and children who are suffering, primarily, as a result of war. Wordsworth’s apparent ‘despair’ during this period is often linked to feelings of guilt over his abandonment of Annette and Caroline. But ‘wife’ and daughter are not totally lost; letters occasionally get through to Wordsworth, their words pleading for a relationship against all the odds. Unlike Cicero, Wordsworth cannot actually grieve his loss, but remains in limbo,

and confusion. As he carried out his own review of his experiences in France, contemplating his youthful folly, and acknowledging the hubris resulting from his over-enthusiastic support for those who had now become ‘terrorists’, he was still faced with a need to answer the ‘moral questions’ he had been seeking answers to from Godwin. Over the next twenty-two months he confronted some of these concerns as he engaged in an intense period of study that was to lead to a further intense period of poetic activity.

Among the collection of ‘Old Whig texts’ available for study in the library at Racedown Lodge was, not only a set of the Complete Works of Cicero, but also a copy of Conyers Middleton’s highly respected three volume Life of Cicero. Middleton’s Life had been a mammoth undertaking; it contained a vast compilation of extracts from Cicero’s speeches, letters and writings that were used to compose a history of his life. The last part, Volume 3, gives a survey of Cicero’s writings on philosophy, and demonstrates the great learning of this influential senator, magistrate, consul, statesman and orator. I suggest that Wordsworth consolidated his earlier knowledge of the parts of Cicero’s political, philosophical and oratorical works that he may have already studied by this time, by reading firstly in Middleton’s synopsis, and then turning to the works themselves, for further study. His reading not only provided him with answers to the ‘moral questions’ of the moment, as he found solace in the ‘right reason’ of ancient authority – rather than Godwinian reason – it also provided him with the moral philosophy that underpinned the work he began at Racedown and later completed at Alfoxden. In addition, it furnished him with a new appreciation of the power of eloquence or style. His reading in Cicero at Racedown would also form the core ideas for the theory of poetry he would later write about in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads as he attempted to educate his more imaginative, classically educated, readers. The Preface presents a veiled explanation of a poetic theory that developed out of his reading of Cicero and which combined Cicero’s political, philosophical, and rhetorical writings in an imaginative art of ‘eloquent’ poetry that was also indebted to Quintilian.

Soon after his arrival at Racedown, Wordsworth set to work on revising ‘A Night on Salisbury Plain’. He both politicised its theme, a move motivated by Godwin’s influence, and incorporated a new moral emphasis that countered Godwin’s rationalism with a new concern for the conscience of the individual. This was followed by a focus on satire – an imitation of Juvenal – something that indicated his state of mind was not too depressed. Such an activity provided a sense of perspective, placing the immediate concerns of his pressing, present involvement in history, into a greater historical context, something that required an objectification of subjective and emotional feelings. Like Pope’s earlier example, he could vent his spleen in an intellectual manner that relieved pressure on the emotions, seeking his consolation in poetic rather than philosophic activity at this time. But in his next major project he was to turn to philosophy, specifically to questions of moral philosophy, as he wrote The Borderers, a tragedy that explored a major, and complex moral conflict in which all of

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27 A letter from Azariah Pinney requested that the Life of Cicero be sent to Bristol in June 1796 - so it may be assumed that it was in the house when Wordsworth arrived there the previous September.

28 Writing to Matthews he tells him, so as not ‘to entirely forget the world’ in his retirement ‘I attempt to write satires! and in all satires whatever the authors might say there will be found a spice of malignity’ (EY 169).
Godwin’s intellectual reasoning was found wanting – when confronted with the reality of a man who could act like Rivers.29

The play is set in the borderlands, where there is no established sense of civil law, and Mortimer leads a group of ‘outlaws’ who have rebelled against the false values of the aristocratic Barons who administer ‘justice’ in the surrounding ‘civilised’ lands, according to their own ends. Rivers argues that the only law there is, is based on an individual’s ‘independent intellect’; and he deceives Mortimer into committing an act of ‘murder’, to prove his point. At the end of the play the outlaws (who had for a while been deceived by Rivers’ rhetoric), kill the unrepentant villain, acting as agents of natural law. But Mortimer, whose mind is ‘overturned’ by his feelings of guilt, is unable to forgive himself for his crime and wanders in a self-imposed state of exile from mankind, an outcast by his own choosing. The play focuses on ‘moral questions’ and is something of a meditation on the Aristotelian understanding that virtue and vice are closely allied, that virtuous self-righteousness can, all too easily, become the vice of Pride and self-love. The two attitudes of mind border closely on each other in Aristotle’s system of virtue-ethics, which acknowledges that human emotions play as great a part as reason in defining moral values, and that the workings of the human psyche cannot be expected to follow the dictates of absolute reason. At a later date Wordsworth wrote that the play was based on observations he had made of human behaviour during his time in revolutionary France in 1792.

The questions raised in composing The Borderers led, in turn, to a remarkable work, in a totally new style, one that indicated a major shift in Wordsworth’s thinking: ‘The Ruined Cottage’. The main character in the poem, the Pedlar, serves as a counterpart to Rivers, in a complex attempt by Wordsworth to redeem some sense of moral certainty. It would seem that Wordsworth turned to Stoicism as a system of belief that might counter the nihilism evident in Rivers’ character, since the Stoic prizes the value of an independent intellect, and also accepts that there is a natural law, a logos that dictates true value. Wordsworth’s poetry, during his time at Racedown, takes on a moral seriousness that he gained from a careful study of Cicero’s philosophical works. It is in pursuing this more detailed enquiry into the original sources of republican virtù that I suggest he became so impressed by the comprehensive nature of Cicero’s moral philosophy that he modelled his own character and intellect on Cicero’s example, someone whose ethos he had secretly decided to emulate. In this he was following the example of Brissot, who had carried his imitation of Cicero to its final end, also losing his head on account of his political principles – another martyr to the cause of Liberty.

I suggest the great change that can be perceived in Wordsworth’s life after the Racedown period can be attributed to his adoption of a secretive Ciceronian ethos, rather than any great debt to Coleridge. His behaviour, in representing himself as a ‘good man,’ and a ‘happy man’, reveals his studious adoption of the manners of a classical humanist gentleman and committed him to a very specific set of ethical beliefs that defined both his behaviour and his manner of thinking. This particular, very ‘classical’ ideology, followed the principles set down by Aristotle in his definition of

29 Before starting on The Borderers he had been working on a narrative referred to as ‘a Gothic Tale’, and early drafts of that work were incorporated into the more serious plot of his ‘tragedy’.
virtue-ethics; by the early Stoics in their pursuit of virtue; and by Cicero’s attitude of mind as an Academic Sceptic. A description of Cicero’s particular philosophical stance is given in some detail in Volume 3 of Conyers Middleton’s Life of Cicero, and I propose that this book, in particular, was one Wordsworth read with great interest in his first few months of concentrated study at Racedown. I also propose that he then turned from its summary of Cicero’s philosophical works to read more widely, in Latin, in the works themselves.

IV. Conyers Middleton’s ‘Life of M Tullius Cicero’

Volume Three of Middleton’s Life of Cicero opens with an extended panegyric in which Middleton makes no secret of his admiration for the man: ‘His moral character was never blemished by any stain of any habitual vice, but was a shining pattern of virtue to an age of all others, the most licentious and profligate’ (694).\(^{30}\) Whatever failings he did have, ‘were as few as ever found in any eminent genius; such as flowed from his constitution, not his will, and was chargeable rather to the condition of his humanity than to the fault of the man’ (695).\(^{31}\) It is only after 14 pages of extensive praise of Cicero’s ethos that Middleton finally arrives at the matter of this section – his concern to record that this famous statesman was also ‘the ablest scholar and philosopher of his age’:

No man whose life had been wholly spent in study, ever left more numerous or more valuable fruits of his learning in every branch of science, and the politer arts; in oratory, poetry, philosophy, law, history, criticism, politics, ethics; in each of which he equalled the greatest masters of his time; in some of them excelled all men of all times. (700)

Middleton notes that only a small part of Cicero’s works has been saved for posterity, and that they are ‘esteemed the most precious remains of all antiquity’. Drawing on Cicero’s own description of his tireless pursuit of knowledge, he relates that:

His industry was incredible, beyond the example, or even conception of our days: this was the secret by which he performed such wonders, and reconciled perpetual study with perpetual affairs. He suffered no part of his leisure to be idle, or the least interval of it to be lost; but what other people gave to public shows, to pleasures, to feasts, nay, even to sleep, and the ordinary refreshments of nature, he generally gave to his books, and the enlargement of his knowledge.\(^{32}\)

His letters have served to give an intimate record of his life, as Middleton’s book had already amply demonstrated, and in addition to these there were historical works, and poetic works, most of which have been lost. Cicero took his poetry writing seriously and considered his poetic works to be of some merit and Middleton suggests that his

\(^{30}\) All references are to the edition published by Longman, Orme & Co, London 1837.

\(^{31}\) Middleton also acknowledged, and conceded, the most noted criticism of his character: ‘The most conspicuous and glaring passion of his soul was, the love of glory and thirst of praise’ (696).

\(^{32}\) Pro Archia 6
poetical genius…would not have been inferior to his oratorical. The two arts are so nearly allied, that an excellency in one seems to imply a capacity for the other, the same qualities being essential to them both: a sprightly fancy, fertile invention, flowing and numerous diction. (704)

Middleton makes a distinction between Cicero’s poetry, which was for ‘amusement only’ and his ‘eloquence [which] was his distinguishing talent, his sovereign attribute: to this he devoted all the faculties of his soul, and attained a degree of perfection in it, that no mortal ever surpassed’ (705). After a brief survey of Cicero’s position as the master of eloquence of the ancient world – discriminating between his copious and full style and the guarded, dry, sententiousness of the more ‘correct’ Attic orators – Middleton, finally, turns to address his actual topic:

we have hitherto been considering, chiefly, the exterior part of Cicero’s character, and shall now attempt to penetrate the recesses of his mind, and discover the real source and principle of his actions, from a view of that philosophy which he professed to follow, as the general rule of his life.’ (708, my emphasis)

In the following twenty pages Middleton presents a concise record of Cicero’s understanding of Hellenistic Philosophy, one drawn directly from Cicero’s own works. His descriptions are largely translations from Cicero’s original Latin, which is given in footnotes complete with references, so that a reader with access to Cicero’s Works can follow up any passages he or she wishes to pursue further. Middleton’s study provides a road map by which interested readers are able to navigate their way through Cicero’s representation of Greek philosophy. I suggest, therefore, that it may have acted as a guide for Wordsworth, and that to follow it, is to gain some sense of the breadth of Cicero’s understanding – and of Wordsworth’s knowledge of Cicero. I suggest that Middleton’s study inspired Wordsworth to read more attentively in the actual works themselves, and that this can account for the distinctive echoes of some of their content that can be discovered in his own writings. Such echoes suggest that Wordsworth had read carefully in Cicero’s works in Latin, rather than gaining his knowledge from secondary literature. Before providing a synopsis of Cicero’s study of the Greek philosophy, Middleton describes Cicero’s own philosophical position. He stresses the need to carefully define Cicero’s own philosophical views in order to distinguish them from those he represents in his texts, where he often spoke on behalf of a particular school of thought to demonstrate both its views, and his own understanding of them. Middleton relates how Cicero’s own philosophical position was based on the ‘Academic’ sect – the followers of Socrates, who were ‘the first to banish physics out of philosophy’ turning from ‘obscure and intricate enquiries into nature…to questions of

33 Middleton echoes Cicero’s idiom in writing about such penetration of the recesses of the mind, and discovering real sources and principles of action. Wordsworth also echoes Cicero’s turn of phrase in his own writing, drawing on Cicero’s rhetoric and his philosophy for his own argument in The Prelude.

34 I am concerned to argue for this direct line of transmission, rather than accepting that Wordsworth was merely reproducing the general wisdom that was passed down, over time, as tradition. One of my concerns is to establish that Cicero, rather than Burke, provided Wordsworth with his ‘morals’ in the late 1790s.
morality, of more immediate use and importance to the happiness of man; concerning the true notions of virtue and vice, and the natural difference of good and evil'.

This ethical focus, on the nature of the human being rather than the nature of the physical universe, distinguished the original investigations of the ‘Academy’. The various forms of Hellenistic philosophy that developed out of Socrates’ original focus on ethical questions are, therefore, all studies of ‘moral philosophy’, they dealt with ‘moral questions’, enquiries about the nature of the ‘soul’ or ‘mind’ – what Wordsworth defined as the ‘haunt, and the main region of [his] song’ in the ‘Prospectus to The Recluse’. When he writes about the growth of his own ‘mind’ in The Prelude, Wordsworth is writing about his development as a human being within the context of a larger social and political context. He is not describing the development of a unique, ‘Romantic’, sense of self. Wordsworth understood that the growth of his mind took place within this classical humanist, ‘political’ context, and the 1805 Prelude reflects those values, as well encompassing and echoing many of the ‘political’ ideas and ideals found in Cicero’s philosophical works.

Having followed Cicero in stressing the importance of Socrates’ influence, Middleton sets out Cicero’s outline of Socrates’ particular method, which was:

Not to assert any opinion of his own but to refute the opinions of others, and attack the errors in vogue; as a first step towards preparing men for the reception of truth, or what came nearest to probability. While he himself professed to know nothing, he used to sift out the several doctrines of all the pretenders to science and then tease them with a series of questions so contrived, as to reduce them, by the course of their answers, to an evident absurdity, and the impossibility of defending what they had at first affirmed. (709)

At the age of eighteen, Cicero had studied as a pupil of Philo of Larissa, the successor of Carneades, the most revered teacher of the New Academy, and Cicero affiliated himself to this school of thought for the rest of his life. Middleton makes a point of representing the philosophical position of Academic Scepticism clearly, so that it is not confused with the more negative stance of the school of Scepticism founded by Pyrrho of Elis. The founder of the New Academy, Arcesilaus, taught a similar negative assessment of the sense world: that the senses deceive, life is short, truth immersed in opinion and custom, and that all things are involved in darkness. But he also proposed that the mind could overcome this darkness. He asserted:

that there was no certain knowledge, or perception of anything in nature, nor any infallible criterion of truth or falsehood; that nothing was so detestable as rashness; nothing so scandalous to a philosopher, as to profess, what was either false, or unknown to him: that we ought to assert nothing dogmatically; but, in all cases, to suspend our assent; and, instead of pretending to certainty, content ourselves with opinion, grounded on probability; which is all the rational mind had to acquiesce in. (710)

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35 Tusculan Dissertations 5.4 (Wordsworth makes this distinction in a letter to Matthews, EY 128).
36 De Finibus 2.1
37 Academica 1. 13
Cicero was concerned that this approach be fully understood not, as a negative attitude of mind, but as a positive form of enquiry:

We are not of that sort whose minds are perpetually wandering in error, without any particular end, or object of its pursuit: for what would such a mind, or such a life indeed, be worth, which had no determinate rule or method of thinking or acting? But the difference between the rest and us is, that, whereas they call some things certain, and others uncertain; we call one probable, the other improbable. For what reason then should I pursue the probable, reject the contrary, and declining the arrogance of affirming, avoid the imputation of rashness; which, of all things, is the farthest removed from wisdom?  

The English word ‘sceptic’ comes from the Greek term sképesthai, meaning to look around, consider, and observe – to enquire. Any concern with ‘doubt’ was originally entertained as a positive attitude, one that cautioned against accepting things at face value, when a more careful, open-minded investigation, might reveal a greater understanding. The virtue of the Academic Sceptic’s position comes from the fact that it makes no claims to be able to discover the truth of a matter, since such a claim is always limited to the contingency of human knowing. The position is essentially that of Socrates who, as a skeptikoi, understood that he could never know the absolute truth of things and turned this apparent position of limitation into a positive asset. The truly wise man suspends his judgement, and instead of arguing for the absolute truth of any particular point, debates a number of ‘probable’ positions, eliminating the weaker positions only with the agreement of other parties to arrive at ‘a’ truth of the matter. But he makes no absolute claim that the position arrived at is indubitably true and could be defended as such.

Cicero saw his stance as an Academic Sceptic as a balanced one; a ‘virtuous’ (Aristotelian) ‘mean’ between two equally ‘vicious’ extremes. The two extremes are represented by the ‘rigour of the Stoic’, who Cicero saw as committed to an impossible pursuit of absolute virtue; and the ‘indifference of the Sceptic’, who observed perfect neutrality and lived without engaging on any side of a question, ‘directing their lives, in the mean time, by natural affections and the laws and customs of their country’ (712). It is inferred that such people have little ability for original philosophical thinking and simply follow their own ‘natural affections’ while passively accepting the status quo and Cicero accused the Epicureans of holding just such an attitude of mind. In contrast to the Stoics and Epicureans:

the Academic manner of philosophising was, of all others, the most rational and modest, and was best adapted to the discovery of truth: whose peculiar character it was to encourage inquiry; to sift every question to the bottom; to try the force of every argument, till it had found its real moment, or the precise quantity of its weight. (712)

As a rhetor Cicero was adept at exploring both sides of a question, as he found all the means available for arguing a case. But he also followed Aristotle in understanding that a philosopher should

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38 De Officiis 2.2 (See also Academica II 7-8)
39 Godwin made a point of stressing this fact in the introduction to his essays in The Enquirer.
40 Academica 2.3
be able to examine all aspects of a *philosophical* question and come to know it so well that he was able to argue both points of view. Aristotle considered this ability to argue both sides of a question – *disputatio in utramque partem* – to be a sign of wisdom rather than sophistry. Carneades, a philosopher of the New Academy had, famously, scandalised Cato the elder on a visit to Rome when he spoke in the forum on the topic of ‘Justice’ on two successive days, and presented two equally persuasive speeches; one in favour, and the other against. For Cato such argument was pure rhetoric, and he responded with the rejoinder that, if the things to be discussed were adequately presented then the words to describe them would follow of their own accord. But for Carneades, words as much as things, were seen to be constitutive of reality. When Wordsworth represents Rivers, ‘sounding his way through words and things’ in *The Borderers*, he is presenting his own appreciation of this particular philosophical dilemma concerning the relationship between *verba* and *res*. The Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* was also concerned with the power of language and its ability to affect minds, which are inseparable from bodies, and are therefore also affected by words. At Alfoxden Wordsworth and Coleridge had discussed the way in which words can act on the mind and the body in conversations they had about the nature of a curse. Coleridge held that a curse operates due to some supernatural agency, while Wordsworth felt it could be understood as a natural activity. 41 For Wordsworth, as for the Stoics, thoughts in the mind, and words spoken into the air, were just as ‘material’ as the ‘flesh and blood’ realities of physical bodies.

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41 There is another clear distinction here between Coleridge’s Platonism and Wordsworth’s Aristotelian principles. In the Advertisement to *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), Wordsworth makes a point of commenting on the circumstances described in the poem of ‘Goody Blake and Harry Gill’ as being ‘founded on a well-authenticated fact’, as recorded in Erasmus Darwin’s *Zoonomia* (*MLB* 35 48-50).
Chapter 10

Laws of Nature and the Emotions

Justice is a mental disposition which gives every man his desert while preserving the common interest. Its first principles proceed from nature, then certain rules of conduct become customary by reason of their utility; later still both the principles that proceeded from nature and those that have been approved by custom received the support of religion and the fear of the law. (De Inventione II 160)

As a young man of 22 Cicero composed De Inventione, a handbook on rhetoric derived from earlier sources, in which he set out the established means of inventing arguments in the forum or law courts. In Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s day students used the same text for composing arguments in school exercises – whether as written prose or in verbal disputation. Such exercises taught students how to think, according to received wisdom, and to express their thoughts clearly in a formal manner. Coleridge is known to have used De Inventione at Christ’s Hospital and demonstrated skill in such exercises at Cambridge. His early lectures and sermons would have been constructed using such handbooks, and were not concerned with any strikingly original materials, but with the skilful presentation of commonplaces in an appropriate manner. As Richard Clancey has pointed out, Wordsworth’s classical education ‘was heavily rhetorical’ (Classical Undersong xvi). He would have engaged in similar exercises at Hawkeshead, and in the ‘wrangles’ at Cambridge that Schneider describes (Wordsworth’s Cambridge Education 70). Such ‘debates’ played a large part in both men’s education. Coleridge obviously enjoyed constructing such exercises in formal disputation in his early years and was accomplished in the art. But after he discovered Kant, he shunned such rhetorical and derivative forms of ‘thinking’, which Kant had dismissed from any truly ‘critical’ philosophical discussion. Cicero had also realised the limitations of such forms of argument derived from set topics later in his life, writing De Oratore in which he had adapted Aristotle’s more complex form of rhetorical dialectic and introduced philosophical concepts.

In this chapter I will focus on excerpts from De Legibus and the Tusculan Disputations in order to present further evidence of Cicero’s influence on Wordsworth as he developed his poetic identity in the later 1790s. De Legibus is a work that Wordsworth must have studied as a republican thinker, and I present a brief synopsis of the first Book here, to give some idea of how important

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1 For a detailed study of Coleridge’s training in ‘rhetoric’ see John Nabholz’s chapter on ‘Coleridge and the Reader’ in My Reader, My Fellow Labourer. See, also, Coleridge’s own description of James Bowyer’s pedagogical methods at Christ’s Hospital, in Chapter 1 of Biographia.
2 For an example of Coleridge’s work see John Antony Harding’s article on ‘Coleridge’s College Declamation 1792’ in The Wordsworth Circle 8.4 (1977): 361-7.
3 For Kant’s critique of rhetoric see Critique of Judgement, trans. J.H. Barnard, p. 171. The fourth book of Augustine’s On Christian Doctrine would have also persuaded Coleridge that, for all his skill at composition, it is the word of God, not the words of men that truly persuade. Coleridge was later highly critical of those, like Sir James Mackintosh, who prided themselves on being learned through their ability to use such topical forms of argumentation - but lacking the wisdom of a Cicero.
Cicero’s concept of ‘natural law’ and ‘justice’ would have been to Wordsworth as he was searching for a better understanding of both concepts after rejecting Godwin’s philosophy. *De Legibus* had an enormous influence on the development of Western political thought, and the concepts that Cicero defined in the middle of the first century B.C.E. appear to have had a significant influence on Wordsworth’s mind in the 1790s.4

**I. ‘De Legibus’: Cicero’s Enquiry Concerning Political Justice**

Book 1 opens with Cicero paying specific attention to the detail of the setting, which deliberately imitates that of Plato’s discourses. The speakers sit under a shady tree, and Cicero passes comment on the difference between poetic and historic truth as he introduces the study in a manner designed to put Roman readers at ease, as they approach what might seem a challenging topic. He constructs his philosophical discussion with attention to the Greek origins of this form of debate, paying tribute to Greek wisdom and also demonstrating that his exposition will be given in a relaxed and easy manner.5 The dialogue that ensues presents a careful philosophical discussion of the nature of the laws essential to the maintenance of a just polity, and the first Book is concerned with their origin. The chief speaker is ‘Marcus’ (Cicero) who speaks here not as himself but as a representative of the Stoic school and presents the main discourse on the topic while other minor characters interject. It is asserted that the nature of law must be sought in the nature of man; that man is a single species, which has a share in divine reason, and is bound together by a partnership in justice. It is stressed that the science of law is not derived from the praetor’s edicts or the 12 tablets – but ‘from the deepest recesses of philosophy’. It is not about framing legally binding constitutions:

in our present analysis we have to encompass the entire issue of universal justice and law; what we call civil law will be confined to a small, narrow, corner of it. We must clarify the nature of justice, and that has to be deduced from the nature of man. Then we must consider the laws by which states ought to be governed, and finally deal with the laws and enactments which peoples have complied and written down. (*De Legibus* I. 17)

Quintus (Cicero’s son) notes that Cicero is ‘tracing the object of our search back to its source’, and adds that ‘Those who present civil law in a different way are presenting modes of litigation rather than justice’. Cicero replies by agreeing that ‘Ignorance rather than knowledge of the law leads to litigation’ - an issue to be dealt with later - ‘but let us inspect the first principles of justice’. He then offers a formal definition by drawing on some other opinions, especially those of Zeno and Chryssipus, whose Stoic position concerning the divinity of nature he approves. ‘Law’ is defined as:

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4 In the introduction to his translation of *De Legibus* Niall Rudd writes that: Cicero’s true importance in the history of political thought lies in the fact that he gave to the Stoic doctrine of natural law a statement in which it was universally known throughout western Europe from his own day down to the nineteenth century. From him it passed to the Roman Lawyers and not less the fathers of the Church. The most important passages were quoted times without number throughout the Middle Ages.

5 This manner of delivery would later be imitated in European literature, notably by Shaftesbury in his *Characteristics* and also by Wordsworth - though not in such a relaxed manner - in *The Excursion*.
the highest reason, inherent in nature, which enjoins what ought to be done and forbids the opposite. When reason is fully formed and completed in the human mind, it, too, is law. So they think that law, whose function is to enjoin right action and to forbid wrong-doing, is wisdom...the origin of justice must be derived from law. For law is a force of nature, the intelligence and reason of a wise man, and the criteria of justice and injustice. (I 19-20)

Cicero concedes that in their discussion the participants will also have to speak of the law in more common terms, as a written code used to control civil matters by enjoining or forbidding certain actions; what the man in the street understands by ‘law’. ‘But’, Cicero continues, ‘in establishing what justice is, let us take as our point of departure that highest law which came into being countless centuries before any law was written down or any state was even founded’ (I 19). And he is concerned to ‘look to nature for the origins of justice. She must be our constant guide as this discussion unfolds’ (I 20). He then asserts that ‘the whole of nature is ruled by the immortal gods, with their force, impetus, plan, power, sway (or whatever other word may express my reason more plainly)’ (I 21), and ‘man’ occupies the highest position among created things on account of his reason:

The creature of foresight, wisdom, variety, keenness, memory, endowed with reason and judgement, which we call man, was created by the supreme god to enjoy a remarkable status. Of all the types and species of living creatures he is the only one that participates in reason and reflection, whereas none of the others do. What is there, I will not say in man, but in the whole of heaven and earth, more divine than reason (a faculty which, when it has developed and become complete, is rightly called wisdom). (I 22)

Cicero’s references to ‘the highest reason, inherent in nature’ that, when ‘fully formed and completed in the human mind’ is also ‘law’ (I 19), and to the fact that humans have the capacity to participate in reason, and to develop their understanding through the pursuit of virtue to become wise, is highly suggestive of Wordsworth’s understanding of Imagination in The Prelude as:

…but another name for absolute strength
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
And Reason in her most exalted mood. (XIII 168-170)

And in the lines immediately following this blending of terms, Wordsworth relates ‘we have traced the stream / From darkness, and the very place of birth’ - just as Quintus, in De Legibus, had stated that in the search for the origins of justice, their debate would be concerned with ‘tracing the object of our search back to its source’ (I 8).

Cicero proceeds to set out the ‘first principles’ of his discussion for a further four pages, in which he defines a number of key assertions of the Stoic school of philosophy, using their method of syllogistic argument:

Since, then, there is nothing better than reason, and reason is present in both man and God, there is a primordial partnership in reason between man and God. But those who share reason also share right reason: and since that is law, we men must also be thought of as partners with the gods in law. Furthermore, those who share law share justice. Now those who share all these things must be regarded as belonging to the same state; and much the more so if they
obey the same powers and authorities. And they do in fact obey this celestial system, the
divine mind and the all-powerful god. Hence the whole universe must be thought of as a
single community shared by gods and men. (I 23)

‘Man’ is conceived in terms of his relationship to the cosmos, his race was sown at a particular
moment in time, and although human bodies are composed of mortal elements ‘which are fragile and
transitory’ they are endowed with ‘the divine gift of mind…implanted in them by God’. This ‘lineage,
origin, or stock in common with the gods’ means that man has a distant memory of this origin, and
therefore also has a reason for believing in the existence of the gods. He therefore also has ‘the same
moral excellence’ as the gods – which is ‘nothing other than the completion and perfection of nature’
(I 24-5).  

Nature lavishes a wealth of things on men for their use, the fertile earth, its plants and animals
for use and enjoyment, and ‘countless skills have been discovered thanks to nature’s teachings. By
copying her, reason has cleverly acquired the necessities of life’ (I 26). And having provided all these
things, nature goes even further: ‘Without any teacher, starting from the sort of things she
apprehended through that original rudimentary perception, she herself strengthens and completes
human reason’ (I 27). These points, which Cicero described himself as ‘briefly touching on’, are
drawn from the teachings of the early Stoics and lead to an appreciation of the ‘vital’ philosophical
claim that ‘we are born for justice, and that what is just is based, not on opinion, but on nature.’

Because all human life originated from the same source in that nature, all human beings are essentially
equal. In our use of reason, in our ability to sense things, in our rudimentary perceptions, and in our
ability to speak, we are all the same, and there is no ‘member of any nation who cannot attain moral
excellence by using nature as his guide’ (I 31). Humans share the same virtues and vices, joys and
fears, loves and hatreds, and should therefore appreciate that ‘the principles of right living make
everyone a better person’. By nature, humanity should all be equal and capable of living in a just
society, whose laws reflect an original natural harmony.  

Much of the ‘philosophy’ presented in the final Books of The Prelude originates in concepts
that I have summarised from the exordium to De Legibus here. The meditation on Imagination in the
last Book of The Prelude does not present a muddled or confused ‘amalgam’ of eighteenth-century
speculations about the nature of things as Abrams and Owen have suggested, nor does it provide
evidence of Wordsworth having followed Coleridge’s transcendental idealism. The concepts
Wordsworth uses, and the definitions he provides, draw substantially on Stoic concepts as represented
in the natural Law theory of De Legibus. Wordsworth’s final, triumphant, declaration that he (and

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6 Cicero’s more detailed exposition of questions to do with religion and the nature of the divinity is set out, in
detail, in De Natura Deorum.

7 A note on this use of the term ‘nature’, in Rudd’s edition, defines it as signifying ‘things as they are.’

8 This understanding was used by Rousseau to distinguish a natural state of humanity that had no need of any
moral sense. Morality, according to Rousseau’s reading of human history is a necessary product of social
interaction. Natural man was naturally good and had no need for any moral law.

9 When Harper thought that Wordsworth has introduced ‘German philosophy’ into the final Books of The
Prelude he, and other later critics who argue similarly, pick up on the fact that German transcendentalist
philosophy had also drawn on the legacy of Cicero’s thinking. Although their idealist concepts developed out
hopefully Coleridge) might work together as ‘Prophets of Nature’ speaking ‘A lasting inspiration, sanctified / By reason and by truth’ (XIII 442-4) is fairly explicit, once other ‘pre-established codes of decision’ are dismissed. The Stoic concepts set out in the final Book of the 1805 Prelude and in the first Book of The Excursion were known to Wordsworth before he moved to Alfoxden.

I have, so far, only quoted from Cicero’s ‘brief’ introduction to his topic in De Legibus. To read on is to discover a detailed discussion of Cicero’s belief that philosophy was a political activity – the pursuit of virtue, by a wise man, who, by definition, was concerned with the affairs of all humanity. The individual mind originated as part of the divine mind and therefore all minds were linked through this common source. This ‘political’ ideal is fundamental to Cicero’s reasoning, his concern with placing ‘social’ issues before the concerns of the individual was essential to the ideal of the common wealth. In further discussion Cicero continues to expound on the relativity of civil concepts of justice, and in turning to civil law he declares: ‘Most foolish of all is the belief that everything decreed by the institutions or laws of a particular country is just’. All such authority is relative. ‘There is one, single, justice. It binds together human society and has been established by one single law. That law is right reason in commandment and forbidding…justice is completely non-existent if it is not derived from nature…every virtue is abolished if nature is not going to support justice’ (I 42-3). Human laws are not representations of justice: ‘we can distinguish a good law from a bad one solely by the criteria of nature…For nature has created perceptions which we have in common, and has sketched them in our minds in such a way that we classify honourable things as virtues and dishonourable things as vices’ (I 44).

Cicero’s rhetoric here was echoed by Edmund Burke, whose own particular interpretation of ‘natural law’ was seen, by James Chandler, as having had a significant influence on Wordsworth. But Wordsworth was more sympathetic to Godwin than Burke in the late 1790s, and he would have seen Burke’s attitude towards the lower classes as very similar to that of Falkland, the antagonist in Godwin’s Caleb Williams. Burke, like Rousseau, other French philosophes, and many other political theorists over the course of history, had also drawn extensively on Cicero’s political works. And Burke interpreted them to suit his own aristocratic ends, which are transparently voiced in his Letters on a Regicide Peace that Wordsworth read at Racedown in 1797. At that time, Wordsworth would have been more sympathetic to Godwin’s interpretation of Cicero than Burke’s, and he would have
sided with John Thelwall, who wrote an emotional response to Burke’s *Letters in The Rights of Nature against the Usurpations of Establishments.*

Book I of *De Legibus* concludes with a remarkable passage in praise of philosophy, the greatest of all the gifts bestowed by the immortal gods on human life, one that allows us to ‘know ourselves’. ‘The person who knows himself will first of all realise that he possesses something divine’. And if he works on developing this capacity he will eventually realise ‘that he has the makings of a good man, and for that reason a happy one’ (I 58-9). By foregoing sensual gratification, entering into a loving fellowship with fellow lovers of wisdom, revering the gods and sharpening the edge of moral judgement, the mind becomes more blessed (I 60). And by examining the heavens, the earth, the sea and the nature of all things and discerning what is mortal and perishing, and what everlasting, the mind will identify, not with a single city, but with the whole world (I 61). If then, the mind has learnt how to become adept at verbal reasoning, an expert in judging what is true and false, and understands the consequences of logical thinking, it can then decide to use, ‘not just the subtle method of arguing, but also a more expansive and continuous style of speech’:

> With such an instrument it will rule nations, reinforce laws, castigate the wicked, protect the good, praise eminent men, issue instructions for security and prestige in language which will persuade fellow-citizens; it will be able to inspire them to honourable actions and restrain them from disgrace; to console the afflicted, and to hand on the deeds and the counsels of brave and wise men, along with the infamy of the wicked, in words that will last for ever. Those are the powers, so manifold and so momentous, that can be discerned in a human being by those who wish to know themselves. And the parent and nurse of those powers is wisdom. (I 62)

This is the actual ideal that Wordsworth holds up to Coleridge in the grand rhetorical flourish that concludes *The Prelude*, when he suggests that the two of them, as ‘Prophets of Nature’ might go out into the world to ‘teach’ as philosopher poets. Although the new age promised by the revolution has not come into existence, and ‘This age falls back to old idolatry’ and although ‘the Nations sink together’

> we shall still
> Find solace in the knowledge which we have,
> Bless’d with true happiness if we may be
> United helpers forward of a day
> Of firmer trust, joint-labourers in a work

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10 Searching for ‘reason’ among Burke’s rhetoric and finding none, Thelwall had proposed that more political good sense could be found among those members of society whose voices were excluded from political representation. He was outraged that Burke had decided that only a privileged 400,000 men of property should be entitled to represent the British public. He declared that every ‘large workshop and manufactory...was a sort of political society’ and many artisans, who employed ‘the weapons of plain, solid, Socratic argument’, understood the principles of government better than Burke himself. Burke, in his ‘frenzy’, was likened to a wounded elephant complicit in an attempt to massacre the ‘flower of British intellect’, whom Burke had identified as one fifth of the enfranchised elite, and had branded as Jacobins. Thelwall’s reaction is summarised by R.B. McDowell in his introduction to *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, IX p. 23.

11 Wordsworth echoes Cicero’s style here in the *Essay Supplementary*, and also uses the expression ‘to console the afflicted’ with similar dramatic effect.
The vision Wordsworth presents in the final lines is highly idealistic, and might well be considered a ‘Romantic’ notion. But it is based on Wordsworth’s representation of himself as a ‘wise man’, a philosopher, even something of a Stoic sage. The ‘knowledge’ he claims to have and the ‘power’ with which he can represent it originate in the classical wisdom that Wordsworth found, primarily in Cicero’s works. It was from them that he drew most of his own philosophical idealism, as well as his ability to structure his argument with impressive attention to matters of style and delivery. His identity, or ethos, as presented to Coleridge, and later to the world, in the conclusion to *The Prelude* is grounded in Cicero’s representation of both philosophy and rhetoric and most especially his Stoic ethics.

In a recapitulation of his argument in Book II of *De Legibus*, Cicero restates his belief that all individual law making and civil law must be founded on reason enshrined in natural law:

> according to the opinion of the best authorities law was not thought up by the intelligence of human beings, nor is it some kind of resolution passed by communities, but rather an eternal force which rules the world by the wisdom of its commands and propositions. In their judgement, that original and final law is the intelligence of God, who ordains or forbids everything by reason. Hence that law which the gods have given to the human race is rightly praised, for it represents the reason and intelligence of a wise man directed to issuing commands and prohibitions. (II 8)

Quintus then speaks to reinforce the fact that all the laws of human communities have to be inspired by, and based on, this same divine reason. If they are not they will become merely the product of the ‘tide of custom’. It is implied that genuine lawgivers speak a ‘higher’ language inspired by Reason – the language that Wordsworth believes himself to be capable of speaking as a ‘Prophet of Nature’. The argument he presents to Coleridge in *The Prelude* opposes Coleridge’s German metaphysical idealism with ‘wisdom’ that – as Quintus had earlier noted (I 8) – goes far back to the beginnings of time. For Cicero ‘reason’ is a power that is ‘not only older than the existence of communities and states; it is coeval with the god who watches over and rules heaven and earth. The divine mind cannot be without reason, and divine reason must have this power to decide on good and evil action. (II 9-10).

This Reason existed when the divine mind came into being, not when it was written down and codified and, ‘as the divine mind is the highest law, so, in the case of the human being, when reason is fully developed, that is law; and it is fully developed in the mind of the wise man.’ In the conclusion to *The Prelude*, Wordsworth announces to Coleridge that the grounds for his claim to be a poet, a philosophical poet, are based on an extensive analysis of the growth of his mind or ‘imagination’ – which is also described as ‘reason in its highest mood’. This leads him to the assertion that he ‘now’ considers himself a ‘wise (enough) man’, ‘capable’ of producing a major epic, one that would succeed – because based on an appreciation of natural law. As a young man he had also believed himself to be a prophet of nature, a ‘chosen son’, but that belief was premised on a *false* imagination –
an imagination that had grown too strong, based on an enthusiasm that had no foundation in the laws of true Nature.

II. ‘Tusculan Disputations’: Philosophy as Therapy

In the Tusculan Disputations Cicero again largely follows the teachings of the early Stoics, who he believed had produced the most impressive account of the cause of mental suffering, and the means of overcoming it. In Book 3 of the Tusculans, Cicero announces that just as there are physical cures for illnesses of the body, so too is there a cure for illness of the mind:

There is, I assure you, a medical art for the soul, it is philosophy, whose aid need not be sought, as in bodily diseases, from outside ourselves. We must endeavour with all our resources and all our strength to become capable of doctoring ourselves. (TD 3.6)

Cicero’s philosophical works were not purely ‘academic’ in their approach. The work of Plato and Aristotle was combined with that of the later Hellenistic philosophers whose approach to philosophy was much more pragmatic. As Martha Nussbaum states:

The Hellenistic schools in Greece and Rome - Epicureans, Sceptics, and Stoics - all conceived of philosophy as a way of addressing the most painful problems of human life. They saw philosophy as a compassionate physician whose arts could heal many pervasive types of human suffering. They practised philosophy not as a detached intellectual technique dedicated to the display of cleverness but as an immersed and worldly art of grappling with human misery. They focused their attention, in consequence, on issues of daily and urgent human significance – the fear of death, love, sexuality, anger and aggression – issues that are sometimes avoided as embarrassingly messy and personal. (The Therapy of Desire 3) 12

Common to the Hellenistic philosophers was the belief that ‘many harmful emotions are based on false beliefs that are socially taught and that good philosophical argument can transform emotions, and with them private and public life’.

The discussions in the Tusculans have as their topics, questions concerning the nature of the soul, its experiences of the world and its attainment of ‘happiness’, eudaemonia through the pursuit of virtue. Books 3 and 4 are connected, and set out a theory of the emotions defined by the early Stoic philosophers who believed that mental distress was caused by the mind’s ability to reason being ‘overturned’ by an influx of strong emotions. They believed that the ‘wise man’ was capable of overcoming the emotions and achieving peace of mind, tranquillitas, by freeing himself from their influence through the exercise of reason. Strong emotional states were considered to be diseases that afflicted the mind and caused mental illness. I suggest that the Stoic perspective was something novel to Wordsworth in 1795-6, having earlier identified with being a ‘man of feeling’ and with the more

12 Martha Nussbaum, The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics. See also, Simo Knuutilla, Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy.
Epicurean pursuit of delightful feelings as he indulged in the states of pleasant melancholy and blissful indolence as part of his earlier identity as a sensitive-minded poet.13

Each of the five Disputations respond to a thesis that provides a starting point for Cicero to present a philosophical discourse representing the points of view of the various schools of philosophy, while mainly setting out the Stoic principles that he finds to be most persuasive. He was critical, however, of the Stoics’ use of syllogistic reasoning to set out their position, and made a point of representing their ideas in ‘arguments’ in which he used the methods of invention he had adapted from Aristotle, to set out the issue in question.14 He believed that such a ‘rhetorical’ form of argument was more likely to be understood, than the ‘pin pricks’ of the Stoic’s logical analyses, and saw his more eloquent form of philosophical argumentation as the chief virtue of his own art. As stated in De Legibus I 62, the wise man will not just use ‘the subtle method of arguing, but also a more expansive and continuous style of speech’. The cursory summary of the Tusculans I offer here fails to do justice to Cicero’s literary skills, or the depth of his expositions, but will give some sense of their importance to Wordsworth, who seems to have studied them with particular attention, given the many echoes of them to be found in his works.

The first Book discusses the topic ‘That Death is an evil’ and becomes a debate about the nature of the soul and the importance of identifying the ‘self’ with the non-corporeal aspect of our being. Attachment to bodily things brings with it the fear of death while detachment leads to equanimity. The philosopher practises detachment in life so as not to fear death as an ‘evil’. Cicero’s representation of beliefs about the soul and the nature of the divinity in Book 1 appear to have provided Wordsworth with the concepts set out in the ‘Ode. Intimations of Immortality’.15 The ‘Platonic’ concepts found in the ‘Ode’ are treated in such a manner as to suggest his source was Plato, mediated by Cicero rather than by Coleridge. Cicero places great stress on the faculty of memory here, defining it as an essential quality of the soul, which brings with it from pre-existence the ‘notions’, the ἀφορμαί or ‘sparks of the divinity’ discussed earlier. Cicero infers here that these ‘notions’ become accessible to the virtuous mind of the ‘wise’ man when he is ‘centred’ and in a meditative state – when he is, as it were, ‘recollecting in tranquillity’. The wise man is capable of remembering the divine state of mind that the infant experiences; he can get in touch ‘once again’ with the ἀφορμαί, with notions that might be conceived as representing the ‘language of the soul’. Cicero stresses the immortality and the divinity of the soul, and that the ‘self’ exists in the soul, not the body. The power of the soul, especially its ability to remember, to imagine, and think, all point to it participating in the divinity: ‘Truly this power which can achieve so many things, I must regard as divine’ (TD I 65).16

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13 See Wordsworth’s early letters to William Matthews in 1791 that repeatedly emphasise his indulgence in states of indolence and idleness in a somewhat affected manner.
14 His early work, On the Paradoxes of the Stoics was his initial attempt to ‘argue’ various cases that the Stoics had set out as logical paradoxes.
15 See especially TD I 52-58
16 Conyers Middleton drew extensively from TD I in his representation of Cicero’s beliefs.
Just as it is acknowledged that the world is full of wonders – So [too is] the mind of man even though you don’t see it, as you don’t see God – still you recognise from his works, so from memory, discovery and swiftness of movement and all the beauty of virtue you must acknowledge the divine power of the mind’ (L 70).

Wordsworth follows this central Stoic belief that Cicero acknowledges as originating in Socrates’ teachings. Plato adapted this idea to formulate his world of ‘ideas’ that transcend the physical world and the physical body, setting up a dualism between body and soul. It is one that also seems to be implied in Cicero’s description in Tusculans as he defines the soul as divine and as having gained its ‘wisdom’ from pre-existent ‘notions’ rather than from sense impressions gained in its earthly existence. It seems ‘logical’ to think in terms of such a duality but, as has already been stressed, Stoic epistemology did not make this distinction between ‘spirit’ and ‘matter’, eternity and time, one that necessitates the definition of a two-world theory. In Stoic thought, everything ‘real’ has to have a material presence.

An extract from the introduction to an edition of Cicero’s Morals, translated by William Gutherie, gives a representative eighteenth-century understanding of Stoic concepts available to Wordsworth’s classically educated contemporaries. Gutherie’s Preface gives a brief synopsis of early Greek history describing how religion was originally used to control the people by playing on their superstitions – a situation in which ‘the king and the priest were one’. This state of affairs was followed by the reaction of the early materialist philosophers who denied the gods in favour of the evidence of the senses; then Socrates came to ‘mend the heart’, defining philosophy as the pursuit of virtue. After this Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, refined virtue from common sense, and created a system of materialism in which both God and the human soul consisted of matter.

As universal matter therefore according to him was God, and the different modifications of it was all the Differences that existed in the Nature of Things, it is no wonder if we find him terminating all Perfection in the noblest Modification of Matter, which is the Mind of Man and which, in his system, is, or may be in every man infallible, that is God. (xv)

When Wordsworth relates his concern to make ‘the Mind of Man, the haunt and main region of [his] song’ in the Prospectus to The Recluse, he was still declaring his belief in Stoic philosophy, which was something more complex than the pantheism that his concerned Christian readers feared he still entertained.

Book Two of the Tusculans discusses: ‘That pain is the greatest of all evils’. In discussing the ways in which the wise man overcomes pain, Cicero is especially critical of the poets, who play upon the emotions and can cause an audience to feel pain. But this criticism is, at the same time, recognition of the power that language has to affect the emotions, and therefore the mind – a power Cicero exploits to the full. The ‘wise man’ develops courage to overcome pain, using mental strength to defeat emotional weakness. In a re-statement of Plato’s division of the soul into two parts – the one that ‘reasons’ and the other that ‘feels’ – Cicero defines a master / slave relationship in which ‘manly’

reason commands the activities of ‘womanly’ feelings. His main argument, however, is the need to overcome pain by developing an attitude of mind that is courageous:

\textit{virtus} gets its name from \textit{vir}, and the especial feature of a man is courage, of which the two most important functions are contempt for death and contempt for pain. So these must be employed if you want to be in possession of virtue, or rather to be \textit{men}. (TD 2 34)

Such fortitude is arrived at through the use of self-reflection and ‘internal dialogue’, in the development of a mental capacity that gives strength of mind (\textit{vis mentis}).\textsuperscript{18} The wise man aspires to mental heights and feels self-assurance in keeping his mind ‘in tension’, in a state of readiness, to combat any assault on his equilibrium. In achieving this equanimity, he also attains to honour and glory, and to true virtue, as ‘a man’. There are several echoes of descriptive passages from Book 2 of \textit{The Tusculans} to be found in \textit{The Prelude}, where Wordsworth uses imagery relating to courage and martial prowess, especially in passages where he is celebrating his own ‘glory’. The enigmatic apostrophe to Imagination in Book VI celebrates the ‘glory’ of Wordsworth’s ‘soul’ in terms that strongly suggest the influence of Cicero’s description of the ‘honourable’ soul – one that has attained some sense of its eternal glory by catching ‘some gleam of light’ from the divine ‘world’ (\textit{Tusculans} 2 58).\textsuperscript{19} When Wordsworth – after experiencing a momentary state of trance – recovers his composure and then says to his soul ‘I recognise thy glory’ (\textit{Prelude} VI 532), I would suggest he is drawing on Cicero’s description of the honourable man in \textit{Tusculans} 2 who has had a ‘recognition’ of his soul’s divine origin, confirmed by flashes of light that, for Wordsworth, present evidence of the ‘invisible world’ that is ‘our home [which]/Is with infinitude’ (VI 536-9).

Mystics and prophets relate that they have experienced such momentary flashes of illumination as a sign of grace or glory, and Wordsworth is hoping that his transient experience might develop into an enduring state of vision. He is also thinking of the example of Dante’s description of his illumination in \textit{The Divine Comedy}.:\textsuperscript{20} Cicero likens these flashes of light from the divine world to the gleaming (\textit{fulgentes}) blades of an enemy, and Wordsworth introduces military regalia and trophies of war into his passage, indicating an echo of Cicero’s military imagery.\textsuperscript{21} He uses the imagery of gleaming and flashing light throughout \textit{The Prelude} and, most suggestive of Cicero’s influence is the description ‘gleams like the flashings of a shield’ used earlier in the poem (I 614). The link between \textit{Tusculans} 2 and the ‘Apostrophe to Imagination’ passage is further compounded by the warning Cicero gives that one should not openly celebrate such an experience:

\textsuperscript{18} Shaftesbury’s ‘Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author’ would seem to have drawn heavily on Cicero here.
\textsuperscript{19} This ‘sublime’ experience should be linked with the earlier description of ‘the glory of my youth’ in Book III
\textsuperscript{20} I cannot develop the significance of Dante here, but see \textit{Purgatorio} Canto 17. ‘Bethink thee reader, if ever in the Alps a mist cloud had enfolded thee…and thy imagination will be nimble in coming to see how I first beheld again the sun…O imagination, that at whiles so snatchest us from external things, that a man heeds not whereas around are sounding a thousand trumpets…who moves thee, if the senses set thee not forth? …Light, which in heaven informs itself’. Dante also relates, of himself, ‘As is he who sees in a dream, in that after the dream the feeling impressed remains, and the rest does not return to the mind, such am I’.
\textsuperscript{21} That ‘banners militant’ could be considered as ‘ornatus’ adds another dimension to this passage.
Set this thought before you: that largeness of soul and, so to speak, building it up to the greatest possible height, which is most conspicuous in despising and looking down on pains, is the fairest thing of all, and all the fairer if it has no time for the public, seeks no applause, and still gives pleasure to itself. More, I think for my part everything more praiseworthy which happens without advertisement and without the public as witness, not that it is to be shunned, all good deeds like to be set in daylight - but virtue can have no more important audience than a good conscience. (264)

Wordsworth writes that:

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, (Prelude VI 543-7)

These two earlier books of the Tusculans set the scene for the more focused study of the emotions themselves in Books 3 and 4, where Cicero develops his belief in the philosopher as atherapeut. In the preface to Book 3, Cicero sets out the grounds for his argument according to Stoic beliefs about the origin of the individual soul and its development. He describes the Stoic ‘cradle argument’ but then puts his own slant on the morals of his times by describing the manner in which the ‘sparks of the divinity’ are extinguished by ‘wrongful habits and beliefs’:

Seeds of the virtues are inborn in our characters, and if they were allowed to mature, nature itself would lead us to perfect happiness. But as it is, no sooner are we born and received into the family than we are surrounded by all kinds of corrupting influences, and the most wrongheaded beliefs, so that it seems almost as if we had drunk in error along with the milk of our wetnurses. (TD 3.2)

Parents, teachers, and poets all, in turn, add the influence of their corrupted beliefs and the child’s mind is soon steeped with erroneous perceptions that it assumes to be the true nature of things. And then society approves of these misguided beliefs, becoming the ‘greatest of all our teachers’:

it is then that we become thoroughly infected with corrupt beliefs and secede from nature absolutely. As a result we think the meaning of nature best understood by those who have made up their mind that public office, military commands, and the glory of popularity are best and most honourable goals a person can have. (TD 3.3)

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22 Wordsworth followed this concern not to openly display his knowledge, or court public opinion, and has been judged by some earlier critics for his failure to do so. David Ferry’s conclusions about Wordsworth’s anti-social behaviour are a case in point. But his attitude can be re-described as a virtue rather than a vice if his motivation is fully understood.

23 Interpretation of this passage has, since Geoffrey Hartman’s influential reading, tended to follow Hartman’s concern with tracing the ‘dialectic between Imagination and Nature’, and Wordsworth’s lack of visionary power. I suggest that Wordsworth was relating his experience to traditional representations of the topic of ‘glory’ as discussed by Cicero and later re-worked by Dante. As Wordsworth’s describes his subsequent swift decent towards the dwellings of men he also describes the terrible (sublime) activities of Alpine nature (the ‘high realms of nature’), as representations - ‘types and symbols’ of divine powers at work. The divine is manifest in nature’s works; it is not to be sought via a transcendent vision.
Because of this corruption, all people are in need of a therapy for their disordered minds, and this gives Cicero warrant for declaring that, just as there is a medical science for the body, so too does a medical science exist for the mind: ‘it is philosophy’. This lead-in provides the greater context to the arguments in these two books, which discuss the questions, ‘Is the Wise Person Subject to Distress?’ and, in Book 4: ‘Does the Wise Person Experience Any Emotions at All?’ The discussion ranges widely over the beliefs of the various schools of thought before setting out a particular model of emotional experience based on Stoic concepts that subsume all emotional experience under two ‘good’ and two ‘bad’, primary states of emotion. One of each of these states is concerned with the present moment; the other anticipates a future good or evil. There are also distinctions made between mild and vehement emotional experiences – the former can be beneficial, the latter are hindrances. The point of Cicero’s exposition is to argue that human beings are responsible for their own emotional experiences, and that the wise man takes control of his mind through right reason, and eliminates the disturbances caused by the emotions. Disturbances of the mind lie within our own voluntary control and we are responsible for our actions. Philosophy teaches us how to reason, so as to control our minds, and ‘reason has taught us to recognise that what is bad in distress comes about not by nature but by voluntary judgement and mistaken belief’ (TD 3. 81).

III. Perturbationes Animi: Gladness, Madness and Sadness

The discourse on the nature of distress in Book 3 begins with a discussion of terms, and in his opening remarks, Cicero stresses that he will not translate the Greek term pathē literally as a sickness (morbus), because the Roman mind conceives of such experiences in a different way to the Greeks. He acknowledges that the Greeks used the word pathē to define various forms of terror, desire, and anger, and notes that, technically, the word should be translated into Latin as morbus because, according to Greek understanding, these states of mind are sicknesses, since they are ‘movements of the mind not obedient to reason’ (3. 7). But to do so would run contrary to Roman usage and he therefore uses the term ‘emotions’, perturbationes animi, literally, ‘disturbances of the mind’. Later in the discussion, he will define more vehement displays of emotion as bordering on mental illness, but his initial discussion does not concern such pathological states. Here he is simply describing the emotions as ‘disturbances of the mind’ and proposing that the ‘wise man’ should be capable of controlling them by the use of the ‘reason’ which is within his power to use, as a natural virtue.

But although Cicero does not want to define the emotions as ‘sicknesses’ the word ‘emotion’ is still used to designate a form of ‘illness’. It describes a dis-ease of the mind, a disturbance that upsets the ideal state of equanimity or tranquillity that is the aim of the ‘wise man’. Such ‘disease’ is classified as being mild or strong. Milder forms can be accommodated by the mind, but extreme states of ‘strong disease’ – vehement expressions of emotion – lead to a loss of mental control and to uncontrolled actions, including acts of violence. In less extreme forms this ‘disease’ of the mind leads to a loss of mental acuity, the afflicted person either enters into a trance state or loses consciousness.
altogether in a faint. Cicero asserts that all emotions can be considered akin to a state of insanity: ‘the term *insania* refers to an infirmity or sickness of the mind…and *sanitas* or health for the mind consist[s] in having a serene and consistent temper’ (3. 8-9). Sane people are those who are not disturbed by their emotions – they are therefore also healthy people, since they know how to overcome ‘insanity’ to attain that peace of mind. For Cicero, the role of philosophy is to root out the false opinions that produce unhealthy emotional states and cause unhappiness. He uses the term ‘insanity’ to refer to a state of mind overcome by ‘emotion’ which can be cured by philosophy – and this is distinct from forms of madness caused by actual physical disease of the mind. He also makes a distinction between the ‘insanity’ caused by emotional distress, and another form of madness, that of frenzy or *furor*, ‘which the Greeks call *mania*’. Such *furor* can even overwhelm the wise man, and cannot be controlled by reason.25

In his preferred ‘rhetorical’ presentation of the syllogistic arguments expressed by the Stoics, Cicero notes that the Aristotelian school accepts the emotions, in moderation, in the belief that they also play a role in defining the virtuous life. Aristotle was more pragmatic and realistic in acknowledging the emotional realities of human existence. But Cicero is concerned to pursue the stronger Stoic position that would do away with emotional disturbance completely – if emotions are ‘sicknesses’, as he has defined them to be, then surely they should be cured. In discussing ‘Distress’ (*aegritudo*),26 he sets out a fourfold classification that originates in the philosophy of the early Stoics, ‘whose reasoning is strongest’:

The cause of distress, as of all the emotions, is to be found entirely in belief … every emotion is a movement of the mind which is apart from reason or heedless of reason or disobedient to reason, the stimulus for such a movement may be of two kinds: it may be a belief either about what is good or about what is bad. This yields a neat fourfold classification. Beliefs about what is good give rise to two emotions. One is wild delight (*voluptas gestiens*) that is gladness carried away to excess: it arises from the belief that some great good is present. The other is desire (*libido*), which can be termed ‘longing’: it is ungoverned reaching, not subject to reason, toward some great good that is anticipated. Thus two genera, wild delight and desire, are caused by beliefs about what is good. The other two, fear and distress, (*metus et aegritudo*) are caused by beliefs about what is bad. Fear is a belief that some serious evil is impending; distress is a belief that a serious evil is present...These are the emotions which folly has stirred up against human life, unleashing them and setting them upon us like Furies. We must resist them with all our strength if we truly wish to spend the allotment of our life in peace and tranquillity. (*TD* 3. 24-25)

In Book 4 of the *Tusculans*, Cicero revisits this four-fold classification as his discussion turns to the emotions in general. In developing it further he invokes the distinction made by Pythagoras, and used by Plato, that divides the mind into a rational and irrational part: ‘In the part which has a share in

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24 The sailor in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* faints at the sight of a gibbet, indicating his feelings of guilt and remorse. Mortimer in *The Borderers* wanders in a state of ‘absence’, his mind ‘overturned’.

25 In his essay on *The Borderers* Wordsworth compares Rivers’ frenzied or furious state of mind with that of the ‘Orlando of Ariosto’, and ‘the Cardenio of Cervantes, who lays waste the groves that should shelter him’ (*The Borderers* 63). Mortimer, on the other hand shows classic symptoms of *insanitas*.

26 Wordsworth uses the term ‘deep distress’ with an awareness of Cicero’s taxonomy of the emotions when composing ‘Elegiac Stanzas’.
reason they put tranquility (that is, a calm and quiet consistency); in the other the turbulent motions of
ger and desire, which are opposed to reason and inimical to it.’ Cicero follows Zeno in defining
emotion as: ‘a movement of the mind contrary to nature and turned away from right reason’ He also
notes that others say that an emotion is ‘a too vigorous impulse’, one that has ‘deviated too far from
the consistency of nature’ (4. 11). Having defined this two-fold distinction, Cicero then applies it to
the earlier fourfold classification of the emotions in further discussion about the two ‘beliefs about
what is good’ and the ‘two beliefs about what is bad’. Given that ‘by nature’ all people pursue the
things they think good and avoid their opposites, they will reach out for the former and withdraw from
the latter. When this reaching out is done wisely and with consistency, (Constantia/eupatheia),
something defined as a ‘reasoned act of volition’, then their experience will be ‘good’. But if they
reach out too vigorously under the impulse of desire, rather than reason, they will be acting foolishly
and badly. In making a further distinction, Cicero describes how ‘good’ emotions can also become
excessive and lose their virtue:

Similarly there are two ways we may be moved at the presence of something good. When the
mind is moved quietly and consistently, in accordance with reason, this is termed ‘joy’
(gaudium); but when it pours forth with a hollow sort of uplift, that is called ‘wild or
excessive gladness’ (laetitia gestiens) which they define as ‘an unreasoning elevation of mind.
(TD 4. 13)

We arrive here at a further justification for my earlier assertions about Wordsworth’s use of
the term ‘joy’ to describe gaudium rather than laetitia. In opposing Coleridge’s celebration of ‘JOY’
as a state of divine inspiration, a ‘visitation from above’, he was enforcing a distinction that privileged
a state of mind that was consistent and ‘in accordance with [highest] reason’. Wordsworth thought
this state of mind a greater virtue than the ‘wild’ or ‘excessive’ gladness that characterised the mind of
an enthusiast whose ‘reasoning’ was more likely to be a form of madness than actual divine
inspiration. Wordsworth was speaking from experience on this matter – a point he stressed in the
argument he addressed to Coleridge in The Prelude – and a distinction he enforced in arguing for his
own understanding of ‘Imagination’ as a power of the mind that needed to be ‘softened down’ by the
workings of ‘Fancy’.

When Wordsworth refers to ‘that strong disease’ in Book XI of The Prelude of 1850, I
propose he was making a direct reference to Cicero’s distinctions about types of emotional experience
as set out in the Tusculans. I suggest that it was his reading in this work that enabled him to
distinguish his earlier, over-enthusiastic, imaginative experiences as ‘diseases’ of the mind. Once they
could be identified as such (rather than as actual madness or ‘possession’), then there was hope of a
cure. And in attending closely to the arguments set down in Cicero’s philosophy, Wordsworth was
able to distinguish between vicious states of ‘strong imagination’ and milder, virtuous, forms of
imaginative experience. Cicero’s use of ‘philosophy’ as a cure for the mind provided Wordsworth
with the means to experience a healing crisis, one that identified his ‘strong disease’ as a mental state
that could be overcome with the help of ‘philosophy’. The ‘crisis of that strong disease’ therefore
marked a major turning point in his life as he abandoned his youthful belief that he was a ‘chosen son’
– a poet by virtue of divine election – and turned to a more philosophical approach to his feelings. By re-describing visionary insight as a ‘disease’ of the mind, rather than possession by a god, he was then able to treat the emotions as resources – as states of mind that could be defined and used to good effect in his poetic art. His detailed knowledge of the passions was applied to the description of his characters, and the significance of the role played by the emotions is seen in his assertion that ‘poetry is passion’ in the note to ‘The Thorn’. If he had come to this understanding during his period of study at Racedown it is not difficult to see how his position was, even then, radically different from Coleridge’s desire at the time to experience ‘supernatural’ states of inspiration. In contrast to Coleridge, Wordsworth was absolutely committed to a position that explained such experience as a product of the natural world, and of the workings of Nature.

In the rest of Book IV of the Tusculans, Cicero speaks of orators who have to learn the art of being able to express strong emotion and anger when necessary, and with a genuine force of feeling, while also being able to control those feelings. This is a difficult task, given that strong emotions are, by definition, considered to be beyond the control of reason. Again Cicero stresses that it is the person who has developed the ‘philosophic mind’, who will have the capacity to do this. This topic, and an allied one – whether the orator must actually experience the emotions he is relating, or whether he can successfully feign them, became a subject of much debate, and is discussed, in detail, by Quintilian in Book X of De Institutione Oratoria. Wordsworth shows evidence that he had also studied the relevant passages in Quintilian by the time he wrote ‘The Ruined Cottage’, and he draws extensively on Quintilian’s treatment of the topic in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads in his discussion of his use of ‘the real language of men’ uttered in a state of excitement. Those who speak ‘spontaneously’ and with great emotion are recognised to speak a ‘genuine’ poetic language, and Quintilian proposes that the orator’s task is to re-create the force of such utterances through the use of a specific technique. The orator speaks passionately, but in a controlled and natural manner utilising an imaginative art that Wordsworth used to great effect in ‘The Ruined Cottage’ and, to a lesser degree, in his experimental poetry in Lyrical Ballads. To achieve this end he does not rely on inspiration, or the use of the supernatural, but uses a carefully controlled poetic art, one that achieves its ends through producing a milder, more considered sense of ‘joy’ in the reader’s mind.

Wordsworth follows Cicero in understanding that the true stoic is not someone who has completely detached himself from all emotional experience. He is not dead to human feeling – the apparent original argument of Zeno the founder of the Stoic school and the position set down by Chryssipus. Such a position represents a misinterpretation of Stoic thinking, one often made by later Renaissance interpreters of Stoicism, based on their (mis)reading of Seneca.27 Cicero allows that emotions can be felt, but they cannot rule the decisions made by the true Stoic sage. Cicero had been trained in the philosophy of the middle Stoics; his teacher had been a disciple of Panaitius who, along with Posidonius, pursued a more reasonable and more moderate interpretation of Zeno’s original

27 Tad Brennan discusses the finer points of the Stoic argument about the nature of the emotions, in some detail in The Stoic Life: Emotions, Duties, & Fate.
assertions. Like Aristotle, Panaetius allows that the emotions play a part in human experience; they are part of what it means to be a human being. Panaetius defines the Stoic sage as someone who has identified the negative role that the emotions can play in human experience, and has gained an ability to control them through the development of a philosophical mind. In the remaining chapters of this study I enlarge upon these claims as I also link Cicero’s description of vehement and mild states of emotion to Quintilian’s use of the pathos-ethos formula. Quintilian’s distinctions can be seen to have originated in his study of Cicero’s commentary in the Tusculans.

Book V of the Tusculans is famous for its endorsement of the life of virtue. It opens with a Hymn to Philosophy and celebrates the Stoic belief that the pursuit of virtue, that of moral goodness, is the only end in life worth pursuing and is, of itself, sufficient for complete well-being. Many of the sentiments expressed in Book V, and indeed throughout the Tusculans, are represented in The Prelude, as Wordsworth lays out the grounds for his argument with Coleridge over Imagination, explaining his own pursuit of virtue and the development of his ‘own’ philosophic mind. As part of that argument he acknowledges the role that feeling has in the education of the child who is, ideally, taught by Nature to negotiate a middle path between experiences of ‘fear’ and ‘beauty’. The youth must develop a right relationship to the emotions as he or she grows up, learning to humanise what was given by Nature. This is not a process of ‘repression’, (a common misunderstanding of the ‘stoic’ position – and exemplified in Freud’s reading in the Stoics), but one in which the virtuous growing mind has learnt to soften down and accommodate the more vehement emotions, through developing the correct philosophical attitude of the Stoic sage. The mind of such a ‘man’ is able to view experience in a state of ‘wise passivity’; the mood of the mind described as tranquillitas that leads in turn to equanimity and the ideal of Constantia.

An early reference to this process is found in the ‘Blest the Infant Babe’ passage in Book II of The Prelude in which the infant shares in a relationship with both its mother, and with ‘Mother Nature’ with whom his own being is ‘interfused’:

From nature largely he receives; nor so
Is satisfied, but largely gives again,
For feeling has to him imparted strength,
And powerful in all sentiments of grief,
Of exaltation, fear and joy, his mind
Even as an agent of the one great Mind
Creates, creator and receiver both
Working but in alliance with the works
Which it beholds       (II 267-275)

It is through experiences of ‘grief’ and ‘fear’, ‘exaltation’ and ‘joy’ that the young mind of the poet builds up his earthly identity. But although he originally acts as an agent of the one great Mind, the divine powers bequeathed by nature must also work with the forms of the human world in an

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28 Many of the ethical concepts Cicero set out in De Officiis originate from Panaetius’ teachings.
‘alliance’ between extreme, ‘sublime’ (daemonic) forms of feeling (pathos) and those softer, more ‘beautiful’ expressions of human feeling (ethos) in an ‘ennobling interchange’.

Wordsworth had learnt to adopt something of a Stoic attitude of mind by the time he was writing The Borderers, and had gained better control over his passions, which he acknowledges to have been ‘softened down’ during this period. (Prelude XIII 224-29) In ‘The Ruined Cottage’, the work that follows after The Borderers, Wordsworth creates a character who can be seen as the counterpart, or even the ‘antidote’, to the character of Rivers – The Pedlar. And the poem contains even greater evidence of Wordsworth’s Stoic turn of mind. ‘The Ruined Cottage’, begun in 1797, also laid the foundations for The Prelude in which Wordsworth concludes his argument with Coleridge by suggesting that true Imagination be described, also, as ‘Reason in her most exalted mood’. In Book V of the Tusculans Cicero has written:

The human soul is a shred from the divine mind and can be compared with nothing else except with God himself – if one can say so without blasphemy. If this has been thoroughly cultivated and its sharpness of vision so cared for as to be blinded by no errors, it becomes a perfect mind, that is, absolute reason, which is also Virtue. (V 38-9)
Part Three

Chapter 11

Imagination Revisited

In the final section of this study I return to the topic of imagination and present a reading of ‘The Ruined Cottage’ before concluding with a brief commentary on the theory of the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802). Both readings present further evidence of Wordsworth’s use of Cicero’s and Quintilian’s works as he developed his art of poetry in the late 1790s. Most particularly I will be arguing that these two Roman authorities provided Wordsworth with a very specific appreciation of the role of the imagination in the production of forceful or ‘energetic’ poetry – poetry that was intended to have a specific imaginative, and moral, effect on the minds of its readers. I also invoke the presence of two other Roman minds: Horace – whose own poetry and *Ars Poetica* were always a background influence on eighteenth century poets – and Virgil, whose *Georgics*, in particular, influenced Wordsworth’s poetic art at this time. And in addition to the influence of these ancient poets it is also necessary to consider that of the greatest British eighteenth-century ‘nature poet’, James Thomson in order to fully appreciate the subtle nuances that inform the development of Wordsworth’s understanding of the human imagination, and the manner in which it replaces or complements the workings of the sublime, supernatural imagination, that so appealed to Coleridge. But before that I must also turn to Shakespeare, whose commentary on Imagination is so much more pertinent to Wordsworth’s practice than Coleridge’s later pronouncements in *Biographia*.

I. Lunatics, Lovers, and Poets

_Hippolita_  T’is strange, my Theseus, that these lovers speak of.

_Theseus_  More strange than true. I never may believe
These antique fables, nor these fairy toys.
Lovers and madmen, have such seething brains
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatick, the lover, and the poet,
Are of imagination all compact:
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold;
That is, the madman; the lover, all as frantick,
Sees Helen’s beauty in a brow of Egypt:
The poet’s eye in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And, as Imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet’s pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation, and a name.
Such tricks hath strong imagination;
That, if it would but apprehend some joy,
It comprehends some bringer of that joy;
Or, in the night, imagining some fear,
How easy is a bush suppos’d a bear?

_Hippolita_

But all the story of the night told over,
And all their mind’s transfigur’d so together,
More witnesseth than fancy’s images,
And grows to something of great constancy;
But, however, strange, and admirable. (V i 1–27)

Shakespeare was named by Wordsworth as one of the four authorities in the history of English literature whose work he aspired to emulate; the others being Chaucer, Spenser and Milton.\(^1\) By turning to Shakespeare, and to Theseus’ famous speech in _A Midsummer Night’s Dream_ it is possible to gain a better appreciation of Wordsworth’s understanding of ‘imagination’ in the late 1790s and early 1800s, and to discern the general influence that Cicero had, also, on Shakespeare’s imagination. Shakespeare was also heavily indebted to Stoic concepts, which he used to describe the states of mind and the emotions felt by his characters. Wordsworth and his circle were well acquainted with Theseus’ famous speech about the imagination in _A Midsummer Night’s Dream_. The idea of the poet ‘bodying forth’ images from his mind is alluded to consistently by the poets of the day\(^2\) and Wordsworth, inevitably, refers to Theseus’ remarks in the Preface to the _Poems_ of 1815 when he discusses Fancy and Imagination (Pr W III 30). He had also made a point of reading extensively in Shakespeare’s works in the 1790s.\(^3\)

In his speech, Theseus is responding to Hippolita’s feelings about the strangeness of the reports given by two pairs of confused lovers about their midsummer night’s experiences. Upon awaking in the forest the lovers had questioned the veracity of the night’s events, unable to distinguish what was ‘real’ from what may have been – ‘just a dream’, a fancy, an imagination. They are lovers, not philosophers, and their enquiry is not concerned with epistemological or ontological questions about the nature of perception and reality. Their more pressing concern is about the true nature of their feelings, which have, over the last twenty-four hours, suffered some severe and inexplicable reversals.

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\(^1\) Wordsworth’s father had set him to learn passages from Shakespeare, Milton, and Spenser as a child. The work of Spenser and Milton could be fruitfully examined for their earlier treatment of the poetic imagination, especially in connection with daydreaming and fantasy, and with the fairy world, as represented in _The Faerie Queene_. For a comprehensive study of imagination in Spenser and Milton see John Guillory’s _Poetic Authority: Spenser, Milton, and Literary History_.

\(^2\) See for instance John Thelwall’s _Address to Greek Gods_, which Wordsworth appears to have echoed in ‘Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey’ - as the second extract here suggests:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Say wilt thou</th>
<th>These fields, these hedgerows, and this simple turf</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Glory of ancient freedom! Say wilt thou</td>
<td>Shall form my Academus: through this vale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permit me, on this rustic theatre</td>
<td>Ye hallowed manes of the gods of Greece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>While bold “Imagination bodies forth”</td>
<td>Thro’ this low vale will I suppose ye walked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The god-like actors, here to represent</td>
<td>Pouring divine instruction or, reclined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Myself and heaven spectators of the scene)</td>
<td>Upon these verdant hillocks, musing deep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The awful drama of thy martial greatness</td>
<td>The silent energy of soul collected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>And sour’d on Contemplation’s awful wing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Into the highest heaven... (my emphasis)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^3\) For the influence of Shakespeare on late eighteenth-century minds see Jonathan Bate’s _Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination_.

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As they attempt to put two and two together (hopefully, this time, in a true coupling), Demetrius makes a distinction between ‘reality’ and ‘appearance’, by appealing to the opinions of others in the group. He asks whether they too had just seen and spoken with the Duke and his train (IV I 200). Their agreement allows Demetrius to conclude, ‘Why then we are awake’ since their confirmation of his experience assures him that he is neither dreaming, nor hallucinating, nor mad.

Shakespeare sets up the scene so that Hippolita’s prompt can allow Theseus to expound on the topic of the imagination. He provides his wife with a suitably unempathetic explanation in his response to her more feeling-orientated musings. He, a rational male of no little authority, declares that he himself could never believe in such ‘antique fables’ or ‘fairy toys’. And he takes the opportunity of expressing – to the audience rather than his Amazon Queen – not just a commonplace about the poetic imagination, but also his knowledge of epistemology and psychology. From our vantage point in history we also read his speech as an indication of Shakespeare’s knowledge of Renaissance learning. The ideas expressed in Theseus’ speech belong to that historical moment when the early Greek philosophers were discussing questions about the nature of reality, as it is perceived through the physical eye, and then ‘impressed’ upon the mind. Their manner of conceiving this process remained definitive of later discussions, even up until Wordsworth’s time, especially since John Locke had revisited the early stoic concept of the ‘tabula rasa’. The ideas briefly presented in Shakespeare’s Comedy have a ‘history’, one that must be seen in terms of a very longue durée.

Theseus’ appreciation of ‘imagination’ and its importance to poets, was invoked by Dorothy at the time of a very significant meeting – that of her first acquaintance with ‘the poet’ Coleridge at Racedown Lodge in June 1797. Writing to Mary Hutchinson, who had just left Racedown, she tells her of her ‘great loss in not seeing Coleridge…a wonderful man’, whose ‘conversation teems with soul, mind, and spirit…he is so benevolent, so good tempered and cheerful and like William, interests himself in so much about every little trifle.’ She goes on to express her first opinions about his looks, which are not very complimentary. But once she had heard him speak for five minutes, she fell under his spell, dismissing physical appearance as a reliable representation of his character.⁴ It was not, however, only his voice that spoke to her:

His eye is large and full, not dark but grey; such an eye as would receive from a heavy soul the dullest expression; but it speaks every emotion of his animated mind; it has more of the ‘poet’s eye in a fine frenzy rolling’ than I have ever witnessed. (EY 188-9)

This appreciation of the poet’s imagination was one of the commonest of commonplaces in late eighteenth-century discussion and therefore hardly remarkable; Dorothy had grasped a literary allusion that fitted this particular situation. However, a closer reading of this famous passage from Shakespeare leads to an appreciation of ‘imagination’ that can help us better appreciate Wordsworth’s particular understanding of the word and to recognise a further example of Ciceronian influence.

⁴ Coleridge, later in life expressed exactly the same opinion ‘my face is not a manly or representable face – Whatever is impressive, is part fugitive, part existent only in the imaginations of persons impressed strongly by my conversations – The face itself is a FEEBLE unmanly face (CL VI 170-1).
Theseus links the ‘brains’ of the lovers in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* with those of madmen. The minds of both groups are considered notorious for shaping fantasies that ‘apprehend’ phenomena that have no actual substance from the point of view of the ‘comprehension’ of ‘cool reason’. Their ‘shaping fantasies’ (*Phantasiae*) are acts of imagination that ‘apprehend’ their own, subjective, phenomenological experience and take it for ‘reality’ – creating something that is not comprehended by ‘reason’ nor verifiable through the agreement of another person. Demetrius believes that at least the Duke and his train are substantial figures, and not merely the product of his own figuration – his own imagination – because he can verify that his mind is ‘comprehending’ something tangible rather than merely ‘apprehending’ (imagining) the phenomena he sees. Lunatics and Lovers form apprehensions that are figments of their own subjective imaginations without seeking any objective verification that their apprehension is true. Lunatics do not take into account anyone else’s point of view, and Shakespeare’s comic lovers are seldom persuaded that their often misdirected love is foolish. It is only at the end of the play, when everything is resolved, that they are finally forced to admit their folly. Whatever their foolish opinions, they find themselves confronted with ‘reality’ in the final scene when presented with a concrete situation in which all other choices have been eliminated. Shakespeare knew, well before David Hume, that the emotions play a greater part in motivating human action, than reason.

Shakespeare was drawing on the same ancient source as Hume, and before him John Locke, as both men pursued their philosophical enquiries into the development of human understanding. The most influential classical study to present a detailed discussion of the veracity of sense impressions, and the mind’s ability to grasp ‘truth’ was Cicero’s *Academica*. The *Academica* discusses the claims made by early Stoic philosophers about the nature of sense impressions, and how the mind comes to ‘grasp’ the truth of appearances through an act of cognition that is somehow able to distinguish between an ‘apprehension’ – an ‘appearance’ or ‘impression’ (*phantasia*) that may be an illusion, a mere fancy – and one that is an actual, concrete, representation of truth, a ‘true’ imagination. The latter, Cicero described as a ‘cataleptic impression’ (*phantasia katalēptikē*); what Theseus called a ‘comprehension’ as opposed to an ‘apprehension’.

This technical term from early Stoic philosophy was used to describe a *phantasia* (an ‘appearance’ or ‘impression’) that can immediately be understood as ‘true’, beyond any possible doubt. It presupposes a cognitive ability in the perceiver that makes him or her capable of ‘assenting’ to the belief that the object is actually what it seems to be, and not an hallucination, a dream figure, an optical illusion, or even a very carefully constructed replica. The veracity of the appearance is defined by the ability of the perceiver to ‘grasp’ it with the mind in an act of will accompanied by an assertion that the object is what it seems to be and has not been misconceived as, for instance, a square tower might be perceived from a distance, at first sight, to be round. It is through the collection of cataleptic impressions that the foundations of the mind are laid and the individual can build up a true knowledge of the world. What is significant about the Stoic concept of *phantasia katalēptikē* is the understanding

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5 The term ‘Fancy’, derived directly from the Greek *Phantasia*, was translated into Latin as *Imaginatio*, the two terms originally referring to the same concept.
that the mind must assent to such impressions being true representations of reality through some a priori ability that enables it to make such judgements.6

In the Academica Cicero discusses how we come to know things, especially from the world of the senses, and whether such knowledge is trustworthy. Sceptical thinkers believe that no sense impressions can ever be wholly trusted, and limit knowledge to reasoned truth: what we perceive through the ‘language of the senses’ can only be considered an ‘appearance’, not necessarily an object of knowledge. Plato had argued that there was a world of ‘true’ knowledge; the world of the Ideal Forms. But these ‘Forms’ were products of pure reason and could not be not objects of sense perception. Coleridge (and Kant) maintained this Platonic distinction and restricted ‘logic’ to the production of a ‘pure’ reasoning. But the Aristotelians, the Stoics and the Epicureans believed that the senses could provide knowledge that was trustworthy, and which could be used to define philosophical arguments, as well as the nature of virtue. The Epicureans simply accepted that a clear and distinct impression (for which they used the term enargeia) was a reliable representation of something real, and they were prepared to trust the senses and ‘take things at face value’.

In Book 1 of the Academica, the Posterior Academics (or Lucullus), Cicero gives a brief history of the new philosophy of the Academy that originated with Socrates. This is followed by a summary of the concerns of the three branches of philosophy (a taxonomy originally proposed by Xenocrates) which are defined under the headings of ‘Life and Conduct’ (Ethics); ‘Nature and mysterious phenomena’ (Physics); and ‘Dialectic and the decision between true and false statements, between correctness and incorrectness in language, between things consistent and things contradictory’ (Dialectic or Logic). Having presented a history of Platonic concerns with dialectic and the adaptations made by the followers of Aristotle, Cicero then turns to define the Stoic approach as set out by Zeno. He firstly outlines Zeno’s Socratic belief in the pursuit of absolute virtue, and then his concern to free the mind from the ‘disease’ of the emotions by an act of will. In describing ‘the certain novel statement about sense impressions themselves’ that are distinctive of Stoic epistemology he writes that sense impressions:

are compounds produced by a kind of blow aimed from without – this [Zeno] called ὀντασία (phantasia) and we may name it an appearance/impression,7 and pray let us adhere to this word, since we shall make use of it repeatedly in the remainder of our discourse – well then, to these impressions, adopted, so to speak by the senses, he links the ‘assent’ of the mind, which he says depends on ourselves and is due to our wills. He did not attach credibility to all impressions but only to such as brought bound up with them ‘evidence’ touching the objects from which the impressions came, and such an impression being discerned by virtue of its own ‘evidence’ he called ‘perceptible/apprehensible’. (Academica I. 40-41)

6 Kant’s concept of Imagination as Einbildungskraft fulfils the same, necessary, function, but his idealist concept should not be confused with Cicero’s account.

7 I have mainly used James Reid’s dated, but respected translation of The Academics (London. 1880). I have also referred to Charles Brittain’s recent (2006) translation, On Academic Scepticism, and to his notes. Reid translates phantasia (Fancy/Imagination) as ‘appearance’, while Brittain prefers ‘impression’ - as did Wordsworth. For the purposes of my argument here, ‘impression’ provides a better meaning.
The Greek word here is καταληπτόν (catalepsies), which literally translates as ‘grasappable’. ‘Once an impression has been adopted and assented to [Zeno] called it a ‘perception / apprehension’; that is, ‘something that has been grasped by the mind’:

That which had been apprehended by sense he called a sense impression, and if it had been so ‘apprehended’ as to be incapable of being uprooted by criticism he entitled it knowledge /science; if otherwise, ignorance: which was the parent of fancied knowledge (opinion); this he said was unstable and indistinguishable from the unreal and unknown. (I. 41)\(^8\)

For Zeno a sense impression that the mind has ‘grasped’ as a genuine representation of ‘what is’ becomes a ‘cataleptic impression’ and is accepted as ‘true’ because of reasoning gained from prior knowledge, and other supporting evidence that it is not false. This is the first stage in building up conceptions that are imprinted on the mind, which then ‘enable us to find out not merely the first steps, but certain broader avenues leading to the discovery of reasoned truth’ (I. 42). Zeno’s belief in cataleptic impressions was an attempt to move on past the impasse declared by the Sceptics, who maintained that it was simply not possible for the senses to know anything as true. They argued that experience shows that the senses deceive us all the time, and that a system of knowledge could not be built on such uncertain grounds.\(^9\)

Wordsworth’s knowledge of the Academica is demonstrated most strikingly in the descriptions of the period when the ‘foundations of his mind were laid’ in the early Books of The Prelude and, before that, in his description of the growth of the Pedlar’s mind in Ms B of ‘The Ruined Cottage’. The vocabulary used, and the unusual concepts expressed, with their very concrete representations of the process by which knowledge is acquired and sensations are ‘impressed’ on the mind, reveal Wordsworth’s attempt to express these concepts found in Cicero’s Academica, and definitive of Stoic philosophy. When he refers to ‘the language of the sense’ in ‘Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey’, I suggest he is also referring the process of concept formation described by Cicero in which sense impressions – Shakespeare’s ‘apprehensions’ – are translated into ‘comprehensions’ through an act of cognition.\(^10\) In the poem Wordsworth distinguishes between the youthful fancies, the dizzy raptures of his immature mind that lacked the cognitive ability to ‘grasp truth’ adequately, and his more ‘manly’ state of mind capable of distinguishing true imaginations from fantasies. It is this activity of the mind in the act of perception that is an act of ‘the imagination’ for Wordsworth.

Coleridge could not accept the Stoic position because it gave the mind of man, communing with nature, the power of the creative act. For Coleridge that act had, ultimately, to come ‘from above’, from the mind of God. The Stoics, like Coleridge, were unable to explain how the human mind gained

\(^8\) This distinction between a ‘true’ imagination (phantasia katalēptikē) - one verifiable as a representation of true knowledge - and a ‘false’ fancy; an ‘un-grasped’ phantasia based only on opinion, sets out a distinction that would have caught Coleridge’s attention.

\(^9\) The Sceptics only had to point to the examples of things seen in abnormal states of mind such as dreams, illusions, drunkenness and fits of madness, to demonstrate the fallibility of sense impressions. For a detailed discussion of the problems posed by the concept of kataleptic impressions, one that also addresses the Stoic response to the problem of perfect copies, see Tad Brennan’s The Stoic Life, pp. 51-113.

\(^10\) Wordsworth’s Stoic declaration of faith in ‘Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey’ was also a rebuttal of the beliefs of sceptical philosophers.
its original capacity to make such distinctions without introducing some form of divine assistance. As has been discussed, their solution to this fundamental problem in philosophy was provided by the ‘cradle argument’ and their belief that ἀφορμαί, ‘sparks of the divinity’, guide the infant mind as it makes its very first contact with the sense world and organises the impressions that it receives, before it has the capacity to reason for itself and make its own judgements about what it is seeing. The work of divine Nature in building up the necessary first impressions that establish the foundations of the mind is accomplished, ideally, with the harmonious assistance of the infant’s first human contact - mother or nurse, so that the two powers, human and divine, necessarily work in tandem.

If we return to the ‘Blest the Infant Babe’ passage in Book II of The Prelude, we can see Wordsworth describing a relationship in which the love of the mother and that of nature work together to feed the growing infant mind with impressions that are healthy. He even uses technical, Aristotelian, terms to describe the process by which the babe is inducted into his earthly life and his new relationship with nature. Wordsworth’s use of the word ‘Tenacious’ clearly conveys the sense of ‘grasping’ that the Stoic terminology uses:

Thus day by day,
Subjected to the discipline of love,
His organs and recipient faculties
Are quickened, are more vigorous, his mind spreads
Tenacious of the forms which it receives.
In one beloved Presence, nay and more,
In that most apprehensive habitude
And those sensations which have been derived
From this beloved Presence, there exists
A virtue which irradiates and exalts
All objects through all intercourse of sense.
No outcast he, bewildered and depressed:
Along his infant veins are interfused
The gravitation and the filial bond
Of Nature that connect him with the world. (II 250-264)

And even earlier, in the very first memories of childhood, the voice of nature’s influence is heard first, even before the reader hears of Wordsworth’s human companions, as the voice of the Derwent that ‘loved to blend his murmurs’ with Wordsworth’s nurse’s song flows into Wordsworth’s dreams, composing his thoughts ‘to more than infant softness’, and giving him:

Among the fretful dwellings of mankind
A knowledge and a deep earnest, of the calm
That Nature breathes among the hills and groves (I 283-5)

The infant’s mind is literally ‘impressed’ by the impressions of nature, which it apprehends to create its sense of identity in the world of the senses that its soul now inhabits, as a sensate being. Wordsworth’s world is full of ‘impressions’, phantasiae that have their origin in physical experiences,

11 Wordsworth removes this awkward technical term in his later revisions.
in empirical concepts. These ‘imaginations’, are tangible realities impressed on the mind from a world ‘out there’ that is real, and concrete, in its materiality.

Before leaving the topic of ‘phantasia katalēptikē, translated literally as ‘grasping impressions’, it is worth noting Wordsworth’s often quoted Fenwick note to the ‘Ode. Intimations of Immortality’ and his description of his inability, in childhood, to be able to ‘grasp’ reality and distinguish between subjective fantasies produced by his mind, and the actual reality of the world ‘out there’:

I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence & communed with all that I saw as something not apart from but inherent in my own immaterial nature. Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality’ (IFN 61).

I suggest that the use of the term ‘grasped’ here is intended to convey a double meaning. It was only because his childhood mind was incapable of grasping objects and assenting to their reality that he had to literally grasp at some physical object in order to escape from the ‘abyss of idealism’. His use of the term ‘grasping’ is telling and I suggest it indicates his appreciation of Zeno’s phantasia katalēptikē.¹²

II. Quintilian’s Classical Art of Eloquence

Having grasped something of the influence of Cicero’s philosophical works on the development of Wordsworth’s ethos, I return now to Quintilian’s influence. I suggest that Wordsworth drew extensively on Quintilian in composing ‘The Ruined Cottage’ in the early spring of 1798, and before justifying that claim in the following chapter, it is necessary to consider Quintilian’s own debt to Cicero.¹³ In the Introduction to De Institutione Oratoria, Quintilian outlines his major concern, following Cicero, that the orator should also be a philosopher. The ‘philosopher’ is both a ‘wise man’ and a ‘good man’ (bonus vir) by virtue of his knowledge. Quintilian also asserts that the best orator should be a man of good character who, through his speaking and active engagement in the world, will

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¹² In a another description of his ‘natural spontaneous idealism’ he again used the same terminology: ‘There was a time in my life when I was often forced to grasp, like this, something that resisted, to be sure that there was anything outside of me. This gate, this bar, this road, these trees fell away from me and vanished into thought. I was sure of the existence of my mind – I had no sense of the existence of matter’. Report to Bonamy Price, in J.C. Smith, A Study of Wordsworth.

¹³ There were two copies of De Institutione Oratoria in the Rydal Mt Library, one was edited by Pareus (Geneva, 1641); the other, edited by Gibson (Oxford, 1691). The Gibson edition, was a handsome scholar’s text complete with Testimonials from Seneca, Juvenal, Martial and others in its prefatory materials and a comprehensive Index of ‘Rerum and Locutionum,’ plus lists of ‘Greek words’; and ‘Authors cited’. These would enable the reader to find his or her way around the 12 Books and locate particular topics. The Pareus edition also had a comprehensive index. It is not known when Wordsworth acquired these editions, but their presence suggests a serious interest. Coleridge had his own copy - though it was a cheaper more portable edition. In marginalia written in Flaccus’ Satirarum liber he mused on how he had managed to build up a library of Classical works because of the availability of cheaper editions: ‘I have the whole works of Cicero, of Livy, and Quintilian, with many others, the whole works of each in a single Volume, either thick Quarto with thin paper & small yet distinct print, or thick Octavo or duodecimo of the same character and they cost me in the proportion of a shilling to a Guinea for the same quantity of worse matter in modern Books or Editions’.
also aspire to *do* good. He argues that the best orator will, by virtue of this practical activity, be a greater man then the philosopher who, in his traditional detachment from the world, is not involved in real life. In his *Proemium* Quintilian states:

"My aim, then, is the education of the perfect orator. The first essential for such a one is that he should be a good man, and consequently we demand of him not merely the possession of exceptional gifts of speech, but all the excellences of character as well...I will not admit that the principles of upright and honourable living should, as some have held, be regarded as the peculiar concerns of the philosopher. The man who can really play his part as a citizen and is capable of meeting the demands both of public and private business, the man who can guide a state by his counsels, give it a firm basis by his legislation and purge its vices by his decisions as a judge is assuredly no other than the orator of our quest. (I Pr 9-10)"

The philosopher’s task is to explain and demonstrate how to live a life of virtue; and given that the pursuit of virtue is the wise man’s aim, he is considered, by definition, to be a virtuous character. But Quintilian points out that when orators are pleading their cases they are frequently compelled to speak of virtues, and to expound on, and illustrate what they are. He recalls how philosophy and oratory used to be closely united before a split occurred after some orators turned to sophistry and abused their position, and philosophers turned away from the art of speaking well to focus more on philosophy itself.\(^\text{14}\) Quintilian follows Cicero in planning to re-unite these two disciplines observing that, in fact, everyone discusses philosophical questions:

"Who, short of being an utter villain, does not speak of justice, equity, and virtue? Who (and even common-country folk – rustics – are no exception) does not make some enquiry into the causes of natural phenomena?” (I Pr 16)\(^\text{15}\)

Quintilian’s ideal orator will therefore have to be a ‘wise man’ (a philosopher). But he cannot just be blameless in his character (perfect in his morals); he must also be ‘a thorough master of the science and art of speaking’ (I Pr 18). Quintilian does not believe that this ideal has yet been achieved, and announces that after he has discussed the education of the orator and the five ‘parts’ of oratory\(^\text{16}\) he will return to a description of his ideal orator in Book X.

In concluding his introduction Quintilian emphasises a final point, ‘Without the help of nature, (without natural gifts), all technical rules and precepts are useless’ (I Pr 26). The argument as to whether natural ability or skill is more important was discussed, at length, in all classical studies and Quintilian refers to it at several points. He asserts that nature can exist without art, but art cannot exist without nature, and although nature is improved by art – and Quintilian stresses the necessity of a good education – he still recognises that it is those with superior natural abilities who will make the best orators. Quintilian’s whole study is built around a discussion of the relative importance of innate talent and acquired skill (*Natura vs Ars*).\(^\text{17}\) His own discussion of *phantasiae*, is found in Book VI Section ii,
which deals with the ‘Peroration’: the concluding speech in which the orator gives his summation. In Judicial or Forensic oratory (Quintilian’s main focus) this is the point at which appeals to the emotions are called upon as a final means of persuading the judge to be sympathetic to the orator’s case. Having used all other means available to present his argument, the speaker sums up his position, using impressive speech to reaffirm his case, and to amplify those things in his favour, while denigrating the claims of his opponents. At the same time, he makes the fullest use of appeals to the emotions, though always in a subtle manner, aiming to move the judge or jury towards a state of mind sympathetic to the feelings of the speaker.18 It is, as Quintilian demonstrates, a great art.

He begins his discussion by stating, ‘The peroration is the most important part of forensic pleading, and in the main consists of appeal to the emotions’. The careful handling of an emotional appeal is considered to be the most powerful, but also the most difficult task so far considered in the Institutes: ‘oratory has no more important contribution to make than this…this form of oratory is Queen of all’. The aim of the emotional appeal is to turn the judge’s mind away from matters of fact towards matters of feeling. ‘The judge, when overcome by his emotions, abandons all attempt to enquire into the truth of the arguments, is swept along by the tide of passion, and yields himself unquestioning to the torrent’ (VI ii 6). Once the orator has produced tears in the eye of the judge, the judge can be considered to be giving a verdict that all can see. ‘It is in power over the emotions that the life and soul of oratory is to be found’, and Quintilian quotes from Virgil at this point: ‘hoc opus, hic labor est’ (Aeneid VI 28).

In discussing his use of emotional appeals, Quintilian described himself drawing on ‘ancient tradition’ that ‘had divided the emotions into two classes, one designated pathos, the other ethos.’ The former is translated into Latin as affectus:

the other is called ethos, a word for which in my opinion Latin had no equivalent; it is however represented by mores (morals or manners) and consequently the branch of philosophy known as ethics is styled moral philosophy by us. (VI ii 8)

Like Cicero in the Tusculans, Quintilian finds some Greek concepts do not translate easily into Roman ones, and he effectively creates a new meaning. Aristotle’s understanding of ethos related to representations of character; the orator would present the facts of a case in a ‘manner’ that led the judge and the jury, to approve of his character, and therefore feel sympathetic to his argument. Cicero had already adapted Aristotle’s use of such appeals, and when Quintilian later set out his understanding of the ethos/pathos formula in his Institutes he was drawing on Cicero’s usage in maintaining that ‘ethical’ appeals produced the arousal of mild states of emotion. This was distinct from Aristotle’s understanding in which appeals to ethos were only rational, and all emotional appeals were subsumed under appeals to pathos.19 Quintilian re-defines ethos according to the understanding

18 Book XIII of The Prelude fulfils all the requirement of a formal peroration. The choice of location - the summit of the highest mountain in England and Wales complements the high or ‘grand’ style required in Wordsworth’s summation as he uses impressive rhetoric in his final, emotional, appeal to Coleridge.

19 For a more detailed discussion of these distinctions sees James M. May’s and Jakob Wisse’s Introduction to On the Ideal Orator p. 34.
he believed to be representative of the ‘ancient authorities’, as Cicero had represented them. Having translated *ethos* as *mores* he goes on to propose that the term does not mean ‘morals’ in general but a certain ‘propriety’, a particular understanding, so that the more cautious writers do not translate the word, but see it as a milder aspect of *pathos*, designating emotions that are ‘calm and gentle’. ‘In the one case the passions are violent, in the other subdued, the former command and disturb, the latter persuade and induce a feeling of goodwill’ (VI ii 9).

Quintilian’s ‘translation’ works towards defining an appeal that is ‘ethical’, rather than passionate, and is suited to situations where it would be counterproductive to be forceful. And such a manner is also seen as useful when the orator is speaking about ‘what is in itself honourable and expedient or of what ought or ought not to be done.’

*Pathos* and *ethos* are sometimes of the same nature differing only in degree; ‘Love’ (*amor*) for instance comes under the head of *pathos*, affection (*caritas*) of *ethos*; sometimes however they differ, a distinction, which is important for the peroration, since *ethos* is generally employed to calm the storm, aroused by *pathos*. (VI ii 12)

And finally Quintilian gives the term a more ‘moral’ basis:

The ethos that I have in mind and which I desiderate in an orator is commended to our approval by goodness more than aught else and is not merely calm and mild, but in most cases ingratiating and courteous (*blandum et humanum*) and such as to excite pleasure and affection in our hearers, while the chief merit in its expression lies in making it seem that all that we have to say derived directly from the nature of the facts and the person concerned and in the revelation of the character of the orator in such a way that all may recognise it. (VI ii 13)

The skilful orator will develop his mannered style, acting with propriety towards those he addresses, being familiar when appropriate, and more distant when it is not. By making his manner look natural he can indulge in gentle raillery, and become highly effective in the use of ‘irony’ – ‘the term which is applied to words which mean something other than they mean to express’. By giving thought to a well-mannered expression, and being aware of the manners of others, the orator will develop a psychological understanding that will give him an edge over other orators, and make his comments far more effective. The same skills can be used to develop ‘character studies’:

There is also good reason for giving the name of *ethos* to those scholastic exercises in which we portray rustics, misers, cowards and superstitious persons according as our theme may require. For if *ethos* denotes moral character, our speech must necessarily be based in *ethos* when it is engaged in portraying such character. (VI ii 17)

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20 Wordsworth insists on a distinction of difference only in degree, not kind between Imagination and Fancy.

21 I suggest Wordsworth’s anxious footnote to ‘The Thorn’ demonstrates his concern over this matter, as he worried that readers - who did not know their Quintilian, or their Blair - might not appreciate that the comments made by the ‘retired sea Captain’ were made in the character of a superstitious person. Blair points out that ‘to give… personages proper and well supported characters, such as display the features of human nature…is…what Aristotle calls, giving manners to the poem’ (*Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, Lecture XLII. 517).
In concluding his remarks on *ethos* Quintilian stresses that: ‘Finally *ethos* in all its forms requires the speaker to be a man of good character and courtesy’. He must possess, or be thought to possess, the virtues he is commending, he cannot afford to give any impression that he is a bad man, and his style ‘should be calm and mild with no trace of pride, elevation or sublimity, all of which would be out of place’ (VI ii 18-19). Quintilian is not insisting that the orator actually *is* a good man here, although the representation of a ‘good’ *ethos* is better if it is genuine. He must, however, produce the impression that he is a good man.

I believe Wordsworth worked closely with several of the recommendations and ideas Quintilian presents in this section of the *Institutes*, which he seems to have been drawing on as he considered his own views on *ethos* in comparison with those held by Coleridge. He understands that he has to pursue ‘good manners’ to become a virtuous man; he develops an ironic attitude that he puts to good use; he stresses the need for his characters to be realistic, and he argued that Coleridge failed to take this into account in his poetry. In fact many of his differences with Coleridge can be seen to have developed out of his particular appreciation of Quintilian’s authority, and Coleridge’s seeming lack of concern about matters of ‘*ethos*’. Since Coleridge believed that poets were ‘born’ rather than ‘made’, he was not too concerned about their character – their genius was an innate disposition, their ‘nature’ predetermined. And, like all humans, their future salvation depended on their implicit belief in the Christian God. Wordsworth, on the other hand, had realised the importance of developing a good character as part of his pursuit of virtue in accordance with his eudaemonist ethical beliefs.

I suggest this issue came to a head during the period the two men spent in Germany where the topic is raised by Wordsworth in the correspondence about Burger’s ‘manners’. Klaus Dockhorn refers to this matter in his essay though, unfortunately, he confuse Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s positions so that his argument loses focus at this point. He does however, point out that the classical concept of *ethos* does not translate easily into the German terms ‘Sitten’ or ‘Charackter’ which had led Lessing to turn to concepts of ‘Moralen’ and ‘Gesinnungen’ (*Rhetorical Traditions* 267). It was Lessing that Coleridge had gone to Germany to study in 1798, and Dorothy, who had not managed to become fluent in German in 1799, was reading Lessing’s *Essay* with the help of a German Grammar in February 1802. This tends to suggest that specific ‘moral questions’ were an important topic of debate between Wordsworth and Coleridge at this time, and that the ‘radical Difference’ between them was also a reflection of their differing appreciation of ‘morals’.

Wordsworth wrote his unfinished ‘Essay on Morals’ while at Goslar, and the language and the concepts that he uses suggest to me that he had a copy of Quintilian’s *Institutes* with him at the time,

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22 In making critical distinctions about the differences between his work and Coleridge’s when editing the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth was critical of the ‘great defects’ of ‘The Ancient Mariner’. The first defect was ‘that the principal person has no distinct character’. The second defect was linked to this; ‘that he does not act, but is continually acted upon’; therefore (the third defect), ‘the events having no necessary connection do not produce each other’. The final defect concerned ‘the imagery [which] is somewhat too laboriously accumulated’. (*MLB* 39-40). Critics have been harsh on Wordsworth for his treatment of Coleridge here – but his comments follow logically from his poetic theory.

possibly Coleridge’s cheap, portable copy. Towards the end of his Introduction, Quintilian stresses that he is not writing a dry textbook on the art of rhetoric that:

by straining after excessive subtlety, [will] impair and cripple the nobler elements of style, exhaust the life blood of the imagination and leave but the bare bones, which, while it is right and necessary that they should exist and be bound to each other by their respective ligaments, require a covering of flesh as well. (I Pr 24)²⁴

Quintilian’s striking figurative language bodies forth imagery that appears to have made quite an impression on Wordsworth’s mind as he was writing his ‘Essay on Morals’, in which he expressed his antipathy to abstract philosophy, especially modern forms of moral philosophy (like Kant’s) that relied solely on reason. He would not have had any great knowledge of Kant’s philosophy in 1799 and ‘Mr Godwyn (sic) and Mr Paley’ are his prime examples. His argument in the essay relies on classical philosophical principles found in Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, which stress the importance of individual character as formed by habit. The role that habituation plays is considered more important than reason, and the art of rhetoric is considered more effective in changing people’s minds than the art of reasoning or ‘logic’. Although Wordsworth makes no mention of either Cicero or Quintilian, the gist of his argument might be found in either *De Oratore* or *De Institutione Oratoria*.

When Wordsworth writes: ‘Now, I know no book or system of moral philosophy written with sufficient power to melt into our affections, to incorporate itself with the blood and vital juices of our minds, and thence to have any influence worth our notice in forming those habits of which I am speaking’ (*PrW* I 103), his description of the ‘blood and vital juices of our mind’ is strikingly similar to the imagery used by Quintilian in the passage quoted above. The lines that follow in Wordsworth’s essay also reproduce Quintilian’s discussion of the need to present striking images to the mind of the addressee, using a language that is so vivid in its representations that change might be effected to habits of thinking. Wordsworth’s musings at Goslar indicate trains of thought that will determine the nature of the poetry he is intending to write, and his future identity as a poet who aspires to be an effective teacher of morals. His poetry, in true Horatian fashion, will be written to both ‘delight’ and ‘instruct’ his readers, and will be effective because of his particular use of the ‘eloquence’ he had learnt from Cicero and Quintilian. In the essay he describes why such works as Paley’s and Godwin’s fail to teach effective moral values. Their writings present ‘a series of propositions’, but ‘no images to the mind’ their bald & naked reasonings are impotent over our habits; they cannot form them; from the same cause they are equally powerless in regulating our judgments concerning the value of men & things. They contain no picture of human life; they describe nothing. They in no respect enable us to be practically useful by informing us how men placed in such or such situations will necessarily act, and thence enabling us to apply ourselves to the means of turning them into a more beneficial course, if necessary, or of giving them ardour and new knowledge when they are proceeding as they ought.

²⁴ Note the striking imagery here: *et omnem succum ingenii bibunt et ossa detegunt: quae ut esse et adstringi nervis suis debent, sic corpore operienda sunt.* For the words underlined, Russell’s translation is, ‘drain off all the juice of the mind and expose the bones’, while Watson’s is, ‘drink up, as it were, all the blood of thought, and lay bare the bones’.
At Goslar Wordsworth had identified the problem with Paley’s and Godwin’s attempts to address ‘moral questions’ as he concerned himself with producing poetry that might have a moral influence on his readers; a very classical aim. In emphasising the need for a language that ‘teaches’ to be one that uses vivid description, he is also drawing on a central argument of Quintilian’s teaching, one he had already demonstrated in his own careful composition of ‘The Ruined Cottage’, the subject of my next chapter. But before turning to ‘The Story of Margaret’, related with such eloquence by the oratorical Pedlar, it is necessary to briefly discuss the influence of James Thomson.

**III. James Thomson’s Virgilian Imagination**

he, from all the stormy passions free
That restless men involve, hears, and but hears,
At distance safe, the human tempest roar,
Wrapped close in conscious peace. The fall of kings,
The rage of nations, and the crush of states
Move not the man who, from the world escaped,
In still retreats and flowery solitudes
To nature’s voice attends from month to month
And day to day, through the revolving year –
Admiring, sees her in her every shape;
Feels all her sweet emotions at his heart;
Takes what she liberal gives, nor thinks of more. *(Autumn 1298-1310)*

This passage, from James Thomson’s *The Seasons* might be considered an apt description of Wordsworth’s state of mind during the Racedown period by critics convinced that his retirement there also signalled his retirement from politics and the adoption of a poetic, and romantic ethos that might be considered an ‘evasion of history’. The passage is Thomson’s rendition of a famous passage in Virgil, the ‘*O fortunatos nimium*’ passage at the end of *Georgics* II that describes the ‘most fortunate’ state of mind of the *beatus vir*, the ‘happy man’, who is ‘all too happy’ in his work as a ‘tiller of the soil’ living in an idyllic pastoral situation, far from war, in which nature’s bounty supplies all that is needed. Thomson’s representations of Virgil’s ‘*beatus vir*’ was just one of a series of renditions on the topic of the ‘Happy Man’ that had developed, originally, in seventeenth-century England during the time of the civil war, and which continued to evolve over the course of the next century. Horace’s treatment of the same theme, in his famous ironic reference to the joys of country life in *Epode II*, was also often invoked.25 Treatment of the topic, which included praising the virtues of retirement to the country from the city, was often defined according to either Epicurean or Stoic positions, as they reflected two opposed schools of thought. In her two-volume study, *The Happy Man: Studies in the Metamorphosis of a Classical Ideal*, Maren-Sofie Rostvig traces the intricacies of this tradition in

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25 See Appendix B for excerpts from Virgil’s ‘*O fortunatos nimium*’ passage and Horace’s *Epode II*. 
which Marvell, Cowley and Milton all played a significant role. Rostvig makes a detailed survey of the use of the topic by other seventeenth-century poets, and defines how it came to reflect a neo-stoic tradition in the wake of the political disappointment felt, firstly by Royalists when they lost their king, and later by Republicans after the restoration of the Monarchy. And the theme, which was endorsed by Dryden in the high regard he held for the *Georgics*, continued to inspire poetic compositions throughout the eighteenth century. For republicans, and for the Country party, the contrast between country and city reflected an idealisation of ‘Sabine’ rural virtues over the corruption of those who pursued luxury in the cities. The traditional ‘Happy Man’ could not dwell in cities, which (as Juvenal’s satires so powerfully portrayed them) were too corrupt for virtue to survive in; and Pope and Swift also represented that understanding in their poetry and prose.

A more recent survey of the idealisation of the pastoral/georgic tradition in England is made in the early chapters of Raymond Williams’ *The Country and the City*. Williams notes just how much of a commonplace the comparison between country and city had always been, pointing out that ‘Quintilian makes it his first example of a stock thesis’ (46). Williams treats the theme within the context of a much longer duration of history than Rostvig, but the two studies are complementary, with Williams providing the historical and political background to the theme, while Rostvig focuses on the literary specifics. Her many references to works of both major and minor poets reveals the pervasiveness of this classical ideal in the literary productions of the age of Pope, as well as the age of Johnson, and even right up to the end of the eighteenth century. Rostvig’s studies provide a historical context for reading Wordsworth as a ‘Happy Man’, whose own mind was especially shaped by the classical values expressed in the poetry of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The ‘*O fortunatos nimium*’ passage from *Georgics II*, with its over-idyllic representation of the Virgilian happy husbandman, is not directly invoked in ‘The Ruined Cottage’. But I argue that the passage – well known to eighteenth-century poets – would have struck Wordsworth with a great sense of irony as he reflected upon his situation at Racedown where the poem was initially conceived. But before turning to *The Ruined Cottage*, I want to place the poem in its classical context by commenting briefly on the significance of the *Georgics*, and the link with James Thomson.

26 All three poets influenced Wordsworth’s poetic development. That of Milton is obvious, but Wordsworth also drew on Marvell, whose *The Garden* was carefully studied. Cowley’s ‘Essays’ were influential as well as his poetry – and a collection of his works was in the Racedown library. In *Liberty*, in 1829, Wordsworth wrote:

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In a deep vision’s intellectual scene
Such earnest longings and regrets as keen
Depressed and melancholy Cowley, laid
Under a fancied yew-tree’s luckless shade
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(111-114)

27 The *Georgics* became a focus of attention at the beginning of the eighteenth century largely due to Dryden’s popular 1697 translation. His edition was accompanied by an influential essay written by Joseph Addison who had proposed that the *Georgics* were the ‘most Complete, Elaborate, and finish’d Piece of all Antiquity – the Aeneid was Nobler, but the Georgics more perfect.’ In order to succeed, ‘this kind of poetry...addresses itself wholly to the Imagination: It is altogether conversant among the fields and woods, and has the most delightful part of Nature for its Province. It raises in our Minds a pleasing variety of Scenes and Landskips, whilst it teaches us’ (*Essay on the Georgics* in *The Works of John Dryden*. Ed W. Frost V 5, pp. 145-154).

Studies by Kurt Heinzelman and Bruce Graver have explored the significant influence that the *Georgics* had on Wordsworth’s work in the 1790s and early 1800s, as he attempted new forms of poetic expression. Graver’s essay, ‘Wordsworth’s Georgic Beginnings’, explores Wordsworth’s early interest in the *Georgics*. He notes, in particular, the subtlety with which Wordsworth used Virgilian phrases in *An Evening Walk*, stressing how Wordsworth seldom quotes Virgil directly: ‘Virgilian details and phrases are woven into the fabric of his original poetry by a process so subtle as to disguise or suppress their Virgilian origins’ (136). In pointing out Wordsworth’s dependence on Virgil, Graver identifies the lines that set the opening scene to *The Ruined Cottage*, as originating in Georgics III, 324-38 (146). But he does not mention that Wordsworth also drew on James Thomson’s rendition of the same passage. Thomson’s version was actually more important to Wordsworth than Virgil’s, since Thomson introduced a ‘dreaming man’ into his version, a figure who is not there under Virgil’s Jovian Oak, and this difference is important to the understanding of Wordsworth’s poem.

In a later essay, ““Honourable Toil”: The Georgic Ethic of *Prelude* I”, Graver presents a carefully argued case for considering Book I of *The Prelude* as a georgic, and suggests that the originally planned Five Book *Prelude* of 1804 fitted the same genre. In his discussion, Graver points out that Virgil’s poem was ‘Deeply informed by Epicurean systems of thought, and heavily dependent on *De Rerum Natura,*’ as Virgil attempted ‘to define the relationships between human beings and the physical universe in order to indicate how human beings need to treat each other’ (347). In emphasising this point, Graver was voicing a distinction between his concerns, and those of Heinzelman’s earlier study, proposing that ‘the georgic, at least for Virgil and Wordsworth, has more to do with ethics than economics.’ In taking this discussion further, I suggest that it was difficult for Wordsworth to divorce ethical concerns from economic ones, and that he was painfully aware of economic issues as he was writing ‘The Ruined Cottage’. James Thomson had also had to accommodate the fact that changing economic practices had compromised traditional republican concepts of virtue and vice. ‘The Ruined Cottage’ does not directly comment on social, economic or political realities – the Pedlar instead offers ‘ethical’ advice to the narrator as he relates his perception of things as they are – and he did not offer Margaret a guinea. But it would be short-sighted, and lacking in any appreciation of Wordsworth’s actual art, to suggest that because these topics are not presented directly, in poetry of social protest, that Wordsworth was ‘evading history’. Like John Thelwall, who was forced to lecture on Roman history to avoid prosecution under the Gagging Acts, Wordsworth turned to hidden means of persuasion, and acknowledged that such an art actually gave

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31 A topic that John Barrell makes central to his study of Thomson in *English Literature in History.*
him greater persuasive power over the minds of his readers, and a new means of engaging in ‘politics’.  

‘The Ruined Cottage’ opens with a description of a late morning scene on an oppressively hot day in summer. The lines that set the scene are taken from *An Evening Walk* (lines 53-56) and eight lines from revisions to that poem written in 1794 at Windy Brow. What is significant about these lines is the fact that they strongly echo a passage from James Thomson’s ‘Summer’ in *The Seasons* which, as Graver observed, is in turn based on a passage in Virgil’s *Georgics* III. *The Seasons* had been a major influence on Wordsworth in his youth, and he records reciting passages from it on his early morning walks by Esthwaite Water before school. In addition to learning from Thomson’s poetic practice, he would have also been influenced by the republican sympathies which inform *The Seasons*, and which were more explicitly represented in Thomson’s *Liberty*. Thomson might be considered Wordsworth’s first teacher of ‘natural’ republican political philosophy, and an influence he was able to draw on when asked about his politics by the royalist officers in Orléans in 1792.

Although the opening lines of ‘The Ruined Cottage’ are taken directly from Thomson, my reading here suggests that the events portrayed in Wordsworth’s poem represent a rejection of the influence of his strong precursor. In ‘The Ruined Cottage’ Wordsworth declares his independence from Thomson’s influence, stressing his own Stoic perspective and denigrating Thomson’s, which he appears to have associated with an Epicurean retreat from the affairs of the world. This was something Wordsworth rejected, seeing his retirement to Racedown and his turn to study as a means to an end – he did not see himself as a detached spectator unconcerned with the world of human affairs. It was important to him that he still be considered a man of action rather than an Epicurean ‘dreamer’, and it was also important that he distance himself from superstition, as he adopted ‘the philosophic mind’ idealised by Cicero’s example. In composing ‘The Ruined Cottage’ Wordsworth does a number of remarkable things as he paves the way toward defining the ethos that he was to define for himself, and his ideal poet by 1802. One of those things was to differentiate his own ‘natural’ poetic voice from that of Thomson’s.

One of Thomson’s central figures in his representations of the *beatus vir* is ‘the dreaming poet’ who, in imitation of his Italian counterpart, reclines under the shade of a tree and indulges in reverie. In *Spring*, Thomson advises his reader to ‘lie reclined beneath yon spreading ash’ and while musing on Virgil, amuse himself with his own fancies:

> There let the classic page thy fancy lead
> Through rural scenes, such as the Mantuan swain
> Paints in the matchless harmony of song;
> Or catch thyself the landscape, gliding swift

32 Such indirect representation of important topics was also a characteristic of the georgic form, as Addison had earlier noted in commenting on Virgil’s art:

> he loves to suggest a Truth indirectly, and without giving us a full and open view of it: To let us see just so much as will naturally lead the Imagination into all the parts that lie conceal’d. This is wonderfully diverting to the Understanding, thus to receive a Precept, that enters as it were through a By-way, and to apprehend an Idea that draws a whole train after it: For here the Mind, which is always delighted in its own Discoveries, only takes the hint from the Poet, and seems to work out the rest by the strength of her own faculties. (*Essay on the Georgics* 147-8)
Athwart imagination’s vivid eye;
Or, by the vocal woods and waters lulled
And lost in lonely musing, in a dream
Confused of careless solitude where mix
Ten thousand wandering images of things,
Soothe every gust of passion into peace-
All but the swellings of the softened heart,
That waken, not disturb, the tranquil mind. (Spring 455-466)³³

Thomson offers different possibilities to the prospective dreamer: a mediated reverie using Virgil as a guide, or unmediated ones, in which the mind either catches for itself the visual memories collected during the morning’s walk, or uses sound ‘images,’ the voices of nature, to lull the mind into its ‘wise passivity.’ In the opening lines of The Prelude, Wordsworth relates how after an initial, unusual, and brief experience of ‘dithyrambic fervour’ – a ‘rant’ that had failed to produce poetry – he walked on and found a grove where he could, instead, lie down and recollect in tranquillity.

And in the sheltered grove where I was couched
A perfect stillness. On the ground I lay
Passing through many thoughts, yet mainly such
As to myself pertained....
...Thus long I lay
Cheered by the genial pillow of the earth
Beneath my head, soothed by the sense of touch
From the warm ground, that balanced me, else lost
Entirely, seeing nought, nought hearing.... (I. 78-81; 87-91)

The contrast between the impassioned state of mind that might produce a vatic utterance, and the milder state of blissful reverie is intended as a formal comparison, a comparatio that sets out something of the matter of the case he will be presenting to Coleridge about ‘imagination’. Later, in describing the dream of the Arab in Book V, Wordsworth models the first of Thomson’s suggestions in the passage from Spring, though the ‘classic page’ is that of a Spanish noble, Cervantes, not ‘the Mantuan swain’. The dream occurs when the narrator, sitting in a rocky cave by the sea falls asleep after reading from Cervantes’ Don Quixote one drowsy summer noon.

In his youth, Wordsworth had drawn heavily on Thomson for descriptions of nature, and on his representations of a sense of the universal spirit in things that links the human heart with nature. Thomson was the great poet of nature in the mid eighteenth-century, and in 1794, while living at Windy Brow, Wordsworth made a number of revisions to An Evening Walk in which Thomson’s influence is very evident. One passage written then, that has captured the attention of later critics seems to owe much to Thomson.

A heart that vibrates evermore, awake
To feeling for all forms that Life can take,
That wider still its sympathy extends
And sees not any line where being ends;

³³ All references are to The Complete Poetical Works of James Thomson, Ed J. Logie Robertson.
³⁴ The same situation is presented in ‘Lines Left upon a seat in a Yew-tree’ where the sound of the waves lapping the shore lulls the mind of the occupant of that particular ‘seat’ into a state of ‘vacancy’.
Sees sense, through Nature’s rudest forms betrayed,
Tremble obscure in fountain, rock and shade,
And while a secret power those forms endears,
Their social accents never vainly hears. \( (PW\ 10\ app\ crit.) \)

George Meyer and H.W. Piper placed a great deal of emphasis on these lines as evidence that Wordsworth had no need for Coleridge to provide him with any ‘philosophy’ at Alfoxdon. Meyer went so far as to suggest that:

these verses contain as much of Wordsworth’s mature philosophy of nature as could be intelligibly compressed within the narrow limits of eight lines. In this passage, written long before his alleged ‘repudiation’ of William Godwin’s radical rationalism, before the Racedown influence of Dorothy and Coleridge, and before the period in which he is thought to have discovered the associationistic psychology of David Hartley, Wordsworth reveals himself in full possession and control of the ideas which are basic to Lyrical Ballads. 35

Piper also believed these lines dispose of the suggestion ‘that Coleridge was the source of Wordsworth’s ideas on the life of nature’ (The Active Universe 73). Both he and Meyer stress the importance of recognising the influence of classical sources, especially Virgil.

Thomson had also, wistfully, defined his own poetic identity as something of a druidic bard, an identity that Wordsworth had also considered while at Cambridge. In one very specific instance in The Seasons, Thomson seeks guidance not only from nature, but also from the spirits of the dead, who act as a benign influence in Thomson’s dramatic climax to the passage, mentioned above, that begins as an imitation of a short passage in Georgics III. The original passage in Virgil is short and expresses the need for the rustic to seek shelter from the hot, midday, summer sun. Thomson’s forceful rendition presents a vivid description of the bright sun and intense heat of the summer’s day as described in Georgics III: ‘Tis raging noon; and, vertical, the sun / Darts on the head direct his forceful rays’. He then takes great liberties with Virgil, as he dramatically expands on Virgil’s text, which had only described ‘a shadowy vale / Where some vast ancient–timbered oak of Jove / Spreads his huge branches’ (Georgics III 331-3).36 Thomson has the poet leaving the bright light of the midsummer day to ‘pierce into the midnight depth’ of the gloomy, black, shade of a ‘large’ and ‘wild’ hill-top grove, once used, it can be inferred, for druidic rituals:

These are the haunts of meditation, these
The scenes where ancient bards the inspiring breath
Ecstatic felt, and, from this world retired,
Conversed with angels and immortal forms
On gracious errands bent-to save the fall
Of virtue struggling on the brink of vice;
In waking whispers and repeated dreams
To hint pure thought, and warn the favoured soul
For future trials fated, to prepare;
To prompt the poet, who devoted gives

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35 Wordsworth’s Formative Years p.167. Jonathan Wordsworth dismissed both Meyer’s and Pipers’s arguments in his influential reading of ‘The Ruined Cottage’ materials in The Music of Humanity. He makes two brief references to Thomson in passing, but his influence is not discussed at all.

36 The oak was also the sacred tree of the Druids, and an oak grove carries connotations of a sacred space, a temple dedicated to Druid mysteries.
Thomson’s poet enters the grove and ‘Deep-roused’, he feels ‘A sacred terror, a severe delight, / Creep through [his] mortal frame’ as ‘A voice, than human more, the abstracted ear / Of fancy strikes’. “Be not of us afraid,” the voices tell him, and relate how they are fellow-creatures come from the same Parent-power, and how some of them were human once. But now, having ‘through stormy life / Toiled tempest-beaten’, they have attained to ‘holy calm’ and ‘harmony of mind’. They invite the poet who seeks their company to sing with them ‘Of nature’ ‘and Nature’s God’ at the ‘visionary hour’ of midnight, or high noon – the two nodes of the day when spiritual beings were believed to be in closest contact with the earth. This privilege they bestow ‘On contemplation, or the hallow’d ear / Of poet swelling to seraphic strain.’ (562-3).

Much of Thomson’s adaptation of Virgil here is coloured by his own interest in the lore of the Druids, who carried out rituals, in darkened groves and caves that were very similar in their aims, to those of the Mysteries in Ancient Greece, as well as those carried out by the superstitious in Roman Italy. The Druids believed in the transmigration of souls, and that death was only a transitory process in which the soul simply passed from one life to another, without too much distress or difficulty. Wordsworth’s interest in the Druids was possibly a direct result of the influence of Thomson.37 Thomson’s own actual views about Druids are not recorded in any detail, but in his poetic works Druids are seen as supporters of British Liberty, and in Liberty Book IV they are credited with teaching the Britons to be fearless of death and therefore able to drive the Romans back off British soil. They are also held in high moral regard in Book V, since political liberty is the fruit of virtue, and Thomson acknowledges the Druids as seers, having knowledge of true virtue. In Thomson’s last major work, The Castle of Indolence, the Druid of the Knight of Arts and Industry helps rescues the people who have been lured into the Castle. Striking at his British Harp, he invokes the muses and sings to the spellbound inhabitants, proclaiming the greater power of nature under God.38 The knight, in turn, waves a magic wand (a tool of the Druids) that has an ‘anti-magic power’ revealing truth from falsehood. The inhabitants see the horror of their selfish and indolent existence and have the choice to repent. And when Wordsworth believed that he was possessed of a certain insight, a special sense, granted to ‘Poets, even as Prophets’ (XII 301), and tells of visions he had had on Salisbury Plain, it is possible to see another Thomsonian influence as he relates that he saw Druids raising and lowering their magic wands (XII 349-353).

References to Druids are found scattered throughout Wordsworth’s works, they haunt his early poems and continue to appear, intermittently, in his later works as revered figures of Britain’s

37 When Thomson died, Collins wrote an ‘Ode Occasioned by the Death of Mr Thomson’ which began, ‘In yonder grave a DRUID lies’. Collins had also included references to the druids in his ‘Ode to Liberty’. Wordsworth echoes Collins’ Ode for Thomson, in ‘Lines Written near Richmond on the Thames at Evening’. For a classic study of Thomson’s connection with druids see J.M.S. Tompkins ‘In Yonder Grave a Druid Lies’ The Review of English Studies 22 85 (1946): 1-16.
38 It is widely understood that Thomson’s ‘little druid wight’ was intended to be Pope.
past history. In the notebook used for Ms 1 of The Borderers, a page in the middle of the draft is headed ‘Druids’ and lists texts about them, mainly from ancient classical sources, but including Drayton’s PolyOlbian. Geoffrey Hiller argues that Drayton discovered ‘a new poet-archetype’, suggesting a “perfecte paterne of a Poete” in the bards and druids of old British History’. Drayton was the first poet to treat them imaginatively, well before they became a topic of interest in the eighteenth century. He also distinguishes between bards and Druids – the former are ‘singers and poets’, the latter are ‘wise lawgivers, teachers and priests’. Drayton creates a tradition where none actually existed, imagining a continuity between the ancient Druids and Welsh bards who had kept a British voice alive over the centuries, and he grants their inspirations to be of divine origin. In PolyOlbian Drayton records that the bards are:

Addicted from their births so much to Poesie  
That in the Mountaines those who scarce have seene a Booke,  
Most skilfully will make, as though from Art they tooke. (Book 4. 188-90)

The linkage between innate poetic ability, the mountain environment, and the lack of books all suggest, very strongly, an influence on Wordsworth’s characterisation of the Pedlar, whose ‘art’ would appear to be a product of Nature. The Pedlar might therefore be seen as something of a druidic bard, given his natural wisdom and eloquence, but Wordsworth had quite other plans for his character.

IV. ‘In all forms of things there is a mind'

Virgil’s ‘O fortunatos nimium’ passage presented a picture of rural delight, and was emblematic of a pastoral ideal in a land, extremely happy under the benign rule of Saturn. But between the opening description of the ‘happy tillers of the soil’, and the closing lines describing the happy husbandman whose work ‘sustains /Country and cottage homestead’, Virgil calls upon the muses to ‘Receive’ him and grant him a vision of the truths of ‘the nature of things’. He seeks to know the secrets behind Nature, for that knowledge will give him the wisdom that a poet, writing about man and the universe, needs for his work. At the time of writing The Ruined Cottage at

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39 Richard Gravil has conveniently summarised various studies on Wordsworth’s interest in Druids as part of his own argument in Wordsworth’s Bardic Vocation and Christine Gerrard comments on earlier interest in the Druids, and on Thomson’s connection with them, in The Patriot Opposition to Walpole.
40 The Borderers. Ed. R. Osborne p. 420-1. It was from Selden’s commentary on Drayton’s PolyOlbian that Wordsworth took his obscure motto for the main title page of Lyrical Ballads: Quam nihil ad genium, Papiniane, tuum!
41 Geoffrey G. Hiller, “‘Sacred Bards” and “Wise Druides”: Drayton and his Archetype of the Poet’ ELH 51 (Spring 1984): 1-15 This paragraph draws directly on Hiller.
42 See Appendix B.
Racedown and Alfoxden, Wordsworth was contemplating what materials and knowledge he needed to have assimilated in order to write an epic work. He had discussed the magnitude of this task with Coleridge the previous April, and Coleridge had remarked that it would take him twenty years to prepare for and then write such a work, and that it would combine knowledge with inspiration, as Milton had done (CL I 320-1). Obviously a vision granted by the muses would provide immediate understanding, and circumvent the laborious task of study required to make the poet ‘capable’ of writing such a work. Wordsworth had already spent some eighteen months dedicated to study at Racedown at the time of this conversation with Coleridge.

Virgil was heavily influenced by Lucretius, who followed the philosophy of Epicurus, and had written, in Book VI of De Rerum Natura: ‘Whether or not a man is benefited by the gods depends upon his state of mind when he apprehends divine ‘images’. If he himself is tranquil he will attain to the right view of the gods’ (71-8). The Epicurean pursuit of tranquillitas saw virtue in pursuing meditative states of mind, reveries and even trance states that might be conducive to the apprehension of divine images (phantasiae) of the ‘gods’. Epicurus believed that the greatest cause of pain (and preclusion of bliss) was mental disturbance produced by a false belief about the nature of things. It was therefore crucial to attain to some ‘true’ vision of things, by attempting to see the world as the gods saw it, by attaining to their vision of ‘things as they are’. Wordsworth made a determined attempt to attain such a meditative state of mind during his time at Alfoxden. Entries in the Alfoxden and Christabel notebooks record his attempts to achieve some kind of unmediated vision of the ‘reality’ behind the world of appearances by stilling his mind and hoping to achieve a purer vision, in states of blissful indolence.

These notebook entries were of especial interest to mid-twentieth century scholars tracing source material for passages that were to be found in The Prelude. But many of those passages had already been used in ‘The Ruined Cottage’ to describe states of mind experienced by the Pedlar, as the foundations of his mind were laid. Several of these extracts describe the ebb and flow of Wordsworth’s consciousness as he entered into states of reverie in which his mind either loses consciousness of the ‘things’ around it, or those ‘things’ are described as entering into his mind. They record attempts to attain to a state of mind beyond that defined by sense experience, an experience of the ‘high realms of nature’ the world of the gods – a state often described as some kind of ‘mystical’ union. The earliest examples of passages that later appear in The Prelude, are found in the Alfoxden notebook and were composed between January and March 1798, when Wordsworth was working on defining the Pedlar’s character. These passages have been the subject of a great deal of study, and early attempts at explication often turned to discussions of mystical experience.

43 In his 1926, parallel text edition of The Prelude, Ernest de Selincourt published many of the passages found in various notebooks. In Appendix B to his edition of The Excursion, he also reproduced several others (PW V 340-47). As was noted in Chapter 6, de Selincourt described Wordsworth’s productions as ‘Hartley transcendentalized by Coleridge, and at once modified and exalted by Wordsworth’s own mystical experience’ (DSP lvi). Geoffrey Hartman made these notebook entries central to his argument in Chapter 6 of Wordsworth’s Poetry 1779-1814. He noted that the passages were only published in 1949 and had attracted relatively little interest, appearing to be overflows from ‘The Ruined Cottage’. Hartman’s reading is controlled by his need to fit the passages in question into the argument of his thesis about the dialectical tension between Nature and Imagination that he finds definitive of the mind of his poet.
In the Introduction to *The Mind of a Poet*, Richard Havens stated that his study was devoted to seeking the reasons for ‘Wordsworth’s preoccupation with the mysterious, the elusive, and the vague [which] cannot…be dismissed as mere romanticism.’ Havens was concerned to ‘bring together what he says about God, nature, reason, fear, passion, solitude, the imagination, and the like’ (7) and to ‘demonstrate the fundamental unity of his thought’. Meyer Abrams’ and Jonathan Wordsworth’s readings of Wordsworth have followed a similar quest, though also identifying Wordsworth’s attitude of mind as specifically ‘romantic’. Geoffrey Hartman’s phenomenological approach focussed on the question of ‘consciousness about consciousnesses’ and all these approaches suggest that Wordsworth was something of a ‘victim’ of ‘unconscious’ mental experiences. I have argued here that there is a ‘fundamental unity’ to Wordsworth’s thought, and that it can be discovered in his attempt to bind his beliefs together as a cohesive system, framed according to Stoic principles that had captured his imagination while reading Cicero. I also suggest that Wordsworth’s reading in Cicero had led him to define Thomson’s appreciation of Nature as Epicurean, and that he made a point of distinguishing his own Stoic appreciation of nature from Thomson’s supernatural representations. In doing so he again provides evidence of his dedication to a Stoic ‘one–life’ philosophy and rejects the transcendentalism implied by the existence of supernatural entities.

It is, of course, a commonplace of pastoral poetry for poets to seek inspiration in nature, reclining in a shady bower, under a shadowing tree, or in the entrance of a secluded cave. But in the notebook entries of the Alfoxden period Wordsworth is paying particular attention to the movements of his mind:

To gaze

On that green hill and on those scattered trees
And feel a pleasant consciousness of life
In the impression of that loveliness
Until the sweet sensation called the mind
Into itself, by image from without
Unvisited, and all her reflex powers
Wrapped in a still dream of forgetfulness.
I lived without the knowledge that I lived
Then by those beauteous forms brought back again
To lose myself again as if my life
Did ebb and flow with a strange mystery. (Alfoxden Notebook. *PW* V 341)

In this passage Wordsworth describes the ‘light of sense’ going out as his gaze, on the forms of nature, leads to a state of trance in which his mind is absent from the world of the sense. But there are no ‘flashes’ that show him ‘The invisible world’. Instead he enjoys a blissful state of ‘no-mind’, and then finds himself drawn back into consciousness, which is also described as ‘beauteous’ in its own right. Consciousness ebbs and flows between these two states of mind, and Wordsworth’s mind is

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44 As noted above, a particular interpretation of the dynamics of this experience was central to the argument of Hartman’s influential study of Wordsworth. I credit Wordsworth with a far greater consciousness of what he was doing in writing the famous passage in Book VI, as he acknowledges the ‘glory’ of his own mind in a guarded reference to claims that would have been seen as heretical by orthodox Christians.
elsewhere represented as freely floating between them as an ‘amphibian’. Other similar examples are found in the Christabel Notebook:

Oh 'tis a joy divine on summer days
When not a breeze is stirring, not a cloud
To sit within some solitary wood,
Far in some lonely wood, and hear no sound
Which the heart does not make, or else so fits
To its own temper that in external things
No longer seem internal differences
All melts away, and things that are without
Live in our minds as in their native home (Christabel Notebook. PW V 343)

This state of mind, in which all boundaries between self and other dissolve, is described as a ‘joy divine’. It is also a state of an almost total loss of everyday consciousness, but again without any experience of divine vision. In another experience a specific ‘spot’ is chosen that is described as having a particular sympathy with Wordsworth’s mind.

I turned
Towards a grove, a spot which well I knew,
For oftentimes its sympathies had fallen
Like a refreshing dew upon my heart
I stretched myself beneath the shade
And soon the stirring and inquisitive mind
Was laid asleep; the godlike senses gave
Short impulses of life that seemed to tell
Of our existence, and then passed away (Christabel Notebook PW V 344)

These descriptions of meditative experiences were later re-written and incorporated into The Prelude, where they provide the ‘mystical’ passages so definitive of the early books. But to describe such experiences as ‘mystical’ is problematical, as H.W. Garrod noted – given that mind and matter in these descriptions appear to be composed of the same ‘substance’. Mysticism traditionally posits a relationship between a contingent and limited material consciousness and some transcendent spiritual reality. Such experience is also usually framed in a religious context even if, as is usually the case, the mystic is unorthodox and places his, or her, beliefs outside traditional religious doctrine or dogma. Wordsworth utilises traditional terms and refers to ‘God’ and to some ‘higher’ form of existence in The Prelude, but his interactions are limited to description of nature. He does not invoke a deity, and sometimes natural forms are described as entering into the mind in a blending of ‘divine’ and human that is not appropriate to religious doctrines that define a transcendent deity.

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45 Jonathan Wordsworth made these reveries a particular focus of his study of Wordsworth’s mind in The Borders of Vision.

46 Wordsworth’s poetry is ‘essentially mystical. But whereas the mysticism of other men consists commonly in their effort to escape from the senses, the mysticism of Wordsworth is grounded and rooted, actually, in the senses’ (Wordsworth 105).
These passages are ones that some critics have taken as evidence of Wordsworth’s debt to Coleridge’s ‘one life’ philosophy, or as early representations of his ‘creative imagination’ at work. While granting that the passages in the notebooks relate to personal experiences, I suggest they also provide evidence that Wordsworth was formulating ideas that would explain his own cognitive processes according to Stoic beliefs about cognition and epistemology. Such an interaction between mind and nature, a blending of human and divine, can be accounted for in terms of the Stoic belief that matter and mind, nature and ‘God’ are all composed of one material substance. Like Jane Worthington, I appreciate that Wordsworth’s experiences can be understood as a product of the ‘serene and blessed mood’ of his own mind, but I also suggest he was fitting his descriptions of those ‘moods’ into a Stoic system of thought he found amenable to his own experiences, and which he saw as offering a means of understanding them.

Other entries in the notebooks are more specific in their representation of Stoicism; one proposes that by becoming attuned to the divinity in nature, we will naturally become sympathetic to the needs of our fellow human beings – whom Wordsworth will later describe as all sharing in ‘one human heart.’

Why is it that we feel
So little for each other, but for this,
That we with nature have no sympathy,
Or with such things as have no power to hold articulate language?
And never for each other shall we feel
As we may feel, till we have sympathy
With nature in her forms inanimate,
With objects such as have no power to hold
Articulate language. In all forms of things
There is a mind (Alfoxden Notebook PW V p340)

Since the Stoics believed the divinity could exist in the human mind as well as in nature it was possible for Wordsworth to draw the inference that there is a mind ‘in all forms of things’. This is not a purely ‘mystical’ understanding, but a ‘philosophical’ one, according to the logic of the Stoics. Wordsworth would famously describe this combination as, ‘a sense sublime’ a few months later, a concept blending the matter of the senses with the sublime power of the divinity, a power that ‘impels / All thinking things, all objects of all thought, / And rolls through all things’.

In another notebook entry, Wordsworth relates how the mind, or here, the ‘eye’, has its own creative power, a ‘godlike faculty’ that acts with ‘absolute essential energy’ as an autonomous power. The passage refers to the paradox of human consciousness – that we are, by nature, two-minded beings, capable of thinking, and also of thinking about our thinking. We are capable of reflecting on our own actions, from a higher vantage point, a godlike faculty, an ability to ‘reason’ about experience that is ‘divine’, something that distinguishes the human mind from that of other animals.

There is creation in the eye
Nor less in all the other senses: powers
They are that colour, model and combine
The things perceived with such an absolute
Essential energy that we may say
That those most godlike faculties of ours
At one and the same moment are the mind
And the mind’s minister. In many a walk
At evening or by moonlight, or reclined,
At midday upon beds of forest moss,
Have we to Nature and her impulses
Of our whole being made free gift, and when
Our trance had left us, oft have we, by aid
Of the impressions left behind
Looked inward on ourselves, and learned, perhaps,
Something of what we are. (Christabel Notebook PW V 343-4)

The second half of the passage describes another manifestation of the power that comes from ‘Nature’. The creative mind of nature is again described as entering into and possessing the human mind, leaving ‘impressions’, phantasiae, that can then inspire the human mind in the production of its own thoughts as well as reflecting on its divine nature.

Wordsworth and Dorothy appear to have experienced such trance states together, and to have discussed some belief that it might be possible for the soul to leave the body in a state of visionary awareness, as ‘when the light of sense / Goes out in flashes that have shown to us / The invisible world’ (Prelude VI 534-6). But it would seem that although such states of mind were blissful, and seemed to come close to some experience of vision, Wordsworth, like Virgil, was never granted the vision he was seeking. During his early months at Alfoxden, Wordsworth was apparently exploring the possibility that such reveries might lead to a state of vision, one that might inspire great poetry. But it would seem that he abandoned his Virgilian, Epicurean, search for tranquillitas during the time he was writing ‘The story of Margaret’. And by the time he was at work defining the character of the narrator of that story, he had decided that his identity should be the epitome of a virtuous man who was both reared in and followed the course of nature – a natural Stoic.

In abandoning his hope that states of reverie might lead him to some vision of ‘Nature’s hidden causes’, Wordsworth shared Virgil’s recognition that he was not inspired enough, frenzied enough, warm hearted enough, to attain to such a vision:

But if to these
High realms of nature the cold curdling blood
About my heart bar access, then be fields
And stream-washed vales my solace, let me love
Rivers and woods, inglorious. (Georgics II 475-486)

I suggest that Wordsworth had the conclusion to Georgics II in mind as he mused on his own abilities and capacities as a poet when writing ‘The Ruined Cottage’ drafts in 1797-8. Although he had acknowledged that the ‘visions’ of his youth were the productions of an over-strong imagination, and were possibly more closely aligned with madness than divinity, he still entertained the hope that he
might be granted some *true* vision in states of *mild* indolence, rather than enthusiastic rapture. ‘But if’ he too is barred access to the ‘High realms of nature’ and cannot be granted a vision that takes him to sublime heights, then he too, will forgo fame and seek solace in his love of the fields, rivers and woods. In this he follows Virgil closely – and in the pursuit of such a life he will no longer rely on passive pastoral, but will be working in a georgic mode, recognising the need to actually have to do the *work* of composing poetry, as a deliberate and eloquent art.
Chapter 12

‘The Ruined Cottage’

I. Incipient Madness: Far from the Madding Crowd

God made the country, and man made the town.
What wonder then, that health and virtue, gifts
That alone make sweet the bitter draught
That life holds out to all, should most abound
And least be threatened in the fields and groves

The peasants are miserably poor; their cottages are shapeless structures (I may almost say) of wood and clay - indeed they are not at all beyond what might be expected in a savage life.  

Life in the country is supposed to be idyllic, and Wordsworth had left the city and the corrupt attitudes of its citizens, to retire to ‘his’ country villa at Racedown. But although he and Dorothy described themselves as ‘perfectly happy’ in their solitary retirement when they first arrived, they would have soon realised that it was not the romantic Arcadian setting Dorothy had anticipated (EY 146-150), nor could it be described as pleasant pastoral. Although she later remembered Racedown as ‘the place dearest to [her] recollections upon the whole surface of the island’ (EY 281), she was also aware of the sharp contrast between the ideals of country life and the realities of the actual situation. Life for the rural poor in Southern England in the late 1790s reflected the impact of the war with France and the ‘miserably poor’ peasants were in genuine despair. Two bad harvests, an extremely cold winter, and the drain on the economy caused by the war, had left some of the local people near to starvation. A shortage of flour had seen bread prices double, and those with little money could not even afford their daily bread. In the verse fragment ‘The Baker’s Cart’, Wordsworth gives voice to the poor as a starving girl exclaims: ‘the wagon does not care for us’. He would have appreciated that the situation was similar to events he would have known about in Blois in 1792 when a flour merchant was murdered by the hungry mob, and in the riots that followed thirteen people were killed.  

In the ‘The Baker’s Cart’ passage, Wordsworth represents an English counterpart to the ‘hunger-bitten girl’ he encountered with Beaupuy in France (Prelude IX 511). Her appearance can be seen as another apt figure of admonishment, bearing in mind his sincere belief, in 1792, that such injustice would soon be overcome (IX 518-529). The English girl has not even a cow to her arm; instead, she carries a pitcher that she has just filled from the spring – from nature’s freely given bounty. But in her famished state Wordsworth notes that her mind was beginning to lose its grip on reality:

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1 Cowper The Task (I. 749-53); Dorothy Wordsworth (EY 162)
2 Nicholas Roe, Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years p. 71.
Denied her ‘daily bread’, ‘the common food of hope’, the girl’s mind is driven into a state in which she loses touch with any sense of natural justice. She, like the female vagrant is a victim of the social situation in Britain, one that denies fundamental laws of nature. In a pre-Malthussian world\(^3\) Wordsworth entertains concepts of natural justice, and he makes the point here that if ‘the rights of man’ are denied, then (as had been case in France) the ‘rebellious heart’ would, ‘to its own will / Fashion the laws of nature’. If fundamental ‘laws of nature’ are abused or denied, then those who are suffering will, of necessity, re-fashion the laws to suit their own ends in order to survive. Wordsworth’s argument here shows him still critical of the Pitt government and those, like Burke, who supported the necessary oppression of the poor that resulted from the misrule of the aristocracy.

What is significant about this fragment, and another one written at the same time, ‘Incipient Madness’, is the fact that Wordsworth is no longer concerning himself with any possibility of direct political action. He has conceded that the political situation is hopeless. The optimistic feelings expressed at the sight of the ‘hunger-bitten girl’ in France, had been proven to be over-enthusiastic and impractical. Change had not occurred through direct political action in Britain, and the Gagging Acts had extinguished hope for popular reform. Furthermore, Wordsworth now found himself in a position of relative affluence and privilege at Racedown, compared to the realities of the poor living in their ‘shapeless structures’. In France, Wordsworth had been prepared to fight to improve the lot of the poor. At Racedown, he found himself in an awkward position as his republican idealism came face to face with practical reality. He had arrived at Racedown in pursuit of the virtues of a country life and was not above collecting and chopping wood and handling the spade, which Dorothy tells us he did ‘with great dexterity’ (\(EY\) 163); he also helped catch and kill rabbits. He was supposedly engaging in the virtuous pursuits of a frugal countryman. But he would also have been aware that the ‘charming walks’, ‘good garden’, and ‘pleasant house’, described in Dorothy’s letters could be deemed luxurious, when compared with the hovels of the local peasants. Moreover, his good fortune in finding rent-free accommodation was dependent on the exploitation of the West Indian slaves whose forced labour had provided the Pinney family with their fortune.

But Wordsworth’s retirement to his country ‘retreat’ had been a strategic one. He had not turned his back on politics and returned to writing poetry. In his letter to Matthews after his arrival he had written, ‘As to writing it is out of the question’ (\(EY\) 169). In 1795 he remained profoundly

\(^3\) Just. Malthus’ *Essay on the Principles of Population As it Effects the Future Improvements of Society, with Remarks on the Speculations of Mr Godwin, M. Condorcet, and Other Writers* was published in 1798.
disturbed and ‘in despair’ of the political situation, and of his impotence. His intention was to further pursue the ‘moral questions’ that had preoccupied him in London; and although he had abandoned the via activa, he had deliberately embarked on the work of study, the via contemplativa that Aristotle acknowledged to be an activity both practical and virtuous. He had not given up his republican idealism and turned, instead, to Burke, but had begun to follow Cicero’s example closely, turning from politics to philosophy in a pragmatic response to the practicalities of the historical moment. His primary concern, arising out of his period of study and reflection at Racedown, was to change minds if, given the circumstances, he could not change the material situation.

I take his concerns for the peasant girl, for the female vagrant, and for Margaret, as representations of genuine feeling. It is also possible to assume that there were feelings of guilt relating to his own situation and his separation from Annette and his daughter. His studies had been focussed on a personal need to redefine his own identity, as he had recognised the extent to which his own mind, in the ‘dizzy raptures’ of his youth, had been closer to madness than prophecy. His diagnosis of the state of mind of the girl in ‘the bakers cart’ fragment is insightful and further reveals his knowledge of Cicero; what he describes is her ‘incipient madness’. As her mind gives up hope and enters into despair she will lose touch with the continuity of past experience. She will lose the threads of consciousness that hold her identity together and, like the lunatic, the lover, the inspired poet, and the poor in France, will begin to fashion ‘the laws of nature’ to the will of her own heart. Her state of mind will become exactly like that of the character Wordsworth created for Margaret in The Ruined Cottage. And in writing her story, Wordsworth suggests a cure for such a state of mind, a cure that he has also applied to himself as a means of curing the disease of his own strong imagination, which he realised had also been tinged with a form of ‘incipient madness’.

Wordsworth set ‘the story of Margaret’ some ten years earlier, when the economic situation had been as grim as that in 1797. Unlike similar tales of suffering about poor women abandoned in times of war with the loss of their men-folk to the navy or army, this tale does not appear to be one of political protest. There is no Godwinian philosophy that seeks to blame governments, no acknowledgement of vehement passions as causes of destruction. Margaret’s husband does not commit murder to get money to support his family. He sells himself to the government as a soldier and, ironically, this economic transaction – the purchase of his services by the government – legitimises his right to kill (or be killed). Unlike other narratives that wring pathos out of their descriptions by dramatising events through the use of ‘moving accidents’, the story of Margaret is delivered in measured tones, by an eloquent Pedlar. In the poem Wordsworth focuses on language and rhetorical skill to paint his picture of unrelenting suffering. There is no dramatic climax or denouement, rather a slow inexorable description of Margaret’s demise, as her body gives way to grief, and her cottage to the elements. And the Pedlar’s measured response and his apparent lack of concern raise several questions that have continued to perplex the critics.

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4 (As those written by Robert Southey at the time obviously were).
So why does Wordsworth tell the story of Margaret, and do so through the narrative provided by the strangely verbose Pedlar who, for all his eloquence, seems to offer a pathetically inadequate, impractical, and even unmanly response to Margaret’s situation? The pathos with which the tale is narrated is universally acknowledged as masterful. We, as readers, experience genuine feelings of concern for Margaret’s plight, and feel outraged that her decline and subsequent demise seems so inevitable; surely she could have been helped? And why is the Pedlar so unable, or unwilling, to actually do anything for her? Such questions lead, in turn, to enquiry about Wordsworth’s intentions in writing the poem – what is its purpose? Is it meant to be realistic, or is it an allegory? Is there a moral to the story? And if so, does the Pedlar provide it? And if he does, is it coherent and meaningful, or impractical and idealistic? Is he a wise commentator with knowledge to impart, or is he a detached visionary with insight into nature, but no practical understanding of human experience? Should we perhaps share in De Quincey’s realistic and unimaginative response when he complained about the Pedlar painting the scene with ‘so many coats of metaphysical varnish’, and suggested he should have offered Margaret a guinea, or at least some rational advice?5

F.R. Leavis proposed that ‘The Ruined Cottage’ was ‘the finest thing Wordsworth ever wrote’, and it is generally understood to be a work that marks a new, masterful direction in his poetic career. But some readers have been concerned that the sentiments expressed by the Pedlar, especially in the ‘reconciling addendum’, appear to lack any real sympathy for Margaret’s situation; and there is implied criticism of Wordsworth’s motives and morals in representing the Pedlar’s character in such a manner. And yet it is the Pedlar’s eloquent delivery of the ‘story of Margaret’ that has caused those readers to feel so strongly involved in the, fictional, Margaret’s fate. Rather than coming to appreciate the skill with which Wordsworth constructed his narrative and caused them to ‘suspend their disbelief’, they feel a need to question the values represented by the Pedlar, and to imply that Wordsworth also lacked feeling. For some critics his treatment of the topic is suggestive of some unconscious guilt, an indication that he could not ‘afford to feel’ for Margaret’s situation. I argue here that such criticism has missed the mark completely, since Wordsworth, quite deliberately, paints the Pedlar’s character as that of a stoic, and his actions and his abilities are typecast.

In ‘The Ruined Cottage’, Wordsworth demonstrates that he is not a ‘poet of nature’ – in the sense that Coleridge, and later Arnold, liked to believe. The poem reveals him to be a practical artist who used language with technical skill in order to produce a very tangible effect on the affections of his readers. It was a skill, an art, that he needed to keep hidden, and his description of the Pedlar’s character at the beginning of the poem creates a sense that the Pedlar’s eloquence is both sincere and natural, a product of nature, not of any art. In his telling of Margaret’s story the Pedlar goes to extraordinary lengths to produce a narrative with a profound sense of pathos that strikes deep into the heart of his auditor, as well as the reader of the poem. His ability to relate such a powerful poetic narrative is supposedly based on a natural ability gained from his natural upbringing among the mountains, something that is related to the reader before we hear of Margaret’s demise. The extensive

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description of the Pedlar’s childhood and youth, and the strong influence of nature on the
development of his character, informs the reader of the Pedlar’s ethos, and this was something
Wordsworth added later to the original ‘story of Margaret’. But it also serves as something of a
smokescreen, to hide the fact that the pathos of the Pedlar’s narrative is the result of Wordsworth’s
own technical ability as an eloquent rhetorician. Sympathetic readers become pre-disposed to accept
the Pedlar’s language as a product of his ‘natural’ native genius rather than recognising his actual
genius, as a masterful orator who has definite designs on their feelings. Of course his character and
his abilities are solely Wordsworth’s creation; and it is Wordsworth’s ‘eloquence’ in the poem that
‘makes us feel’. Another word for eloquence, in the discussion of rhetoric, is ‘style’; and it is
Wordsworth’s use of style that makes the poem work so effectively – the style that Matthew Arnold
had denied to the ‘simple’ Wordsworth.

The original ‘Story of Margaret’, begun at Racedown in the spring of 1797, was composed
over the course of a year, with a new focus on the character of the Pedlar taking up the early spring of
1798. At the beginning of March 1798, Wordsworth had produced a manuscript of some 900 lines
entitled ‘The Ruined Cottage’ and identified as Ms B (DC MS 17) by Ernest de Selincourt. This text
was later published as the first Book of The Excursion in 1814, after moderate revision. In The Music
of Humanity, Jonathan Wordsworth studied ‘The Ruined Cottage’ and ‘The Pedlar’ as the two
separate poems they became in 1799, writing a separate commentary on each. James Butler, editor of
The Ruined Cottage and The Pedlar for the ‘Cornell Wordsworth’, does not print the complete text of
Ms B as a 1798 ‘Reading Text’, since he followed Jonathan Wordsworth’s example. He does,
however, provide the text of Ms B as a ‘Transcription’. In my reading of ‘The Ruined Cottage’ here, I
have chosen to focus on the original Ms B text of March 1798. I read that text as an identifiable and
relatively coherent ‘finished’ draft of ‘The Ruined Cottage’ in which the Pedlar’s history remains an
important component, as it does also in The Excursion. I also refer to lines that were added by April
1798, that make up a concluding addendum to Ms B. This passage was later used to support the
argument being made in Book IV of The Excursion; ‘Despondency Corrected’. In order to prevent
confusion in referring to two different narrators, and a narrative within a narrative, I will refer to the
original speaker of the poem as ‘Wordsworth’ here. After discussing the opening lines that describe
the setting I then focus on the Pedlar’s narration of the ‘story of Margaret’, the first part of the poem
to be written, before then turning to comment on the significance of the description of the growth of
the Pedlar’s mind. My text for Ms B is Ernest De Selincourt’s printing, which is found in the Notes to
II. The Story of Margaret

‘The Ruined Cottage’ opens with a description of a late morning scene on an oppressively hot summer’s day.

Twas summer, and the sun was mounted high,
Along the south the uplands feebly glared
Through a pale steam… (PW V 379)

As was noted in the previous chapter the lines, which were adapted from An Evening Walk and revisions written at Windy Brow, deliberately echo a passage from Thomson’s Summer that was his rendition of a passage in Virgil’s Georgics.⁶ Wordsworth is, therefore building on an original Virgilian topos, mediated by Thomson. In between these two passages that describe the setting and situation, reference is made to a figure in the landscape and the day is described as:

Pleasant to him who on the soft cool grass
Extends his careless limbs beside the root
Of some huge oak whose aged branches make
A twilight of their own, a dewy shade
Where the wren warbles, while the dreaming man,
Half conscious of that soothing melody
With sidelong glance looks out upon the scene
By those impending branches made more soft
More soft and distant (10-18)

The passage creates a comparison that is intended to contrast this dreaming man’s experience with that of the narrator of the poem, who finds the summer heat far from pleasant. At this point he switches from his description of the landscape to voice his own feelings:

Other lot was mine
Across a bare wide Common I had toiled
With languid feet which by the slippery ground
Were baffled still; and when I stretched myself
On the brown earth, my limbs from very heat
Could find no rest (18-23)⁷

The narrator (Wordsworth) relates how his face was assailed by a host of insects, and his ears by the sound of crackling gorse seeds exploding in the heat. He had found no peace when he attempted to lie down to rest out on the open common exposed to the heat, and had sought the shade of a distant group of elms. There is an obvious contrast made between the otium of the dreaming man, reclining underneath the oak, and the labor of the unhappy narrator whose travel is also travail, as he ‘toils’ across the plain. This contrast between the Tityrus-like figure and the narrator’s situation, figures him as a workingman, and the poem, as something of a georgic. The content of this poem is not the

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⁶ See PW 1, pp. 8 & 10 for the original lines and the revisions to An Evening Walk.
⁷ These are the lines that are taken from the 1794 Windy Brow revisions to An Evening Walk.
product of passive inspiration, not the production of a dreaming man’s imagination, but the creation of a poet, hard at work at his art of poetry.

As Wordsworth approaches the shade of the elms he discovers that they shelter a ruined cottage and another reclining figure – the Pedlar. But before proceeding with a discussion of Wordsworth’s engagement with the Pedlar, we need to give more attention to the relevance of the dreaming man, who the reader now realises is only as an imagined figurative presence. The critical reader needs to ask just who he is, why he is there and, given that he is apparently only a thought in Wordsworth’s mind, what purpose does he serve, other than providing a comparison to Wordsworth’s experience of the same day? He originates in lines from Thomson’s Summer, inspired by the passage from Georgics III (331-4) that Thomson had used, and Wordsworth had also echoed.

’Tis raging noon; and, vertical, the sun
Darts on the head direct his forceful rays.
O’er heaven and earth, far as the ranging eye
Can sweep, a dazzling deluge reigns; and all
From pole to pole is undistinguished blaze.
In vain the sight dejected to the ground
Stoops for relief; thence hot ascending steams
And keen reflection pain. Deep to the root
Of vegetation parched, the cleaving fields
And slippery lawn an arid hue disclose. (Summer 432-6)

A few lines later Thomson introduces one of the several varieties of musing figures that figure in his landscapes: the cool, virtuous, and, ‘thrice happy’ man:

Thrice happy he, who on the sunless side
Of a romantic mountain, forest-crowned,
Beneath the whole collected shade reclinés;
Or in the gelid caverns, woodbine wrought
And fresh bedewed with ever-sporting streams,
Sits coolly calm; while all the world without,
Unsatisfied and sick, tosses in noon.
Emblem instructive of the virtuous man,
Who keeps his tempered mind serene and pure.
And every passion aptly harmonised
Amid a jarring world with vice inflamed. (Summer 458-468)

Once this connection is established, it is possible to recognise that Wordsworth’s ‘dreaming man’ is in fact an emblematic presence; an ‘Emblem instructive of the virtuous man’ who has retired from the turmoil of the world and its vices, and is intent on keeping his mind free from the vehement passions that can cause such distress to the human mind. But this ‘virtuous man’, who has ‘harmonised’ his passions has not, like a Stoic, attempted to completely eliminate their influence; nor does he express any concern for the affairs of the world. From the Pedlar’s perspective he would be described as an ‘idle dreamer’, and although he may consider himself ‘virtuous’ for distancing himself from the vices of the world, his passivity suggests that he conceives of virtue as an Epicurean pursuit of pleasure. His presence is invoked at the beginning of the poem, only to then be dismissed, as Wordsworth also turns his back on the pastoral ideal symbolised by such an attitude, and on a
poetics based on inspiration, something that had earlier been his aim. In ‘The Ruined Cottage’, Wordsworth demonstrates this shift as he presents a new form of poetic art at which he has to actively ‘toil’, as he makes a conscious distinction between a Pastoral and a Georgic poetics, and subtly criticises Thomson for his ‘evasion of history’.

Leaving behind the image of the Epicurean dreaming man, Wordsworth arrives at the ruined cottage under the cluster of elms that provide a shady grove, to discover a ‘real’ man, one who also appears to be dreaming. The Pedlar is described as lying stretched at his ease with his eyes shut; it is inferred that he is asleep: ‘I guess he had no thought / Of his way-wandering life’ (303-4). But the Pedlar is not dreaming; he is quite *compos mentis*. He rises, points to the source of water needed for the overheated narrator’s refreshment and, on the latter’s return from the well, launches into his eloquent narration of Margaret’s story with a voice that instantly assumes authority: ‘I see around me [here] / Things which you cannot see’ (325-6). His topic is mortality and the link between mortals and the nature that surrounds them:

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We die, my Friend,
Nor we alone, but that which each man loved
And prized in his particular nook of earth
Dies with him or is changed, and very soon
Even of the good is no memorial left. (326-330)
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Margaret’s death leads to the inevitable demise of the things she loved and prized. While she was alive there was a ‘bond of brotherhood’ between her and the waters of the spring. And although it is noted that the waters are not alive, cannot feel, and do not mourn, they are described as having ‘ministered / To human comfort’ as she ‘upheld the cool refreshment drawn / From that forsaken well’ (350-1).8 When Margaret was alive and well she took some initiative in a partnership with nature, but after her death nature reverts to its wild state; animals and snakes invade her cottage, and ‘The worm is on her cheek’. Her death entails the cottage’s collapse, as neither she, nor her more practical husband, is there to maintain it.

Having invoked Margaret’s presence, the Pedlar then relates the history of her decline, tracing its origins back ten years to two failed harvests and the economic hardship compounded by war. Margaret’s family managed to reconcile themselves to the circumstances at the time, but ‘ere the second spring / A fever seized her husband’ (396). During his sickness their savings were exhausted, and no work that brought in sufficient income could be found on his recovery. Although his physical illness was overcome, his mental health suffered from his inability to provide for his dependants and, ‘poverty brought on a petted mood / And a sore temper’ (428-9). And as his emotional health

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8 In a later revision (Ms D) the Pedlar adds:

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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 passions  (73-79).
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This is a much more explicit indication of the Pedlar’s skill. In *De Oratore* Cicero relates how an eloquent orator might succeed in not only causing the jury to cry but would also ‘have forced every stone to weep and wail...’ (1. 245)
degenerated, his behaviour started to affect that of his children. It is important to recognise that – as was the case with the girl in ‘The Baker’s Cart’ passage – it is the mental rather than the material situation that is the presenting problem. This again reflects the stoic attitude pervading the poem; Wordsworth places more importance on the character’s attitude of mind rather than their material circumstances. De Quincey’s critique, and those voiced by other materialist-orientated critics have missed the point. Matters of consciousness here are more significant than the material situation. Though this is not to deny that the situations of all the suffering women in Wordsworth’s poems of this period were caused by very obvious material circumstances that were caused, in part, by actions of a government that ‘does not’ care for the poor.

At this point in the narrative, the oratorical Pedlar becomes far more engaged in the ‘manner’ than the ‘matter’ of his tale and, in a dazzling display of rhetoric, he momentarily brings the dead to life as he gives voice to Margaret’s response to her husband’s state of mind:

> ‘Every smile’
> Said Margaret to me, here beneath these trees,
> ‘Made my heart bleed’ (437-9)

Her presence ‘here beneath these trees’ (we can imagine the Pedlar gesturing), brings the narrative to an emotional climax and:

> At this the old man paused.

Then, in a magnificent subversion of Thomson’s sublime ‘haunts of meditation passage’ in Summer – the climax to the section beginning ‘Tis raging noon’ (line 423) – the Pedlar notes the time: ‘the hour of deepest noon’, and the place: ‘here beneath these... enormous elms’. The moment of noon, like the moment of midnight, was the bewitching hour when spirits were believed to come closest to the earth, and might be visible or audible to mortals. At this moment in time it was thought possible to momentarily escape the temporal world and hear the voices of the dead, just as they spoke to the poet in Thomson’s ‘druidical’ grove and invited him to join in their supernatural song. But in ‘The Ruined Cottage’ it is the human speaker who has just given voice to the dead – Margaret has not, in fact, spoken. And then, to continue this deconstruction of Thomson’s sublime, supernatural, middy-moment, the Pedlar goes on to describe the other voices he can hear:

> At this still season of repose and peace,
> This hour when all things which are not at rest
> Are cheerful, while this multitude of flies
> Fills the air with happy melody,
> Why should a tear be in an old man’s eye? (442-446)

Natural voices sing in the Pedlar’s grove, not supernatural ones, and the insects that had previously disturbed Wordsworth’s attempts at rest are seen here, to fill the air ‘with happy melody’. Wordsworth demonstrates a new poetic voice here; one that engages with the human world, and reveals a new appreciation of the role of language. The oratorical Pedlar has assumed the status once given by Wordsworth to the Druid or Bard – but the powers the Pedlar draws on are natural, not
The distinction is important, and marks the beginning of the period when Wordsworth chose not to pursue supernatural topics for his poetry. Not only does the narrative of ‘The Ruined Cottage’ mark a turn from Pastoral to Georgic – from a poetics of inspiration to one of labour – it also marks Wordsworth’s rejection of a bardic vocation, with its reliance on supernatural inspiration. His earlier idealisation of the poet as bard, druid, or prophet of some god, is replaced by a new conception of the poet as an eloquent orator. The earlier reliance on unconscious, supernatural, inspiration is abandoned in favour of an art of poetry in which the poet consciously constructs his meanings and controls his language. This ‘new’ understanding provided the rationale for the division of labour in the production of the *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798, in which Wordsworth chose to write on ‘natural’ topics, and did not want to engage in the supernatural, while Coleridge preferred to exploit the possibilities it offered. The grounds for the later ‘radical difference’ in the two men’s beliefs about poetic theory can be traced back to Wordsworth’s concern to treat ‘natural’ rather than ‘supernatural’ topics, and is revealed in work completed in the spring of 1798.9

The Pedlar’s eloquent narrative demonstrates particular oratorical skills as he succeeds in making Margaret’s story come alive and be experienced as a heart-felt reality. The feelings involved are not produced by any dramatic ‘moving accident’ or representation of sublime terror, but by a milder form of *pathos* and a sense also of *lacrimae rerum*, the tears in things – as the Pedlar’s example again demonstrates. He has been touched by his own eloquence, despite his stoic character, and he is quick to dismiss such sentimentality. But Wordsworth allows him this minor demonstration of weakness in order to reveal that he is not actually the hard-hearted moralist that some readers have discerned, in their less than close reading of the text. In ‘The Ruined Cottage’, Wordsworth is doing a number of remarkable things – one of which is to distance himself from his earlier sympathy with Thomsonian reveries and the poetics of the pastoral dreaming poet. Where Thomson had brought the dead to life through recourse to superstition and supernatural agency, the Pedlar achieves the same effect by a natural one – his use of eloquent or ‘poetic’ language.

In bringing his narrative to a conclusion, for the moment, the Pedlar poses a couple of rhetorical questions. His tale is sad, but why should he and Wordsworth feel grief at a time of ‘repose and peace’ when nature is cheerful. Why should human feelings cloud the natural happiness to be found in nature?

Why should a tear be in an old man’s eye?
Why should we thus with an untoward mind,
And in the weakness of humanity,
From natural wisdom turn our hearts away,
To natural comforts shut our eyes and ears.
And feeding on disquiet, thus disturb
[The calm] of Nature with our restless thoughts? (446–452)

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9 Coleridge set out his version of a distinction between his ‘supernatural’ concerns and Wordsworth’s ‘natural’ ones in 1798 at the beginning of Chapter 14 of *Biographia Literaria*. His influential and widely discussed commentary needs to be re-examined in the light of the reading I present here in order to appreciate Wordsworth’s understanding of distinctions that Coleridge wrote about from memory some eighteen years later.
The question is the same one raised by Cicero in his treatment of grief in Book 3 of the *Tusculans* where he argued that grief is not becoming to a virtuous man. The Pedlar’s rhetorical questions raise the possibility of debate on the topic – he is not simply laying down some stoic admonishment that represents the truth of the matter. His position should not be interpreted as a rigorous endorsement of values that might have been considered ‘truly’ stoical and reflecting an uncompromising sternness. Cicero had had to admit his own weakness in the face of grief when his daughter and granddaughter died; he was unable to dismiss his feelings with ‘manly fortitude’. And in his treatment of the topic, Wordsworth allows that there is a tear in the Pedlar’s own eye, and that it is not a sign of weakness.10

The Stoic ideal would be to follow the logic of natural wisdom and not disturb the calm of nature with ‘an untoward mind’; and the Pedlar is recommending that ideal. But he also acknowledges some feeling, and this reveals his humanity. It is important the Pedlar can show that he still has feelings, that he is still human; but he also demonstrates that he is not under their control.11

As he listens to the Pedlar, Wordsworth also notes that the Pedlar’s countenance, and his cheerfulness and mildness of expression – representations of his *ethos* – serve to moderate Wordsworth’s own feelings:

He spake with somewhat of a solemn tone
But when he had ended there was in his face
Such easy cheerfulness, a look so mild
That for a little time it stole away
All recollection and that simple tale
Passed away from my mind like a forgotten sound. (453 - 458)12

But this respite is short lived, his words have sunk deeply into Wordsworth’s heart, and the matter has struck home. After some further conversation on ‘trivial things’ he begins to feel a sense of distress as he realises that the story has, in fact, made a deep impression on his heart/mind:

He had rehearsed
Her homely tale with such familiar power
With such a tender countenance, an eye
So busy, *that the things of which he spake*
*Seemed present*, and attention now relaxed
There was a heartfelt chillness in my veins (462-467 my emphasis)

The Pedlar has the ability to present a story so convincingly through the skill of his oratory that he can make Wordsworth see the things spoken about in his imagination. Having told Wordsworth, on his arrival, that he could see things around him that Wordsworth could not see, he then proceeded to

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10 When Wordsworth was later confronted with the extraordinary feeling of grief over his brother John’s death, he experienced something of the extent of Cicero’s grief. In a letter to Southey he acknowledged Southey’s condolences and the fact that, as Southey had written, ‘grief will…and must have its course; there is no wisdom in attempting to check it under the circumstances which we are all of us in here’ (*EY* 542). In Coleridge’s absence it was Sir George Beaumont who fulfilled the role that Atticus had fulfilled for Cicero.

11 As a ‘sentimental’ poet, in his earlier romantic youth, Wordsworth would have understood a tearful response to be a necessary and beneficial expression of genuine feeling - here the signification is different.

12 One might compare his demeanour with that of the ancient mariner, whose recital of events is delivered in the manner of a man possessed.
show’ him the ‘visions’ in his own mind. The meeting with the Pedlar at the ruined cottage presents a strange scene of instruction, in which the Pedlar demonstrates his skill to his auditor, as well as setting out the grounds of his imaginative ability for those readers of the poem who do have eyes to see what he is actually doing. He narrates the story with such eloquence and vividness of description that his auditor is able to see the same scene in his mind’s eye – and his feelings are also strongly affected; as if the scene was real; as if Margaret was actually present as a ‘flesh and blood’ reality. What he fancies he ‘sees’ is an impression, a phantasia, an ‘image’ in his imagination. It is this very ‘concrete’ experience of the power of the imagination that was a focus of Wordsworth’s poetic art in 1798, and it played a significant part in the poetic theory of the Preface to Lyrical Ballads. This imaginative ability to paint vivid and realistic pictures in the mind of an auditor was described in some detail by Quintilian in Book VI of De Institutione Oratoria. He considered it to be one of the greatest skills of an orator and claimed originality for his particular understanding and treatment of this ability, which he discusses immediately after his description of the ethos-pathos dichotomy. The assumption can therefore be made that Wordsworth had read further on in Book VI, and had also discovered Quintilian’s particular treatment of ‘imagination’.

III. Quintilian’s Imagination

Having stated that he had dealt with everything useful there is to know from other sources on the topic of emotional appeals in Book VI of the Institutes, Quintilian then tells his readers that he intends to go further:

My design is to bring to light the secret principles of this art, and to open up the inmost recesses of the subject, giving the result not of teaching received from others, but of my own experience and the guidance of nature herself. The prime essential for stirring the emotions of others is, in my opinion first to feel the emotions oneself.

(VI ii 25) 13

In asserting that the orator must himself feel the feelings that he wishes to produce in his audience, he points out that this requires more than mere acting:

But how are we to generate these emotions in ourselves, since emotion is not in our power? I will try and explain as best I may. There are certain experiences, which the Greeks call phantasiae and the Romans visiones, whereby things absent are presented to our imaginations with such extreme vividness that they seem actually to be before our very eyes. It is the man who is really sensitive to such impressions who will have the greatest power over the emotions. (VI ii 29)

This belief, by itself, is not original to Quintilian. Aristotle in his Rhetoric and Poetics; Horace in the Ars Poetica; and Cicero in De Oratore all discuss this commonplace of classical theory. Horace’s treatment of this topic in his Ars Poetica is perhaps the most well known: ‘si vis me flere, dolendum est / Primum ipsi tibi.’ – ‘If you would have me weep, you must first show grief yourself’ - The speaker (rhetorician or poet) must first express the emotion he intends to make his audience/reader feel. Quintilian is not claiming that he discovered this belief; it is his further comments on phantasiae that he feels are uniquely his. See: Aristotle, Rhetoric 1.1.1356a, Poetics XVII 1455a; Horace Ars Poetica ll 99-103; Cicero De Oratore ll xxviii, xlv.
He suggests that possession of this visionary ability is something that all may readily acquire, and proposes that all people with a strong imagination can turn their experiences to good use:

> When the mind is unoccupied or is absorbed by fantastic hopes or daydreams, we are haunted by these visions of which I am speaking to such an extent that we imagine that we are travelling abroad, crossing the sea, fighting, addressing the people, or enjoying the use of wealth that we do not actually possess, and seem to ourselves not to be dreaming but acting. (VI ii 30)

Having described his own habits of daydreaming, and revealing that his own mind had a strongly visual and active imagination, Quintilian seems to think this is an ability that everyone shares. He asks: ‘Surely then, it may be possible to turn this form of hallucination to some profit?’ Reveries and daydreams that many see as useless fantasies (or fancies), can be put to good use by the orator who wishes to be truly effective. Through fully indulging in this experience of strong imagination/visualisation, while also maintaining a state of consciousness, the ideal orator can imagine himself so strongly involved in the situation he is describing, that he can feel as if he were actually there. The strong state of mind produced when such experiences are vividly ‘perceived’ by the orator in his delivery, creates a sense of authenticity to his manner of speaking and is a ‘power’ readily transmitted to the minds of his audience.

The transfer of emotion from the speaker to the auditor is accomplished by his careful, specific, and skilful use of language, and this is reinforced by his actual state of mind at the time. This state of mind has to be really felt but, as Cicero had earlier stressed in De Oratore, this ability is an ‘art’ or a ‘skill’ (tekne); it depends on technique, not inspiration. Although the speaker is animated and is expressing strong passions, he is not actually ruled by them, his eloquence is something he controls and uses to his express advantage. The eloquence of the expert orator has the capacity to affect the minds of those he addresses, and is based on his very precise knowledge of the worth of words. Wordsworth adapts Quintilian’s advice to the production of his eloquent poetry in ‘The Ruined Cottage’. By having Margaret’s story told by the Pedlar in the form of a dramatic narrative he can produce a similar effect to that achieved by an eloquent orator. As Quintilian states:

> From such impressions arises that enargeia that Cicero calls illustratio and evidentia which makes us seem not so much to narrate as to exhibit the actual scene, while our emotions will be no less actively stirred than if we were present at the actual occurrence. (VI ii 32)

To Quintilian this imaginative identification is obviously something he managed to achieve through his own particularly strong powers of visualisation, and he evidently believed others could train themselves to experience a similarly ‘active’ imagination. I suggest that these ‘secret principles’ described by Quintilian formed the basis of Wordsworth’s imaginative art, and that a careful reading of the Preface to Lyrical Ballads will discover that, among other things, Wordsworth adverts to this

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14 *hoc animi vitium ad utilitarem non transferemus? Another translation gives ‘Shall we not turn this lawless power of our minds to our advantage? Animi vitium literally refers to a defective or false disposition.

15 Aristotle also made the point that if someone is remembering an actual experience, a personal memory, then he/she will also experience the feelings associated with that earlier experience.
particular imaginative ability. Wordsworth exploited Quintilian’s appreciation of *enargeia* as he developed his own theory of poetry, recognising the importance of consciously focussing his innate ability, rather than relying on Nature, or God, to provide him with some unmediated form of inspiration, or vision. Where Coleridge was arguing that the truly inspired poet surrendered totally to the force of his inspiration, and that this was the true nature of Wordsworth’s imaginative genius, Wordsworth himself was proposing a more conscious art. It was one in which the poet stayed in control of the mind and his words, utilising a conscious, imaginative art to impress imaginations on the minds of his readers.

In Book X of the *Institutes*, as Quintilian discusses the finer points of the best orator’s abilities, he returns to the topic of ‘Imagination’ in a discussion about speaking extemporaneously:

> Those images therefore, to which I have alluded, and which I observed are called *phantasiae* (by the Greeks), must be carefully cherished in our minds and everything on which we intend to speak, every person, and every question and all the hopes and fears likely to be attendant upon them must be kept full before our view and admitted as it were, into our hearts; for it is the strength of feeling combined with energy of intellect that renders us eloquent. Hence even to the illiterate words are not wanting if they be roused by some strong passion. (X vii 15)\[16\]

It is highly significant that Wordsworth chose to use the last two sentences quoted here for the motto (in Latin), that he inserted, on a half-title page, between the Preface and the Poems, to the 1802 and 1805 editions of *Lyrical Ballads*. The motto offered his classically educated readers a paratextual clue to a significant aspect of his experimental poetry.\[17\]

Wordsworth’s personal challenge in the late 1790s was to try and achieve the transfer of emotions identified by Quintilian as a particular skill of the orator, in his own ‘eloquent’ poetic work. Where the orator had the possibility of gesture, personal presence, and the advantage of a dramatic delivery, the poet had to rely entirely on language, and on *style* or ‘eloquence’. Wordsworth attempted to overcome something of this handicap by writing dramatic narratives in which he could represent men speaking to men – the ‘art’ that Stephen Parrish identified as playing a central role in the poetry in *Lyrical Ballads*. The *tour de force* – the masterpiece of Wordsworth’s skill in developing this rhetorical art is found earlier, however, in his representation of the ‘oratorical Pedlar’.

The Pedlar’s performance clearly demonstrates the extent of Wordsworth’s ‘knowledge’ of rhetorical skills and the ‘power’ of his own eloquence, as he presented a narrative in which the Pedlar demonstrates a seemingly ‘natural’ ability to make his auditor, and the reader, feel the pathos of Margaret’s experience. This is a very different understanding of imagination to that defined by

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\[16\] ‘Quare capiendae sunt illae, de quibus dixi, rerum imagines, quas vocari phantaisiae indicavimus, omniaque, de quibus dicturi erimus, personae, quaestiones, spes, metus habenda in oculis, in adfectus recipienda. *Pectus est enim, quod disertos facit, et vis mentis. Ideoque imperitis quoque, si modo sint aliquo adfectu concitati, verba non desunt*. I have used Watson’s translation here. For the final two sentences Butler gives ‘For it is feeling and force of imagination that make us eloquent. It is for this reason that even the uneducated have no difficulty in finding words to express their meaning, if only they are stirred by some strong emotion’, Butler’s use of the phrase ‘force of imagination’ for *vis mentis* (literally strength of mind) is highly suggestive. But Watson’s use of ‘energy of intellect’ resonates more strongly with the sense of *enargeia*.

\[17\] He also used the passage in his letter to Charles James Fox in January 1801, where it expressed sympathy for the poor, whose feelings are as valuable as those of the rich. It can therefore be inferred that the sentiments behind the passage, were already in his mind as he was writing the content of the 1800 Preface.
Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria* with its abstract philosophical/theological definition of ‘the imagination’ and its differing appreciation of ‘the willing suspension of disbelief that alone constitutes poetic faith’. Wordsworth’s more technical understanding of imagination does not rely on ‘faith’, but on tangible, emotional and physical effects made on the imagination (mind) of the auditor/reader by poetic language that is specifically tailored to produce such effects and which has been consciously crafted in order to achieve that end.\(^{18}\) Such language could be described as ‘expressive’, but it is the product of a profoundly ‘pragmatic’ poetic art.

**IV. Margaret’s Demise**

In Part II of ‘The Story of Margaret’, Wordsworth expresses a natural desire to know more about Margaret’s fate, though he knows his enquiry could be seen as indelicate if it were made for the wrong motives. His request is therefore ‘impelled / By a mild form of curious pensiveness’ (472-3). The Pedlar, in response, presents a brief lecture about the evils of seeking pleasure from another’s suffering, but concedes:

> that there is often found  
> In mournful thoughts, and always might be found  
> A power to virtue friendly; weren’t not so  
> I am a dreamer among men – indeed  
> An idle dreamer. ’Tis a common tale  
> By moving accidents uncharactered  
> A tale of silent suffering, hardly clothed  
> In bodily form, and to the grosser sense  
> But ill adapted, scarcely palpable  
> To him who does not think. (482-491)

The Pedlar distances his own beliefs about virtue from those of idle dreamers. He is not like the ‘dreaming man’ who sees virtue in ignoring another’s sorrows in a pursuit of his own individual pleasure and ‘happiness’. The Pedlar’s narrative is not told as entertainment, it is not sensational – ‘the moving accident is not [his] trade’ – and it requires that the listener ‘think’ as well as feel. The auditor has to use his own imagination in order to ‘grasp’ what is going on.

In taking up the narrative again, the Pedlar recalls how eagerly he anticipated his next meeting with Margaret. He was ‘glad’ to see the lofty elm trees again, and relates that he was ‘cheereed’ by ‘many pleasant thoughts’ on his way ‘O’er the flat common’ as he approached her cottage (499-500).\(^{19}\) But his desire for the future good of seeing her again is not realised upon his arrival. Margaret is speechless when she meets him and promptly bursts into tears. The emotions attached to the situation lay beyond the Pedlar’s capacity to cope with them at the time, and he also finds it difficult to relate them in the present moment:

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\(^{18}\) My reading here proposes a radically different kind of ‘Natural Supernaturalism’ to that presented by Meyer Abrams in his reading of Wordsworth.  
\(^{19}\) His joyful state of mind, on crossing the common, is contrasted with that of Wordsworth’s ‘toil’.
I cannot tell how she pronounced my name 20
With fervent love and with a face of grief
Unutterably helpless, and a look
That seemed to cling upon me, she inquired
If I had seen her husband. As she spake
A strange surprise and fear came to my heart
And I could make no answer  (508-513)

Margaret’s searching eyes are felt to ‘cling’ to him for support, but her strong feelings of grief are too intense for the Pedlar who, in his feelings of ‘strange surprise and fear’ is himself rendered speechless. Even after she has told of her husband’s departure he had:

little power
To give her comfort and was glad to take
Such words of hope from her own mouth as served
To cheer us both’ (530-533).

Although he did not contribute many of his own words to the conversation, the exchange ‘built up a pile of better thoughts’, and when he left she sent a blessing after him ‘With tender cheerfulness, and with a voice / That seemed the very sound of happy thoughts’ (542-3). What is striking about the Pedlar’s narrative is his unease at Margaret’s feelings, and his candour in admitting that he had little power to give her comfort. She found her own ‘words of hope,’ once she felt supported by his presence. He gives sympathetic support – but does not ‘console’ her. It is she who gives voice to ‘cheerfulness’; he does not attempt to cheer her up. He is ‘stoic’ in his attitude and neither shows excessive emotion nor allows himself to be overcome by her feelings of despair. Nor does he offer any false hope about a situation that he is not competent to judge; he has no idea whether her husband will return.

His subsequent visit finds Margaret absent from the cottage (and her baby) as she wanders the countryside aimlessly and fails to attend to her domestic duties. When she finally arrives, her appearance is so distressing, that the Pedlar twice tells Wordsworth that the sight of her would have made his soul/heart grieve. She tells the Pedlar that she is ‘changed’; her eyes are ‘downwardcast’, her voice ‘low’, her body ‘subdued’, and as she sighs, there is ‘no motion of the breast…No heaving of the heart’ (634-5). Her spirit is practically gone from her. And as the Pedlar relates his memory of this visit he feels, in the present moment, that his ‘spirit’ now ‘clings to that poor woman’. His vision of her manner, look, presence, and goodness, is so strong that he feels ‘a momentary trance’ come over him. She exists in his memory so vividly, that it seems to him she is not dead but only sleeping, and might wake again ‘when he shall come again / For whom she suffered’(624-5). The Pedlar is momentarily overcome with emotion, reveals his sensitivity, and then regains his composure and constancy of mind.

20 The ‘I cannot tell’ construction is used for similar effect in Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey as Wordsworth distances himself from his former powerful feelings.
In contrast to his earlier visit, when his presence had been sufficient to cheer her up, he now appears incapable of raising her spirits. He offers the ‘best hope and comfort [he] could give’ as he comes to leave her, and notes that she thanked him for his will, but not for his hope (641). The next visit, however ‘she enquired / If [he] had any hope’ but, at the same time, she voices her own loss of the will to live. She declares that she has no hope, and relates that she would die of sorrow, if it were not for her children. Her boy, however, was already gone to the workhouse, and the next time the Pedlar visited (his last visit) ‘her little babe was dead’. But Margaret lingered on for ‘five tedious year’ after this, tied to the spot in expectation of her husband’s return as the cottage fell into decay until, finally, she also died: ‘Last human tenant of these ruined walls’ (742). Ms B ends with the bleak description of Margaret’s death, and the words ‘The End’ are written underneath this last line. There are no concluding remarks to redeem the mood of despair and distress at the bare facts of the situation. A close reading of this second section reveals the Pedlar’s lack of apparent action, his inability to contribute anything other than guarded ‘hope’ and ‘will’. Even at his first visit after her husband had gone, he admitted that he could offer her little practical help – she had to supply the words that might overcome her distress.

Ernest De Selincourt notes that in subsequent pages in the manuscript book Wordsworth made three different attempts at a reconciling passage for the close of the poem. But these were then struck out and a much longer passage written, one that incorporated passages from earlier unused first drafts. In this addendum, which was added to the poem by April 1798, the Pedlar offers words of consolation to his auditor and something of his philosophy of life. Possibly this passage was written in response to questions and concerns raised by Coleridge. In attempting to justify the extreme pathos of the story, the Pedlar’s subsequent remarks have been seen by some critics, as suggesting even greater heartlessness on his part. They are, however, totally in keeping with his character as a ‘natural’ Stoic attempting to gain a true sense of equanimity in the face of the disturbances of the emotions. He does not suggest that Wordsworth should not be touched by feelings of pity for Margaret’s plight; such feelings are part of human nature. But it is inappropriate to let those feelings become an indulgence to the extent that they overcome the mind. For then the individual has given away his, or her, freedom to make the conscious, reasoned choices about life that the wise man must make. Margaret is dead. In narrating her tale the Pedlar brought her memory to life, and Wordsworth’s heart was touched; but now she must be left to rest in peace, and Wordsworth is admonished for indulging in excessive grief:

My friend, enough to sorrow have you given
The purposes of Wisdom ask no more
Be wise and cheerful, and no longer read
The forms of things with an unworthy eye
She sleeps in the calm earth and peace is here. (PW V 403 ll 118-122)

The Pedlar relates that, on a later visit to the ruined cottage the setting, which had previously been described as being ravaged by wild nature, appeared to him in quite a different light. It
conveyed to his mind ‘so still an image of tranquillity’ and looked so ‘calm’ and ‘still’ and ‘beautiful’ that the image displaced the uneasy thoughts that filled his mind, leading him to think:

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. (130-134)

The Pedlar again stresses the fact that he is not an idle dreamer, but someone who had meditated deeply (on man, on nature, and on human life) in his moments of quiet reflection, or contemplation. This re-description of the ruined cottage as a place of peace, rather than despair, has been seen by some critics as a most unsatisfactory aspect of the Pedlar’s character, and has attracted much critical discussion. Wordsworth’s intention was to provide a suitably ‘stoic’ ending in keeping with the Pedlar’s ethos, which is described, within the main body of the poem, as also endowed with human feelings. Wordsworth paints the Pedlar’s character as a stoic who cannot be described as rigidly ‘stoical’, or unfeeling. But to those who fail to appreciate the finer points of Wordsworth’s characterisation, the Pedlar comes across as a stereotypical ‘Roman’ Stoic whose words and actions appear dismissive of Margaret’s suffering and show little understanding. I have suggested that this is a misconception – that Wordsworth was drawing on Cicero’s philosophical works which represented the milder and more reasonable pursuit of virtue as set out by Panaetius. The Pedlar’s message, and his example, is that ‘happiness’ is achievable in this world through the pursuit of virtue, something that requires a measure of control over the emotions and achievement of equanimity in the face of all adversity. Unlike the Epicurean, the Stoic neither flees from pain, nor pursues pleasure; for him ‘the good’ is an absence of all emotional pressure, and a feeling of genuine equanimity that is a permanent state of mind; Constantia. Without an appreciation of this particular Stoic bias, the Pedlar’s closing remarks can indeed cause concern to readers of the poem who find his remarks insensitive. The Pedlar would see his remarks as simply describing things as they are, by nature – the natural states of affairs.

The Stoics were arch-realists, pragmatically concerned with facing the world, as it was, not with evading its realities. Stoicism absorbed the essence of the wisdom of the Greeks, which was concerned with finding out how things actually, ‘objectively’ are. The Stoics then understood that boundless human desires or appetites had to conform to the inescapable laws of ‘Fate’, or ‘Providence’ or ‘Nature’. As J.M. Cocking noted in his study Imagination: A Study in the History of Ideas, in Stoicism, ‘Greek fatality becomes nature’s laws…as an attitude Stoicism can be distinguished from the sensibility which seeks to identify consciousness with something outside the immediately real’(264). Human beings are plagued by desires that appear to dictate the necessity of their actions – unless they are able to develop a higher sense of reason that will enable them to see nature ‘as it is’. Then they will be able to face up to and accept their ‘Fate’ and enter into a communion with Nature, and experience the deeper sense of ‘joy’ that is described in the
‘philosophical’ passage that makes up a large part of the reconciling addendum to ‘The Ruined Cottage’.

I do not attempt to provide a more detailed reading of the concluding addendum here, since it would commit me to extending this study to include comment on The Excursion. The passage later formed a substantial part of the Wanderer’s reply to the Solitary in Book IV of The Excursion, ‘Despondency Corrected’, and should be read in that context. However, several lines of the concluding addendum will be found to have originated in the passages from the Alfoxden and Christabel Notebooks, and a more detailed study of those notebooks will reveal the extent to which leading ideas expressed later in The Excursion originated in work done in 1798-9. Briefly summarised, the passage (which Stephen Gill described as the most important lines Wordsworth ever wrote), relates how humans have to develop the right relationship with Nature, developing their own intellectual capacities in partnership with Nature by careful observation and action: ‘Thus disciplined / All things shall live in us and we shall live / In all things that surround us’ (PW V 402 ll 78-80). And as this capacity is enhanced it ultimately produces a state of wisdom which ensures that humans ‘shall move / From strict necessity along the path / Of order and of good’ (ll 93-95). Wordsworth’s, and the Wanderer’s, understanding of ‘necessity’ here is fundamentally Stoic and a reading of Book III of Cicero’s De Finibus (On Moral Ends) can supply statements about Stoic ethics that are very similar in sentiment to those voiced by the Pedlar.

The original ‘bleak’ ending of Ms B was in fact the first part of ‘The Ruined Cottage’ to be written, and Wordsworth developed the story from an initial exercise in describing the despair of a half-crazed, distressed, and abandoned woman rooted to her ‘wretched spot’. It is likely that he took as his starting point a passage that he found in Southey’s Joan of Arc, and that he then developed a scenario to explain her situation.21 The tale of Margaret’s demise provides the pathos for Wordsworth’s narrative, and in casting the Pedlar as the narrator of her story, he developed an alternative focus to that of her suffering. In developing the Pedlar’s specific ethos, Wordsworth intended that he would offer some form of consolation to Margaret in her distress. In order for him to provide that consolation, he needed to have a philosophy that might offer ‘hope’ – which is the opposite of ‘despair’. The Latin words spes and desperare provide a better sense of the relationship between the two terms. And as has been noted, ‘hope’ is indeed what the Pedlar did offer Margaret. Wordsworth’s use of the term ‘hope’ throughout the poem plays on this fundamental opposition, something clear to the mind of a reader of Latin, whose education had trained him to think according to such distinctions. In the poem, Wordsworth continued to draw on Cicero’s description of the economics of the emotions in the Tusculans, as he defined the attitude portrayed by the Pedlar. But he

21 At her cottage door
The wretched one shall sit, and with dim eye
Gaze o’er the plain whereon his parting steps
Her last look hung. Nor ever shall she know
Her husband dead, but tortur’d with vain hope
Gaze on- then heart-sick turn to the poor babe
And weep him fatherless. (Book 7. 325- 31)

also went into great detail to narrate just how the Pedlar acquired his philosophy of life. Some 252 lines of the poem are dedicated to defining the growth of the Pedlar’s mind in the long preamble, narrated by the actual narrator of the poem.

As has already been noted, the purpose of such a description is to give the reader a clear and comprehensive understanding of the Pedlar’s ethos before he begins his narration. But Wordsworth was obviously carried away by his preoccupation to develop the Pedlar’s character, and it is therefore not surprising that, on second thoughts, he chose to remove this extensive character study and make it a separate poem, leaving the much shorter introductory passage to be found in Ms D. But the most remarkable thing about the poem that was now produced, ‘The Pedlar’, was the fact that its description of the growth of the Pedlar’s mind was to become a record of the growth of Wordsworth’s ‘own mind’ in the ‘Two-Part Prelude’, something of great significance to the understanding of Wordsworth’s description of his own ethos. The lines describing the growth of the Pedlar’s / Wordsworth’s mind contain some of the most characteristic passages that Wordsworth ever wrote, about what seem to have been experiences of his own early life. They construct the Ur text for the most striking passages about his youth in The Prelude and represent the ‘mystical’ element in his philosophy of mind. They also form the basis of the Wanderer’s character in The Excursion. What makes these passages so ‘impressive’ is the fact they present a record of the development of the Pedlar’s, and then Wordsworth’s mind, that draws on the Stoic understanding of Phantasiae being impressed on the mind in the formation of its character, as Cicero had described in his Academica.

V. ‘Colours and forms of a strange discipline’.

The character description of the Pedlar in the original ‘Ruined Cottage’ opens with an acknowledgement of his sensitivity. A tear is described as standing in his ‘luminous eye’ when he discovers that Wordsworth knew his childhood home in the mountains; the place where he relates having read his bible at an isolated school ‘far from the sight of city spire or sound / Or Minster clock’ (58-9). Having established these origins and the solitude of his home, Wordsworth turns to describe ‘how the foundations of his mind were laid’ amidst this sublime landscape, ‘not from terror free’ (77-8). ‘While yet a child’ the impressions of nature formed by the mountains were literally impressed on his mind:

He had perceived the presence and the power
Of greatness, and 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. He had received
A precious gift, for as he grew in years
With these impressions would he still compare
All his ideal stores, his shapes and forms.
And being still unsatisfied with aught
Of dimmer character, he thence attained

264
An active power to fasten images
Upon his brain, and on their pictured lines
Intensely brooded, even till they acquired
The liveliness of dreams (80-94)

These lines, and the ones immediately following them, originate in the notebook entries mentioned above, and although they have been interpreted as evidence of Wordsworth’s own ‘mystical’ experiences – when they are later used to describe the growth of his own mind in *The Prelude* – they incorporate Stoic concepts about *phantasiae* that were originally used to define the particular movements of the Pedlar’s mind. Wordsworth’s own childhood visionary experiences and the imaginations (*phantasiae*) of his extremely visual memory are linked here with Stoic descriptions of how the mind develops, to furnish the history of the Pedlar’s mind. As a child, ‘deep feelings’ are impressed on his mind; that they ‘lay like substances’, suggests an image of the sedimentary strata that contemporary geologists were describing at the time. The Pedlar has a natural ability, the ἀφορμαί given by nature to infant minds, that allows him to make comparisons and build up his ‘ideal stores’ of memory to create an individual identity. He then attains ‘An active power to fasten images/Upon his brain’ – the ‘apprehensive habitude’ that Wordsworth will later define for the growth of his own mind in the ‘Two-Part Prelude’ (II 286). This active power is presumably the ability to ‘grasp’ an impression that is a true representation – *phantasia katalēptikē* – rather than a mere fancy. It is an active power because, according to the Stoic system of belief, all knowledge of true things requires an act of assent. As Tad Brennan writes ‘Assent is the lynchpin of the Stoic system. Assent is the fundamental psychological activity – more fundamental even than believing something, or desiring something’ (*The Stoic Life* 52). The mind is not a purely passive receiver of images as Locke later argued in his picture of the *tabula rasa*; there has to be an innate capacity in the mind to both discriminate and organise the *phantasiae* received by the senses. The Pedlar’s cataleptic impressions are organised to build up a store of knowledge, and a stable sense of identity. The suggestion that the images in his memory can come alive and act with ‘the liveliness of dreams’ appears to be a reference to Wordsworth’s own particularly vivid visual memory, something he also attributes to the Pedlar’s mind.

As a youth, the Pedlar continues to be impressed by the feeling that Nature is alive, especially when he is alone and in a meditative frame of mind. And whether this is the result of ‘his peculiar eye / Or by creative feeling overborne, / Or by predominance of thought oppressed’ (103-5), he ‘sees’ in the ‘naked crags’ – ‘Even in their fixed and steady lineaments…an ebbing and flowing mind’ (106-7). Although ‘In his heart / Love was not yet’ (109), nor ‘the pure joy of love’ received from the sights and sounds of nature:

22 Theresa Kelley discusses this topic *Wordsworth’s Revisionary Aesthetics*.
23 The Stoics had already debated the problems with the analogy of stamping impressions on a wax tablet. Chrysippus had raised the problem of each subsequent image obliterating the other, as well as needing to account for two simultaneous impressions being present; and he had amended the concept to refer to ‘an alteration of the soul’. Brennan engages in more detail with the intricacies of the Stoic position in Pt II of *The Stoic Life*.
24 It could also be an allusion to *De Institutione Oratoria* VI ii 30.
he had felt the power
Of nature, and already was prepared
By his intense conceptions to receive
Deeply the lesson deep of love, which he
Whom Nature, by whatever means, has taught
To feel intensely, cannot but receive. (113-118)

The Pedlar’s development is following clear stages here. Nature has impressed his mind with *phantasiae* that he has assented to, but only with her help. And by referring new impressions to those previously received, he has built up ‘intense conceptions’ – true representations of things, notions (*ennoiā*) that will prepare him for the next stage, which is also under the tutelage of Nature. ‘Ere his ninth summer’ the young Pedlar is sent out into the hills as a shepherd, where he is then touched by the ‘unutterable love’ he feels for the beauty of Nature, and in his ‘gladness and deep joy’– emotional states that are appetitive and excessive – he loses himself in nature:

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his spirit drank
The spectacle. Sensation, soul and form
All melted into him. They swallowed up
His animal being; in them did he live
And by them did he live. They were his life. (129-133, my emphasis)
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This ecstatic state is considered to be evidence of election, of:

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a visitation from the living God,
He did not feel the God; he felt his works;
Thought was not. In enjoyment it expired.
Such hour by prayer and praise was unprofaned
He neither prayed, nor offered thanks of praise
His mind was a thanksgiving to the power
That made him. It was blessedness and love. (135-141 my emphasis)
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It would be customary for such experiences, such ‘transports of delight’ to be seen as celebrations of great gladness and joy: *gaudio exultare* or *effusa laetitia*. But in the understanding of the Stoic teachings, these excessive states are *disturbances* of the mind, and Wordsworth writes of them here, quite deliberately, as *appetites* of the *youthful* mind. They are sublime and wonderful states of being, and they affirm the power of Nature. The Pedlar *feels* his faith in the divinity without need for any sight of an actual entity. Nor does he conceive of ‘God’ as some being who requires to be praised. Even though he had, early on, reverenced the teachings of the Bible and acknowledged its ‘written promise’, he feels no need for such scriptural authority, since the inscriptions in the book of nature appeared more real than the records of revealed religion: ‘But in the mountains did he feel his faith / There did he see the writing’ (149-50).

Although these enthusiastic emotional experiences are contrary to Stoic conceptions of wisdom, Wordsworth does not judge them; the Pedlar’s experience is ‘age appropriate’. And it is exactly the same sequence of events that is later set out in the description of his own youth in *The Prelude*, where he is also offering an impartial, phenomenological description of the growth of his
own mind. Young men do not act with wisdom; they pursue sensation and experiences that are
focussed on self-love before they are capable of objectifying those experiences and learning to love
others. The Pedlar’s ecstatic experiences are fortunately mediated by the fact that his heart was
‘lowly’, and although his being became ‘sublime and comprehensive’ with the knowledge he
acquired (157), he was also ‘meek in gratitude’. And, by meditating on his experiences,

he acquired
Wisdom which works through patience; thence he learned
In many a calmer hour of sober thought
To look on nature with an humble heart
Self-questioned where it did not understand,
And with a superstitious eye of love. (161-166)

Wordsworth then touches on the Pedlar’s lack of formal education beyond his early school
days, in order to account for his learning:

Small need had he of books; for many a tale
Traditionary round the mountains hung,
And many a legend peopling the dark woods
Nourished Imagination in her growth
And gave the mind that apprehensive power
By which she is made quick to recognise
The moral properties and scope of things. (167-73)

A natural mind, in a natural setting, can learn from local tales, the feelings that nourish
Imagination in her growth. And this process is again referred to using Stoic terminology, as the mind
exercises its ‘apprehensive power’, grasping at further impressions that are built up and understood
within a particular moral context. But then, seemingly as an afterthought, Wordsworth was also
concerned that some books were available to the Pedlar, to give his mind a greater ‘scope of things’.
Those relating to the humanities are provided from the Vicar’s library, while others – relating to
mathematics, geometry and the sciences – ‘the schoolmaster supplied’. The Pedlar’s learning is
therefore far more comprehensive than would be expected from a youth who spent his days as a
shepherd, and he gains a good knowledge also of ‘The purer elements of truth involv’d / In lines and
numbers’.

There then follows a further transition, one that takes place ‘before his twentieth year was
passed’ (221). Strong emotional states return with vehemence, but this time they are not the light-
hearted, positive experiences of gladness and joy experienced at the end of his boyhood days; they
have greater force, are more disturbing, and cannot be displaced by meditation. This time he was
‘o’er powered / By Nature and his mind became disturbed’ (223-4). And just as later, in Book X of
The Prelude, Wordsworth describes himself turning to Mathematics to try and still his mind, so too
does the Pedlar. Turning to Newton’s Optics (rather than to Euclid’s Elements) he attempted to use
‘his intellect…and the stillness of abstracted thought’ to seek repose. But it was ‘in vain [that] he
turned to science for a cure’ (224-229). His sickness, his ‘fever of the heart’ is then described in terms that make it sound a blessing rather than a curse:

From Nature and her overflowing soul  
He had received so much, that all his thoughts  
Were steeped in feeling. He was only then  
Contented, when, with bliss ineffable  
He felt the sentiment of being, spread  
O’er all that moves, and all that seemeth still  
O’er all which, lost beyond the reach of human thought,  
And human knowledge, to the human eye  
Invisible, yet liveth to the heart,  
O’er all that leaps, and runs, and shouts and sings,  
Or beats the gladsome air, o’er all that glides  
Beneath the wave yea in the wave itself  
And mighty depth of waters. Wonder not  
If such his transports were; for in all things  
He saw one life, and felt that it was joy. (238-252)

Many readers of Wordsworth’s poetry first come across these lines in Book II of *The Prelude* in both the 1799 and 1805 texts, where they describe a state of mind that appears to be, quite literally, wonderful. And Wordsworth plays with language here in the expression ‘Wonder not’, in his brief turn to the reader, as he describes a state of mind that appears ‘most wonderful’. Here again, as in so much of Wordsworth, the finer points of his vocabulary require an appreciation of his Latin mind. The feeling of wonder, in Latin, is conveyed by the word *miratio*, which, with the prefix *ad* forms *admiratio*, a feeling of wonder towards someone or something. The superlative form is *mirabilis* – most wonderful. The terms ‘admiration’ and ‘astonishment’, are used by Wordsworth to describe a strong state of emotion. A sense of astonishment, of absolute wonder, is ‘a sense sublime’ – one in which the mind is overcome, and can no longer function. Longinus’ treatment of the experience is well known, but here Wordsworth is also defining ‘wonder’ as a state of emotion that is not ‘a good’. In Stoic terms it is an ‘evil’ state of mind because it is experienced as a loss of control over the mind. When this passage is later used in *The Prelude* to describe Wordsworth’s youthful experience, his hope is the one repeated in the Simplon Pass passage, and on Salisbury Plain – the hope that he, as a poet dedicated to the Muse and a priest of nature, might be ‘received’ by the god(s) and granted a vision of the true nature of things, as Virgil had hoped.

The Pedlar’s experience of such transports of delight is described as a vision of the ‘one-life’: ‘He saw one life, and felt that it was joy’. But neither the Pedlar, nor the youthful Wordsworth in *The Prelude*, is capable of withstanding, or understanding, such an overwhelmingly sublime, sense of ‘joy’ when it was experienced as a divine influx in youth. For the Pedlar, such intense feelings are overpowering rather than empowering; they are too intense for his mortal mind to bear and, as a result:

his bodily strength began to yield  
Beneath their weight. The mind within him burnt
And he resolved to quit his native hills. (258-30)²⁵

Having been overpowered by these sublime visitations from Nature, he is forced to quit his natural surroundings and descend from his mountains to live among men. His father is fearful for him,²⁶ but the Pedlar has enough moral strength to walk among men and observe ‘their manners, their enjoyments and pursuits / Their passions and their feelings’ (266-7), without succumbing to their vices. This is because the foundations of his mind had been so strongly impressed by nature in his childhood; and we can assume the original ‘sparks of the divinity’ must have guided him as he grew up in such a natural setting.²⁷

As ‘He walked among the…haunts of vulgar men unstained’ his ‘constant thought’ and ‘gentle heart / Preserv’d him’. His virtue was an example to the vicious, and he was strong enough not to be tainted by their ‘evil’. His solitary wandering life still kept him in contact with nature and preserved his mind serene:

In his steady course
No piteous evolutions had he felt,
No wild varieties of joy or grief,
Unoccupied by sorrow of its own
His heart lay open and by nature tuned
And constant disposition of his thoughts
To sympathy with Man. (PW V p. 386 / Excursion I. 358-64)

States of extreme emotion - ‘wild varieties of joy or grief’ are not his experience as he exhibits a milder, better-mannered, ethos:

Happy and quiet in his cheerfulness
He had no painful pressure from within
Which made him turn away from wretchedness
With coward fears. He could afford to suffer
With those whom he saw suffer.²⁸ (PW V p. 387 / Excursion I. 366-370)

In his equanimity, he was able to travel among humanity, observing ‘the progress and decay / Of many minds’ as they either lived in peace and happiness of mind and body, or were overthrown by strong passions. A description of his physical appearance affirms his character as remarkable, his gait as robust, active and nervous: ‘And his whole figure breathed intelligence’ (PW V p. 387 / Excursion I. 425).

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²⁵ In The Borderers this situation is reversed. Rivers, his mind greatly disturbed by his guilt in causing the death of an innocent man, goes into the mountains of Lebanon and cultivates a prophetic state of mind that he then uses to justify his actions, in a perversion of the experience of natural election.

²⁶ - Just as Michael is later fearful for his son, Luke. In a variant reading the Pedlar’s father suggests he earn a living as a teacher in a school in the adjoining village. He attempts this, but soon finds it ‘A task he was unable to perform’ as the ‘wanderings of his thought were then / A misery to him’.

²⁷ At this point in his editing of the Ms B manuscript, Ernest De Selincourt provides a brief 11-line passage summarising the Pedlar’s wanderings, as well as a longer passage of around 80 lines. This longer section was to be used in The Excursion and is intended to demonstrate the Pedlar’s moral strength, and I include it in my reading here.

²⁸ Coleridge would later accuse Wordsworth of being unable to express such sympathy himself, in the bitterness he later felt toward Wordsworth’s more puritanical moral judgements. As was the case with many of these later comments, they tended to be projections of Coleridge’s own state of mind.
VI. He / I was a chosen son

Wordsworth concludes his description of the Pedlar’s ethos by painting a picture of his character as it is in the present moment, at the time of the meeting at the ruined cottage. It is related that as he and Wordsworth had walked together on previous occasions he had recited the songs of Burns: ‘His eye/ Flashing poetic fire’ as he did so. Another allusion to Burns is made when it is stressed that the Pedlar ‘was untaught / In the dead lore of schools undisciplined’. Burns had made a virtue of his own lack of knowledge of such lore in the Preface to the Kilmarnock edition of his Poems. And the Pedlar’s own lack of that ‘dead lore’ is not considered a handicap since:

he was a chosen son
To him was given an ear which deeply felt
The voice of nature in the obscure wind
The sounding mountain and the running stream
To every natural form, rock, fruit and flower
Even the loose stones that cover the highway
He gave a moral life, he saw them feel
Or linked them to some feeling. In all shapes
He found a secret and mysterious soul,
A fragrance and a spirit of strange meaning.
Though poor in outward shew he was most rich,
He had a world around him, ‘twas his own
He made it, for it only lived to him
And to the god who looked into his mind.
Such sympathies would often bear him far
In outward gesture, and in visible look,
Beyond the common seeming of mankind
Some called it madness - such it might have been
But that he had an eye that evermore
Looked deep into the shades of difference
As they lie hid in all exterior forms
Near or remote, minute or vast, an eye
Which from a stone, a tree, a withered leaf,
To the broad ocean and the azure of the heavens
Spangled with kindred multitude of stars
Could find no surface where its power might sleep,
Which spake perpetual logic to his soul,
And by an unrelenting agency
Did bind his feelings even as in a chain.
So was he framed ...  (The Ruined Cottage 272-301)

These lines assert that the Pedlar’s highly inspired state of mind, his strong imagination, is balanced by ‘an eye’ that, in looking from stone, to tree, to withered leaf, to broad ocean, and to the azure heavens spangled with stars, can perceive ‘shades of difference’. Such an eye is a ‘poet’s eye’, one described in its ‘fine frenzy rolling’ as it glances from earth to heaven. It is an eye (I?) that also speaks ‘perpetual logic to his soul’ as it functions to ‘bind his feelings even as in a chain’. Natural reason here exists alongside the feelings of strong imagination and, as a result, inspiration is balanced by active thought. The experiences of the Pedlar’s mind and his visionary powers cannot be construed...
as ‘madness’ if he can also demonstrate logical thinking, and express feelings that are held in moderation. His ability to contain his emotions is ‘stoical’ to a certain degree, and is premised on a natural capacity he has inherited from growing up among the positive influences of ‘Nature’, and through establishing a virtuous relationship with the world of men.

It is these lines, which conclude the character study of the Pedlar, that are later used in The Prelude to form the more extended passage in Book III, when Wordsworth, shortly after arriving at Cambridge from his native mountains, relates how he considered himself to be ‘a chosen son’ endowed with ‘holy powers / And faculties’ with which he intended to work changes there ‘by the force of [his] own mind’:

I was a Freeman; in the purest sense  
Was free, and to majestic ends was strong.  

_I do not speak of learning, moral truth,  
Or understanding; ’twas enough for me_  
To know that I was otherwise endowed. (III 89-93, my emphasis)

As he turned ‘the mind in upon itself’ in moments of meditation he describes himself feeling

_Incumbences more awful, visitings  
Of the Upholder, of the tranquil soul  
Which underneath all passions lives secure  
A steadfast life. But peace, it is enough  
To notice that I was ascending now  
To such community with highest truth’ (III 115-120)_29

The lines following this introductory passage are made up from those quoted above, which had concluded the description of the Pedlar’s character in ‘The Ruined Cottage’. At the beginning of his Cambridge years, Wordsworth describes his own state of mind as one still in communion with Nature and highest truth. But while it was experienced, at the time, as a ‘glorious’ state of existence, it is later recognised to have been a state of limitation, not one of freedom. A state thought to be virtuous in youth is later seen as vicious according to the philosophy of the Stoics. As a mature adult, Wordsworth understands that the ‘purest sense’, in which he thought he was free then, was one that did not speak of ‘learning, moral truth or understanding’ – the things a liberal education was intended to provide. But, at the time, he had idealised that state of mind, identifying with the bardic tradition and hoping to become something of a Druid.

In The Prelude, Wordsworth then acknowledges that this glorification of Nature’s influence and his sense of participation in the divine mind was actually a vice, since it only concerned what went on within his own mind and, as such, was out of touch with the world of humanity. He is like the youthful Edwin in _The Minstrel_ – consumed with self-love and singing his own songs – having

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29 Wordsworth echoes Southey’s use of the phrase ‘th’ Incumbent Deity’ from _Joan of Arc_ here. In his Preface Southey had raised the question as to whether Joan was genuinely inspired, or mad. Wordsworth remembered a passage about Joan’s ‘burthened breast heaving beneath th’incumbent deity’, well enough to quote it to Coleridge in April 1797, in a discussion of Southey’s lack of imagination (_CL_ I 320).
yet to hear ‘the still sad music of humanity’ heard by those who have learnt ‘to look on nature’ with an educated mind. In a deliberate turn to Coleridge, he marks a turning point in his early life, as he reviews his experiences during his Cambridge years from the vantage point of his mature consciousness. In addressing Coleridge he tells him:

And here, O friend! I have retraced my life  
Up to an eminence, and told a tale  
Of matters which not falsely I may call  
The glory of my youth. Of genius, power,  
Creation and divinity itself  
I have been speaking for my theme has been  
What passed within me. Not of outward things  
Done visibly for other minds, words, signs,  
Symbols or actions but of my own heart  
Have I been speaking, and my youthful mind. (III 168-177, my italics).

What Wordsworth stresses here is the self-centredness, the solipsistic, narcissistic nature of this existence. Such was the ‘glory’ of his youth, and he had felt himself filled with the glory of the divinity. But, as the narrative of the poem goes on to relate, such a state of enthusiasm is vicious, and can lead to claims of prophetic insight that are pure folly and self-delusion. While it is accepted that youth might relish such experience, it is no state of mind for a mature man, who must develop his own capacity to reason and reflect, in order to become wise, and fully conscious of the potential divinity of his own mind and its relationship to humankind. At this point in the narrative of The Prelude, Wordsworth figures himself descending into earthly life from his earlier, more divine, vantage point – just as the Pedlar had done. But he also alludes to the more epic pretensions of his narrative in The Prelude, which can be seen to echo the descent of Dante in his Divine Comedy, or Adam in Paradise Lost:

Enough: for now into a populous plain  
We must descend. A Traveller I am,  
And all my tale is of myself; even so  
So be it (III 195-198)

And with this ‘Amen’, he also requests that Coleridge – ‘Who in my thoughts art ever by my side’ might ‘Uphold, as heretofore, my fainting steps’ (III 201), just as Dante had asked of Virgil, in the Divine Comedy.

Wordsworth noted that his residence at Cambridge served as something of a halfway house, one situated between the divine world of his youth and the world of ‘man’. During this period of his life he describes himself, like the Pedlar, with a foot in both worlds – divine and human. In Book IV, he describes himself being able to return (regress) to the ‘divine’ world and the narcissistic states of consciousness of his youth during his first long vacation. It is significant, however, that his encounter with the discharged soldier at the end of the book interrupts his deliberately sought state of reverie, and requires him to attend to the needs of a ‘suffering’ man, whose experience of the world has been one of war. The ‘dreaming man’ is again confronted and admonished’ by ‘historical man’. This
The encounter is carefully staged as the poem presents its carefully constructed narrative on the progress of Wordsworth’s genius, one that closely follows the design of Beattie’s *The Minstrel*. The soldier is a figure of admonishment who shocks Wordsworth out of the blissful pursuit of astonishment he had been pursuing on his walk, as he indulged in Rousseauian reveries seeking a blissful experience of a milder ‘sense sublime’.

In setting out this passage, Wordsworth paints his state of mind as ‘exhausted…[and] worn out by toil’ as he portrays himself seeking the ‘deeper’ joy to be found in ‘sublime’ settings. He is describing himself deliberately seeking the ‘pleasures of the imagination’:

> O happy state! What beauteous pictures now
> Rose in harmonious imagery – they rose
> As from some distant region of my soul
> And came along like dreams’  (IV 392-395)

The presence of the ‘uncouth shape’ of the unnaturally long and lank sailor interrupts those dreams, as a ‘real’ image usurps those of his imagination. But he remains unsure whether the soldier is a real being, or a product of his imagination. His mind is given the task of ‘grasping’ whether the phenomenon ‘appearing’ before him exists as a substantial being, or as a rude imagination. A third alternative is momentarily inferred, that he is some ghostly apparition, a spectre; and Wordsworth watches carefully, from a place of hiding, as he grasps the fact that the appearance is that of a real man, a man of the world. The meeting with the soldier brings Wordsworth’s mind down to earth, and signifies another transition in the development of the narrative of *The Prelude*. The Rousseauian wanderer is forced to confront the harsher realities of the real world, and the problems faced by societies that are incapable of living together in peace.

In ‘The Ruined Cottage’, Wordsworth presented an ironic critique of the ‘Happy Man’ tradition, as he pursues a deliberate, philosophical, stoic response to the suffering being experienced in rural England in the 1790s, as a result of the war with France. In 1798, he was writing poetry with a very specific, classically educated audience in mind, and was appealing to both old Whig and traditional Country party sentiments, arguing as a ‘true patriot’ according to principles that transcended ‘party’ politics. The subtlety of his bi-partisan position would have been lost on the more enlightened readers of ‘modern’ poetry of his time, who were seeking a quite different form of entertainment from poetry. For them ‘the moving accident’, that the Pedlar states is specifically *not* his concern, *was* just what they were looking for; and Wordsworth was not willing to provide it. In ‘The Ruined Cottage’, the vehement passions, the ‘manners’ expressed by the ‘characters’ in the ‘situations’ defined in ‘Adventures on Salisbury Plain’ and in *The Borderers*, have been replaced by the *gravitas* of the character of the Pedlar. He is a *Beatus vir*, having ‘the skill to understand /Nature’s hidden causes’ (*Georgics II* 490-1). But where Virgil looked to Lucretius for exemplary wisdom founded on

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30 The same state of mind is referred to in the opening lines of the ‘Prospectus to ‘The Recluse’, a revision of the 1800 original text, which did not refer to visual images - but to music in the soul.
Epicurean principles, Wordsworth was looking to the early Stoics and was influenced by Cicero, who had made a point of distinguishing between the sophisticated philosophical principles of the Stoics, and the mere sophistry of the self-centred Epicureans. It was the latter school of thought that avoided political matters, as its members sought solace in the pursuit of private visions of the gods; in a quite deliberate ‘evasion of history’. I have argued that it is important to realise Wordsworth was not of their party.

The importance of ‘The Ruined Cottage’ lies in the fact it contained materials that seeded the development of Wordsworth’s distinctive poetic career and formed the prima materia for The Recluse. In 1799, the description of the growth of the Pedlar’s mind was removed from ‘the story of Margaret’ as a separate poem, ‘The Pedlar’. At the same time, Wordsworth decided to use the description of the growth of the Pedlar’s mind to describe Nature’s influence on the growth of his own mind, in the two–part poem he began at Goslar and finished at Sockburn. The circumstances of the growth of the Pedlar’s mind provide the underlying structure for the ‘Two–Part Prelude’, forming a skeleton that was then clothed with descriptive passages and biographical detail from Wordsworth’s early life, to produce a narrative describing Wordsworth’s early years. The Pedlar, as represented in 1798, is probably the most important character in all of Wordsworth’s poetry, and an identity that Wordsworth later fancied his own character might have assumed had he been born in the same circumstances.31 My reading of ‘The Ruined Cottage’ here, has stressed the importance of recognising that the character of the eloquent Pedlar is quite deliberately defined as that of a naturally ‘wise man’, whose wisdom comes from having pursued a virtuous life, one ‘lived consistently and harmoniously with nature’; the aim of the Stoic.32 The poem defines Wordsworth’s particularly classical vision of things in 1798, and shows little evidence of the influence of Coleridge’s more romantic vision of ‘the one-life’ as he made his own, radically different, comments about being a ‘poet of nature’.

31 Had I been born in a class which would have deprived me of what is called a liberal education, it is not unlikely that being strong in body, I should have taken to a way of life such as that in which my Pedlar passed the greater part of his days. At all events I am here called upon freely to acknowledge that the character I have represented in his person is chiefly an idea of what I fancied my own character might have become in his circumstances. Nevertheless much of what he says and does had an external existence that fell under my own youthful and subsequent observation. (IFN 79)

32 De Finibus III 26.
Chapter 13

Conclusions

I. The Additions to the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, 1802

Wordsworth’s psychology of the imagination is sometimes described as associationist, but I cannot see that it is seriously anticipated by Locke or Hume, or Hartley, or by Coleridge.\(^1\)

This study took as its starting point Coleridge’s comments about the ‘radical Difference’ of opinion over poetic theory that he had voiced in his letters to Sotheby and Southey in July 1802. In his comments to Southey about Wordsworth’s ‘considerable additions’ to the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* he focuses on one ‘on the Dignity & nature of the office & character of a Poet’ that he considered to be ‘very grand, & of a sort of Verulamian Power & Majesty’ before suggesting it was ‘in parts, obscure beyond any necessity’. In concluding my argument here about Wordsworth’s classical ethos, and that of his ideal poet, I turn to the additions of 1802 and to Wordsworth’s description of ‘the Poet’ as ‘a man speaking to men’. In the additions, Wordsworth reinforces his original belief – set out in 1800 – that the Poet’s vocation is grounded in human activities, and that he or she need only express human thoughts and feelings, and not claim any exalted or supernatural powers. The Poet, understood as a ‘man speaking to men’, must represent ‘passions and thoughts and feelings [that] are the general passions and thoughts and feelings of men’ (*MLB* 78: 638-640). In asserting this difference from traditional views about the inspiration of the poet, Wordsworth states: ‘Among the qualities which I have enumerated as principally conducing to form a poet, is implied nothing differing in kind from other men, but only in degree’ (*MLB* 78: 631-3).\(^2\)

The new section begins with Wordsworth restating the high seriousness with which he views the office of Poet. In voicing his concern to define ‘just notions upon this subject’, something of ‘highest importance to our taste and moral feelings’, he believed that many would fail to perceive that his argument was necessary, having failed to appreciate the radical nature of what he was proposing:

if in what I am about to say, it shall appear to some that my labour is unnecessary, and that I am like a man fighting a battle without enemies, I would remind such persons, that, whatever may be the language outwardly holden by men, a practical faith in the opinions which I am wishing to establish is almost unknown. If my conclusions are admitted at all, our judgements concerning the works of the greatest Poets both ancient and modern will be far different from what they are at present, both when we praise, and when we censure: and our moral feelings influencing, and influenced by these judgements will, I believe, be corrected and purified.\(^3\)

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\(^1\) David Bromwich, *Disowned by Memory* p. 94.

\(^2\) He will later use the same expression about a difference ‘in degree’ rather than ‘kind’ to refer to the difference between Imagination and Fancy in the Preface to the *Poems of 1815*, and is totally consistent.

\(^3\) The serious high moral tone expressed here is often overlooked, and not recognised as operative in Wordsworth’s thinking until it is expressed more forcefully in the *Essay Supplementary*. But Wordsworth held these strong moral opinions early on, when they were based on classical values found in Cicero.
Taking up the subject, then, on general grounds, I ask what is meant by the word Poet? What is a Poet? To whom does he address himself? And what language is to be expected from him? He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endued with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them. To these qualities he has added a disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present, an ability of conjuring up in himself passions, which are indeed far from being the same as those produced by real events, yet (especially in those parts of the general sympathy which are pleasing and delightful) do more nearly resemble the passions produced by real events, than any thing which, from the motions of their own minds merely, other men are accustomed to feel in themselves; whence, and from practice, he has acquired a greater readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels, and especially those thoughts and feelings which, by his own choice, or from the structure of his own mind, arise in him without immediate external excitement. (MLB 71-2: 408-448)

These particular abilities are what give the Poet ‘power’ and ‘knowledge’ as he combines the skills of oratory and philosophy to become the best kind of ‘speaker’. In stressing the poet’s manliness and his ability to speak well Wordsworth is also giving his orator ‘political’ authority as a rhetor, someone concerned to speak on behalf of the needs of society. His identity, as ‘a man speaking to men’ distinguishes him from the vates poet (who speaks with the voice of a god), and alludes to the importance of the role speech had in the formation of the civilised society, as famously set out by Aristotle in his Politics, and echoed by Cicero in De Oratore:

What other force could have gathered the scattered members of the human race into one place, or could have led them away from a savage existence in the wilderness to this truly human, communal way of life, or, once communities have been founded, could have established laws, judicial procedures, and legal arrangements? (1 33)7

This ‘political’ aspect of Wordsworth’s ‘definition’ has not been recognised by many readers in the past who were more focussed on the belief that the Preface defined something of a new, Romantic aesthetic, rather than appreciating its ethical stance, and its rhetorical style. The Poet, as ‘a man speaking to men’ endowed with all the superlative qualities defined for him by Wordsworth, is

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4 Anne Barton suggests that Wordsworth’s use of the rhetorical question ‘What is a poet?’ may have been inspired by Ben Jonson’s use of the question in his Discoveries. Barton’s essay ‘The Road from Penshurst: Wordsworth, Ben Jonson and Coleridge in 1802’ shows Wordsworth had been reading extensively in Jonson in 1802 and she suggests Wordsworth’s sympathy for Jonson’s classical voice may have caused another argument with Coleridge at the time.

5 Note Wordsworth’s characteristic ‘both/and argument’. The poet has more enthusiasm and tenderness. The tenderness is something that balances the enthusiasm and works with it in tandem.

6 W.J.B. Owen’s Commentary on the Preface to Lyrical Ballads refers readers to: Quintilian, Inst Orat VI. Ii. 29: ‘visiones…per quas imagines rerum absentium ita repraesentatur animo, ut eas cerne re codis ac praesentes habere videamus’. He gives two more references to Quintilian: X. VII. 15 & VI. Ii 29 (passages discussed above) before turning to focus on eighteenth-century writers’ treatment of the topic (Pr W 1. 175).

7 Blair opens his Lectures of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, with a civilised echo of Aristotle and Cicero:

One of the most distinguished privileges which Providence has conferred upon mankind, is the power of communicating their thoughts to one another. Destitute of this power, Reason would be a solitary, and, in some measure, an unavailing principle. Speech is the great instrument by which man becomes beneficial to man: and it is to the intercourse and transmission of thought, by means of speech, that we are chiefly indebted for the improvement of thought itself: (1)
modelled on Quintilian’s ideal orator, ‘a good man speaking well’, an ideal exemplified, in history, by Cicero. Wordsworth’s ideal poet should be considered something of a Ciceronian orator – a role that had evolved out of that defined for the oratorical Pedlar. The Pedlar’s mind was explicitly shaped by Nature, while the mind of the ideal poet in 1802 is shaped, also, by ‘second nature’ – by his knowledge of the human world and its affairs. And Wordsworth’s ideal poet recognises that the proper realm for his poetic activities is the human one. The Pedlar had no skills for engaging with the world of man, and remained a ‘natural man’, committed to his Stoic love of nature. He was able to offer Margaret ‘hope’, but he was ‘hopeless’ when it came to addressing practical moral questions. For all his eloquence his character was such that he was incapable of becoming a ‘political man’.8

‘The Poet’ of the 1802 Preface to Lyrical Ballads is a man of the world, not a recluse – and his dwelling place is the world of men. He has also had an education giving him the necessary ‘knowledge’ to translate his ‘natural’ eloquence into a ‘power’ that might effect political change in a vicious world. Wordsworth’s ideal poet is a pragmatist, and must incorporate the ‘flesh and blood’ realities of human existence into his poetic art. His ‘office’ or ‘duty’ as ‘a Poet’ commits him to the human world, to human feelings, and to using human language in order to achieve his task. He cannot rely on vatic inspiration, or draw on any specialised poetic diction if he is to produce genuine poetry. The character he has consciously developed as a poet is one more sensitive to human feelings than ‘other men are accustomed to feel in themselves’, because he has a particular ability of conjuring up in himself passions that more closely resemble those ‘produced by real events’. This ability, which is originally innate, a natural disposition, is linked to Quintilian’s commentary on visiones in Book VI of the Institutes. It is therefore something the poet also has to develop and train, over a period of time, to transform it into a habitual state of mind, something ‘second nature’ that will exist within the ‘structure of [the poet’s] own mind’ without the need for any ‘immediate external excitement’.

In asserting his argument that the poetic character must be that of ‘a man’, rather than ‘a god’, Wordsworth also declares that the language of poetry is the same as the language of prose:

They both speak by and to the same organs; the bodies in which both of them are clothed may be said to be the same substance, their affections are kindred, and almost identical, not necessarily differing even in degree; Poetry sheds no tears ‘such as Angels weep’ but natural and human tears; she can boast no celestial ichor that distinguishes her vital juices from those of Prose; the same human blood circulates through the veins of them both…the language of such Poetry as I am recommending is, as far as is possible, a selection of the language really spoken by men. (MLB 69: 363-71)9

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8 The character of Michael represents another man of nature. He is a ‘statesman’ who remains a ‘country’ man - more connected with the elemental world of nature and its laws, and who cannot adapt to the world of modern ‘commercial’ man. Luke, although brought up in the proper manner, is unable to resist the corruption of city life and, unlike the Pedlar, he succumbs to it. Significantly, at the end of the poem, Michael’s dwelling ‘is gone’. The habitus of this man of natural habits is returned to nature. The ‘stranger’ who buys the land demolishes the cottage; the EVENING STAR is totally eclipsed: ‘the ploughshare has been through the ground/ On which it stood’. (I am reminded also of the reflected image of the star that ‘gleamed upon the ice’ of the frozen lake in The Prelude Book I, that Wordsworth ‘cut across’ with his skates (I 477-8).

9 Reference to ‘vital juices’ and to the ‘circulation of the blood’ again recall Quintilian’s distinctive idiom.
This argument was set out in the original 1800 text, in which Wordsworth had stressed the need to keep his ‘Reader in the company of flesh and blood’ and to use the ‘real language of men’ in order to produce genuine poetry. It is an argument that would later be attacked by Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria* in his concern to uphold formal distinctions between poetry and prose. He was as uncomfortable with this apparent democratisation of poetry as Francis Jeffrey. Wordsworth’s argument was ‘radical’, but it was not inspired by Jacobin sentiments. Wordsworth’s reasoning was connected with his absolute commitment to the ‘principle object’ set out in his introductory remarks. ‘The Poet writes…as a Man’ (*MLB* 73: 505-510). ‘Poets do not write for Poets alone, but for men …the Poet must descend from this supposed height, and, in order to excite rational sympathy, he must express himself as other men express themselves’ (*MLB* 79: 657-8; 661-3).

II. ‘Spontaneous Overflow’: Associating Ideas in a State of Excitement

Wordsworth’s Preface is carefully set out as justification of his own style, and he had anticipated that his educated readers would be reading him carefully. As John Nabholtz has demonstrated in his reading of the Preface, Wordsworth’s rhetoric defines a carefully studied appeal to his reader that does not rely on any systematic defence.10 He makes ethical appeals, and appeals to the passions, rather than entertaining any ‘selfish foolish hope of reasoning [his reader] into an approbation of these particular Poems’ (*MLB* 58 40-1). Nabholtz asserts that Wordsworth’s aim was to establish ‘the creation of a mutually understanding and beneficial relationship between reader and writer’ (71), not to set out an argument amenable to logical analysis. He also notes that most critical readers, over the past two centuries have demanded the ‘Preface’ be read as a systematic defence, and that it is this kind of misreading that has led to a failure to understand Wordsworth’s frame of mind.

The course Wordsworth sets out for the reader of the Preface travels between the Scylla of an exaggerated and over-ornate ‘high’ style and the Charybdis of the meanness and triviality of a ‘low’ one. He obviously abjures allegiance to the monstrous productions of high style, and what saves his own more simple style from being sucked down into triviality and meanness, is the fact that each of his poems ‘has a worthy purpose’ (*MLB* 62: 147). It is here that the ethical component of the theory comes to the fore, and Wordsworth sees his role, like that of Quintilian, as that of an educator. His theory is more ‘pragmatic’, than ‘expressive’. Although it does have its ‘expressive’ component, it is problematical to describe it as a ‘Romantic’ theory when it is so firmly based on a classical model. Wordsworth ‘explains’ what he means by his ‘worthy purpose’ in the section that contains his famous reference to the ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings’– a phrase that Abrams had made something of a leitmotif in *The Mirror and the Lamp*. Abrams appears to have believed that ‘spontaneity’ here was meant to convey the same meaning as that which Wordsworth intended in a key passage in Book I of *The Prelude*. In painting the character he once was, Wordsworth tells how – in

what is described as an unusual instance – he had ‘told / A prophecy’ in which ‘poetic numbers came / Spontaneously’ (*Prelude* I. 59-61). But, as was noted earlier, the term ‘spontaneous’, as used in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* is not necessarily the Romantic expression Abrams conceived it to be, with both Paul Magnuson and Marilyn Butler suggesting alternative readings. Butler also describes Wordsworth as ‘a true son of the Enlightenment’ and a neo-classicist (*Romantics Rebels and Reactionaries* 57-61). But although Wordsworth is writing with a mind attuned to the demands of the neoclassical reader, he is not presenting a neoclassical argument. He is concerned to subvert the superficiality of empty neoclassical form, which he sees as a mere husk, by filling it with genuine expressions of feeling. And Quintilian is also an influence on this passage. Wordsworth writes:

Not that I mean to say, that I always began to write with a distinct purpose formally conceived; but I believe that my habits of meditation have so formed my feelings, that my descriptions of such objects as strongly excite those feelings, will be found to carry along with them a purpose. If in this opinion I am mistaken, I can have little right to the name of a Poet. (*MLB* 62: 148-154)

This ‘purpose’ is again mentioned at the beginning of the next paragraph, and is defined once more: ‘this purpose will be found principally to be, namely, to illustrate the manner in which our feelings and ideas are associated in a state of excitement’ or, speaking more appropriately ‘to follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature’ (*MLB* 63: 176-182). Wordsworth’s reference to the ‘great and simple affections of our nature’ recalls his fundamental distinction between two types of feeling that govern his model of the mind as represented in the Preface, and in *The Prelude*. The human mind or ‘soul’, or ‘imagination’, is affected by passions that can be vehement or mild, both are necessary, neither can be privileged. It is up to the will of the individual to achieve the right ‘moral’ balance, and this is achieved through experience of the world, not by appeal to any transcendental authority that sets out moral laws. The right way of acting ‘morally’, of appreciating a true sense of purpose, comes about from experience, which is then followed by careful reflection on that experience that leads to further discrimination, and finally results in knowledge.

The clues to any further understanding of this ‘purpose’ are to be looked for in the intermediary passage that proclaims, and qualifies ‘the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings’. It is this passage that spoke loudly to Arthur Beatty as he came to believe that Wordsworth was indebted to Hartley. Wordsworth’s poet is someone who has a ‘more than usual organic sensibility’ and has also ‘thought long and deeply’, forming his feelings in a certain way through his habits of meditation. Those feelings produce thoughts that are the ‘representatives of all our past feelings’ and these thoughts in turn modify all new influxes of feeling. In this process of assimilation, habits of mind are formed that represent the true character of the Wordsworthian Poet who has, through his repeated acts of meditation, discovered what is really important to ‘men’, and has modified his feelings accordingly:

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11 He explicitly states that he was ‘not used to make /A present joy the matter of [his] song’.

12 Beattie’s main argument for Hartley’s significance is found on pages 109-124.
till at length, if we be originally possessed of much sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced that, obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits, we shall describe objects, and utter sentiments, of such a nature and in such connection with each other, that understanding of the being to whom we address ourselves, if he be in a healthful state of association, must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections ameliorated.  
(Maxell 62-3: 166-174)

The original thinking behind this rather lengthy and convoluted explanation can, again, be attributed to Quintilian, rather than any complex appreciation of Hartley. The mechanics of the process do suggest something of Hartley, but the psychological process is also found in Quintilian, who, in describing the importance of ‘habits’, is using Aristotelian concepts. Quintilian’s text is about the education of the orator and learning, of course, takes place through repetition that, in time, becomes habitual. Throughout the Institutes, Quintilian describes how, through learning and practice, the orator builds up a store of topics and commonplaces in his memory (‘Memory’ being one of the five ‘parts’ of traditional classical rhetoric). Once these are firmly established in the mind they become a resource – the ‘hiding places’ of his ‘power’ – that he is then able to draw on as he prepares an argument. However, as he becomes more experienced, his choice of topics and arguments becomes more a thing of habit, or ethos; he doesn’t need to think twice, or deliberate for too long about which argument to use. As he becomes even more experienced, the argument he needs to use in a particular case is no longer something he draws on from his memory, he has become that understanding; it is incorporated into his ‘flesh and blood’ existence. What was once merely a habit has become an enduring state of mind. In Aristotelian terms an intellectual virtue has become a character virtue. The topics and commonplaces he uses can have become ‘second nature’ to him, and he can draw on them ‘spontaneously’ by virtue of this capability (hexis). This is a general understanding that is applied throughout the Institutes, and is re-iterated in the section from which Wordsworth took his motto for Lyrical Ballads (X vii). A more specific reference can be found in Book VIII Pr 25-31, where Quintilian is discussing Style; and Wordsworth makes very similar statements to those made by Quintilian who is in turn drawing on Cicero’s example in De Oratore.

Quintilian relates how Cicero had argued that while invention and disposition were within the ability of any man of good sense, eloquence, ‘the production and communication to the audience of all that the speaker has conceived in his mind belongs to the orator alone’ (VIII Pr 14-15). He concurs with Cicero in believing that style should not be ornate or clever, and ‘elegance’ – which Quintilian regards as ‘the fairest of all the glories of oratory’ – should only be used ‘when it is natural and unaffected’ (VIII Pr 18). Natural and unaffected language has force and virility while an over-elaborate style is considered effeminate, and is likened to make-up; it is a luxurious accessory that corrupts rather than reveals true nature. ‘As a rule, the best words are essentially suggested by the subject matter and are discovered by their own intrinsic light.’ However, many poets and orators go looking for ostentatious ornaments, instead of using plain language, and these obscure the topic. Such ‘poetic
diction’ hides direct, manly, good sense in a dark and luxuriant overgrowth of allusion and cleverness. (VIII Pr 21-25).\textsuperscript{13}

We borrow figures and metaphors from the most decadent poets, and regard it as a real sign of genius that it should require a genius to understand our meaning. And yet Cicero long since laid down this rule in the clearest language, that the worst fault in speaking is to adopt a style inconsistent with the idiom of ordinary speech and contrary to the common feeling of mankind. (VIII Pr 25)\textsuperscript{14}

Quintilian bemoans the fact that in the Rome of his time most orators had rejected Cicero’s advice (and Cicero recognised that he was fighting a losing battle). Many of them waste their time trying to discover ‘brilliant’, ‘appropriate’ and ‘lucid’ words arranged with ‘exact precision’ and not only does this take up time, it ‘checks the natural current of our speech and extinguishes the warmth of imagination by the delay and loss of self-confidence which it occasions’. As an antidote to this loss, Quintilian proposes that if the orator:

will only first form a true conception of the principles of eloquence, accumulate a copious supply of words by wide and suitable reading, apply the art of arrangement to the words thus acquired, and finally, by continual exercise, develop strength to use his acquisitions so that every word is ready at hand and lies under his very eyes, he will never lose a single word. For the man who follows these instructions will find the facts and words appropriate to their expressions will present themselves spontaneously. (VIII Pr 28-29)\textsuperscript{15}

Although the orator – unlike the poet – has to learn how to present his argument while speaking in public, his art relies on the use of the right words in the right place in order to be effective. Wordsworth’s description of his own careful and systematic collection and recollection of words and experiences, governed by an appreciation of the idiom of the ordinary speech and the common feeling of mankind, seems to owe much to Quintilian’s instructions. The process, however, is laborious:

But it must be remembered that a long course of preliminary study is necessary and that the requisite ability must not merely be acquired, but carefully stored for use; for the anxiety devoted to the search for words, to the exercise of the critical faculty and the power of comparison is in its place while we are learning, but not when we are speaking. Otherwise the orator who has not given sufficient attention to preliminary study will be like a man who, having no fortune, lives from hand to mouth. If on the other hand, powers of speech have been carefully cultivated beforehand, words will yield us ready service, not merely turning up when we search for them, but dwelling in our thoughts and following them as the shadow follows the body. (VIII Pr 29-30)

Wordsworth is declaring far more than a theory of poetry in the preface to \textit{Lyrical Ballads}, he is declaring that he has, through his long periods of careful meditation, so moulded his feelings, with

\textsuperscript{13} Wordsworth experiments with such allusion and cleverness in some of his Goslar poems - especially the Lucy poems, where he plays on the Latin term \textit{luceo} linked with \textit{lucullus}. De Quincey alludes to either his own, or Wordsworth’s, perverse, or paradoxical, use of a term meaning ‘light’, to also refer to the darkness of a grove through association with the term \textit{lucus}. De Quincey suggests Quintilian to be the source for Wordsworth’s use of Lucy as a name. See Laura E Roman’s detective work in ‘Addison, Quintilian and Wordsworth’s Lucy’. \textit{Notes and Queries} March 1999 pp. 41-44.

\textsuperscript{14} The reference to Cicero is to \textit{De Oratore} (I iii 12)

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Namque et qui id fecerit simul res eum suis noninibus occurent}
the aid of his thoughts, that he has acquired the habits necessary to be the kind of poet he is speaking of. He represents himself as a poet by virtue of his character, his *ethos*, attained through having thought ‘long and hard’ on his experiences in the right manner. Because of this prolonged process of the collection and recollection of ideas and images, he can utter poetry that is the ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings’ as they are ‘recollected in tranquillity’. They are, in his case, ‘a true voice of feeling’. But that feeling is the expression of ‘a poet’ who has worked so extensively on developing a virtuous character that his feelings can never be vicious. Added to this, of course, is the practical understanding the poet has about how to use language persuasively (eloquently) to convey his understanding to his reader. While his ‘matter’ may originate in ‘spontaneous’ lyrical utterance, the manner in which it is then composed is an art, a *tekne*. And as Aristotle stated in the *Rhetoric* and Horace had repeated in the *Ars Poetica*, an artist must appear to have used no artifice, while producing language that catches the attention of the reader. Aristotle stated that ‘style’ is a matter of using familiar language in an ‘unfamiliar’ way that makes it striking and yet does not appear to be contrived: ‘authors should compose without being noticed and should seem to speak not artificially but naturally’ (*Rhetoric* 1404b).

It was by paying attention to matters of ‘eloquence’ or ‘style’ that Wordsworth came to produce the kind of poetry that defined his actual poetic career. Having assimilated Quintilian’s and Cicero’s advice on rhetoric, and having managed to organise his thoughts and feelings around certain topics and techniques, he was then able to figure out a new poetic career in which he hoped he would have a better fortune, and no longer be living ‘from hand to mouth’, like Quintilian’s orator ‘who has not given sufficient attention to preliminary study.’ The fruits of Wordsworth’s period of preliminary study at Racedown are seen in the work, in both poetry and prose, set out in ‘his’ *Lyrical Ballads*.16

### III. And now, O Friend! This history is brought

*To its appointed close*

This thesis has defined an alternative ethos for Wordsworth in the late 1790s and early 1800s; one that does not classify him as an exemplary Romantic. My argument has been an attempt to justify Wordsworth’s radically differing appreciation of Imagination from the concept argued for by Coleridge in 1802 and set out in *Biographia Literaria* in 1815. I have argued that Wordsworth refused Coleridge’s transcendentalist representation of the poetic imagination on the grounds that it was opposed to the realist, and materialist, principles that informed his own philosophical beliefs at the time. In my research I have also been concerned to resolve some of the apparent paradoxes and contradictions that earlier readers have discovered in Wordsworth’s poetry by paying better attention to what Wordsworth had actually written, rather than relying on interpretations based on Coleridgean ideals. Many of the paradoxes ‘discovered’ in Wordsworth’s writings are found there by readers who

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16 There can be no doubt that the 1800 edition, with Wordsworth’s name in it, was his edition, rather than a joint project. His authority was further established by the additions to the Preface in 1802 – to Coleridge’s further discomfort.
bring with them their own pre-established codes of decision, often based on Coleridge’s methodology and pre-disposed to find Wordsworth problematical. There are, however, two versions of his greatest poem *The Prelude*, the text in which he claimed to represent his mature ethos — and they do represent two different Wordsworths. There is the text referred to as ‘finished’ in the letter to Sir George Beaumont in June 1805 (*EY* 594), and there is also the ‘official’ text, published in 1850. I place some weight on the fact that Wordsworth still considered the 1805 text to be a ‘finished’ text in 1814 — as stated in his Preface to *The Excursion*. The original poem was supposed to represent his ‘mature’ mind in 1798, and I have read that text with that in mind as I attempted to interpret its meaning. The later revisions to that text were made by a mind that considered it had progressed still further in its ‘growth’, and had later accepted Christian principles and values that were at odds with some, but by no means all of the classical humanist ethos represented in the 1805 text. The argument that I have presented here for Wordsworth’s classical imagination does, I believe, represent his true ethos during a ‘great decade’ from 1795–1805. It was an ethos based on very classical *mores* that he had begun to take seriously during his period of retirement and study at Racedown. When he later felt the need to turn to Christianity, he would not have had a great deal of difficulty blending his classical humanist principles with those of the Christian religion — just as the early church fathers had done, as they placed ‘faith’ above philosophy, or logic.

In arguing that Cicero had a greater influence over Wordsworth’s mind than Coleridge, I have come to a new appreciation of the values Wordsworth attributed to the visionary experiences of his youth. His mature, Stoic, understanding runs contrary to the values that have been discussed in traditional readings of his ‘mystical’ states of mind. Most readings of the early books of *The Prelude* understand the euphoric, ecstatic, and blissful states of feeling described there to be ‘good’ states of mind that Wordsworth appears to be celebrating as he presents ‘a narrative of poetic election’. But according to Wordsworth’s actual representation of them, when the argument of his thesis is fully understood, they are only perceived as ‘good’ when viewed from the ‘golden’ perspective of youth. From the vantage point of his mature ‘Stoic’ ethos, they are vicious, rather than virtuous. Wordsworth’s ethical stance, representative of his mature ethos before he turned to Christianity, depended upon concepts of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ that were defined according to his classical humanist principles and ‘manners’. Unless these are understood, along with his eudaemonist sense of virtue and his identity as ‘a good man’ it is hardly possible to judge his meanings, or escape from the meanings imposed by Coleridge on his work.

This study has proposed a radically different appreciation of Wordsworth’s ethos in the formative years of his poetic career, a great decade in which his mind was committed to framing his concepts, and defining his poetic art according principles very different to the ones his later critics have, romantically, defined for him. This study has necessarily ‘wandered’ over a large area in order to establish a new perspective. It is one that is not easily gained without a greater appreciation of Wordsworth’s debt to Cicero and Quintilian. In arguing that Cicero had a greater influence over Wordsworth’s mind than Coleridge, I have presented a provocative thesis. A softer, more palatable version of the argument would have focussed, instead, on emphasising the pervasive influence of
Cicero’s works on late eighteenth-century classically educated gentlemen, especially those with Old Whig, classical republican sympathies. This would have squared more readily with the opinions of such respected and established authorities on Wordsworth as Meyer Abrams and W.J.B. Owen who both argued for Wordsworth’s debt to eighteenth-century thinkers. My reading of Wordsworth has had the advantage of the historical detail to be found in the more recent historical studies that have recognised Wordsworth’s engagement with history in the 1790s, rather than his evasion of it. My concern has been to place Wordsworth and his poetry within that history, in order to discover the sources of his political concerns, his philosophical principles and his poetic eloquence.

Somewhat reductively, my research led me to consider the significance of one particular primary source because, in my reading of Wordsworth and Cicero I discovered that Cicero’s Academic scepticism; his classical humanist principles; his particular representation of philosophy and his idiom are all reproduced in Wordsworth’s writings. I argue that the proofs of Cicero’s influence can be discovered by reading carefully in his philosophical works and discovering passages that sound familiar to a Wordsworth scholar because Wordsworth later echoes them. He does so either deliberately, in an allusive manner intended to reveal the extent of his ‘wisdom’, or unconsciously because his acceptance of Cicero’s Stoic frame of mind had become habitual – something ‘second nature’ to him. My discovery of this Ciceronian influence was a direct result of my earlier appreciation of Quintilian’s influence, something that has already been established. My reading of the works of both these Roman moralists provided me with a better understanding of the origins of Wordsworth’s political, philosophical and poetic interests than the works of any other possible influence, including Coleridge.

As novel as my proposal about the significance of Cicero’s influence might at first appear, it has a great deal of merit in helping explain the enigmatic nature of Wordsworth’s personality and the often noted paradoxical nature of his thinking. The course of his actual poetic career; his focus on the natural rather than supernatural; his particularly ironic stance towards making judgements; his noted discrimination in discussing both sides of a question; his so-called egotism; and his later reputation as the (Stoic) sage of Rydal Mt can all be accounted for if Cicero’s influence is accepted. It also makes much clearer the significance, at least to him, of his masterpiece, The Excursion, and helps to explain why he never could have written The Recluse in the form that Coleridge urged on him in 1798. By turning my focus from Coleridge to Cicero I am building a case for displacing Coleridge’s authority as the necessary influence on Wordsworth’s poetic development in 1798, and arguing instead for a more important and enduring ‘classical undersong’ that provided a solid support for Wordsworth’s theory, and underpinned his poetic career as it actually developed, with difficulty, in the early 1800s. This is not to deny that Coleridge played a crucial role in Wordsworth’s life in the late 1790s both as a friend, and as a fellow poet. Coleridge drew Wordsworth out of his reclusive retreat at Racedown at a time when Wordsworth was also in need of friendship. But instead of playing the role of necessary

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17 Wordsworth studied Cicero’s actual works closely, judging by the concepts that he reproduces in his own writing. He often sticks closely to Cicero’s Latin when he reproduces key passages, and the number of distinct echoes from Cicero suggests a direct transmission.
philosophical and poetic advisor, he discovered that Wordsworth already had a philosophy and was in the process of developing a poetic theory based on its moral values. I suggest it is a better to follow Blake’s dictum that ‘opposition is true friendship’, rather than idealise and romanticise the two men’s relationship.

Curiously, Coleridge is believed to have borrowed the third Volume of Middleton’s *Life of Cicero*, the volume containing the summary of his philosophical works, during the period Wordsworth was completing the Ms B text of ‘The Ruined Cottage’. I would suggest that Coleridge’s interest in Middleton’s *Cicero* might have been inspired by Wordsworth’s discussion, at this time, of his own earlier reading of Middleton at Racedown. Possibly Wordsworth suggested Middleton’s *Cicero* to Coleridge as a guide for him to gain a more comprehensive knowledge of Cicero’s philosophy in order to better understand his indebtedness to Cicero’s work. In the Wordsworth Trust Library at Grasmere there is a handsome five volume edition of *Ciceronis Opera* printed at the Clarendon Press in Oxford in 1783. It is expensive, leather bound scholarly edition *cum indicibus et variis lectionibus* with each bound volume containing two volumes of the original text and containing around 500 pages. We can deduce that it was acquired at some time before John Wordsworth left Grasmere for the last time since it has his signature in it, and one can only assume that the set was left with William and Dorothy while John was away at sea. One might speculate that it was purchased on William’s recommendation, and that he grateful to have such an edition in his Library.

Once Coleridge had turned to ‘critical’ philosophy, after 1800, he was unwilling to accept Wordsworth’s looser form of reasoning and must have been frustrated by Wordsworth’s commitment to principles that saw any claim for certainty, in philosophical discussion, as a dogmatic approach that undermined genuine attempts at enquiry. I have stressed the relativity of Coleridge’s influence on Wordsworth by pointing to ideas in Wordsworth’s poetry in the late 1790s that appear to originate in Cicero’s philosophical works. In contrast, those works of Coleridge’s that have been cited as influential on Wordsworth’s development during this period, can be seen to have made far less impact on the kind of poetry Wordsworth was writing at the time. Certainly there is the, by now, well traced record of the allusive interplay between the two men’s poetic productions, but this interchange does not add up to serious evidence that Coleridge’s work was instrumental in defining Wordsworth’s. As is well known by now, Coleridge borrowed as much (if not more) from Wordsworth as he gave. It is also significant that the two men were never able to work together on producing a poem.

In contrast to Wordsworth, Coleridge’s life was spent in a continual search for some absolute philosophical principles that he hoped might provide him with his own sense of security. In his ‘Essays on the Principles of Method’, in *The Friend* (1818) he had defined ‘philosophy’ as the pursuit of an ‘absolute truth’. In announcing his quest to find ‘a ground that is unconditional and absolute, and

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18 Duncan Wu records that Joseph Cottle borrowed Volume 2 of Middleton’s *Life* from the Bristol Library from the 15 January to the 19 February 1798, and Volume 3 from the 21 February to the 9 March. Wu proposes that Cottle probably borrowed these books for Coleridge, since Coleridge borrowed Volume 1 in January (*WR* I 185-6). Wu also records that Cottle borrowed Hugh Blair’s *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* in May, and that Coleridge had also been reading them in February. Wu again surmises that the *Lectures* were borrowed for Coleridge.

19 Ref 1995. R29
thereby to reduce the aggregate of human knowledge to a system’ he maintained that this quest constituted the ‘great problem the solution of which forms, according to Plato, the final objective and distinctive character of philosophy’. Coleridge’s truth claims were fixed and non-negotiable, he appealed to a higher tribunal that transcended empirical reality. Wordsworth’s position, on the other hand, was open to negotiation and to the accommodation of differing beliefs. Coleridge believed that philosophy – as philosophy, and not rhetoric – should be committed to defining absolutes, and he placed his faith in an analysis of logical relationships that could be seen to symbolise the workings of a higher nature. His reasoning was committed to defining binary dualisms in which there was always a ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ position. There could, therefore, be no mutual dialogue, but only the recognition of the ‘true’ state of affairs in which there was a resolution that privileged the higher perspective (that of eternity) over a lower one, (that of humanity). Wordsworth, following Cicero (and Aristotle) made no such claims, refusing to limit the grounds of his enquiry by introducing ‘first principles’ that had not been ‘proven’ through a discourse that arrived at a consensus of opinion, but only by appeal to logic. To base an argument about living human realities on first principles defined by logic is, essentially, an act of faith.

Coleridge confused philosophy with religion while Wordsworth, who consistently refused Coleridge’s concern that he should simply become a believer in Christ, did so because he was being honest to his own principles. He, like the Pedlar, had no need for religion since he lived, like the Stoics, in Nature. Wordsworth could not, on principled philosophical grounds, make any absolute truth claims about ‘God’. Personal faith was a different matter, but it should not be confused with ‘philosophy’. His moral and religious beliefs were premised on a classical understanding of the universe, or cosmos, and could not be defined in Romantic, individualistic terms. For the same reason, Stoic philosophy cannot be confused with the principles behind Kant’s critical philosophy – or Kant’s conception of Morality or Duty. Although Kant drew on Stoic concepts – more specifically those of the later Roman Stoics – his philosophical position stresses the autonomy of the individual consciousness, set apart from any social or political context. As such, it lay outside classical notions of philosophy, which were always concerned with ‘morality’ as a social concept. Wordsworth rejected Coleridge’s Kantianism because it was ideologically incompatible with his own classical ethos. In Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity, Charles Taylor stresses this distinction:

Kant explicitly insists that morality can’t be founded in nature or in anything outside the human rational will. This is the root and branch rejection of all ancient moralities. We cannot accept that the cosmic order, or even the order of ends in human “nature”, should determine our normative purposes. All such views are heteronomous; they involve abdicating our responsibility to generate the law out of ourselves. In spite of some resemblances to ancient Stoicism, Kant’s theory is really one of the most direct and uncompromising formulations of a modern stance.’ (364)

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21 See also John Cooper’s essay, ‘Stoic Autonomy’ in Knowledge, Nature and the Good: Essays in Ancient Philosophy pp. 204-244.
Cicero’s most detailed exposition of Stoic ethics, about what is ‘good’ and what is ‘bad’, is set out in Book III of *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum*. It was written as a rebuttal to the Epicurean ethical positions described in Book I. Cicero makes Cato (the younger) the spokesperson of the Stoic position in *De Finibus*, and he opens his remarks with the assertion that their values are all ‘in accordance with nature’ and that an individual’s ‘appropriate actions’ (*kathêkon*) are to preserve them in their ‘natural constitution’ and ‘to take what is in accordance with nature and reject its opposite’:

Once this method of selection (and likewise rejection) has been discovered, selection then goes hand in hand with appropriate action. Then such selection becomes continuous, and, finally, stable and in agreement with nature. At this point that which can truly be said to be good first appears and is recognised for what it is. A human being’s concern is for what is in accordance with nature. But as soon as one has gained some understanding, or rather ‘conception’ (*ennoia*), and sees an order and as it were concordance in things which one ought to do, one then values that concordance much more highly than those first objects of affection. Hence through learning and reason one concludes that this is the place to find the supreme human good, that good which is to be praised and sought on its own account. This good lies in what the Stoics call *homologia*. Let us use the term ‘consistancy’, if you approve. Herein lies the good, namely moral action and morality itself, at which everything else ought to be directed. Though it is a later development, it is none the less the only thing to be sought in virtue of its own power and worth, whereas none of the primary objects of nature is to be sought on its own account. (III 20-21)

Wordsworth’s argument about the growth of his (stoic) mind in *The Prelude* follows Cato’s pattern of development here. Nature is a necessary guide in infancy, but as the individual gains a sense of identity as a human being he or she must find ‘the supreme human good’ through ‘learning and reason’, something to be ‘praised and sought on its own account’. Developing this moral understanding and identity then becomes more important than the original influence of Nature. The relationship between original nature, and the wisdom achieved through reason, is one of succession that is also one of continuity:

Since all appropriate actions originate from natural principles, so too must wisdom itself. Now it often happens that when one is introduced to someone, one comes to value that person more highly than one does the person who first made the introduction. Similarly it is the starting points of nature which first introduce us to wisdom, but it is no surprise that we then come to cherish wisdom herself far more than we do those objects by which we came to her. (III 23)

In the course of his discussion of Stoic ethics Cato warns that the pursuit of wisdom is not something that can be achieved by applied technical skill, it is not like ‘navigation or medicine’; it is likened more to ‘acting or dancing’. It is an art of living that acknowledges the human condition, while focussing on the pursuit of wisdom and on ‘appropriate actions’ based on the principles of nature. His discourse on

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22 Note Wordsworth’s allusive art in the ‘Ode’, and further reference to the ‘sparks of the divinity’:

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:
how ‘to live consistently and harmoniously with nature’ concludes with a panegyric that sings the praises of the ideal Stoic sage:

How dignified, how noble, now consistent is the character of the wise person drawn by the Stoics! Reason has shown that morality is the only good. This being so, the wise person must always be happy, and the true possessor of all those titles which the ignorant love to deride …The one who alone knows how properly to use all things is the owner of all things. Such a person will rightly be called beautiful too, since the soul’s features are more beautiful than those of the body; and uniquely free, the servant of no master, the slave of no appetite, truly unconquerable. (III. 75)

In Wordsworth’s Prospectus to ‘The Recluse’, ‘Beauty’ is named, explicitly, as: 23

    a living Presence of the earth
    Surpassing the most fair ideal Forms
    Which craft of delicate spirits hath composed
    From earth’s materials.

The beautiful forms of Nature are described here as ‘Surpassing the most fair ideal Forms’ that Platonic idealists claim to be the truth of things. I suggest there is a quite deliberate pun being expressed in this comparison, one that also provides evidence of Wordsworth’s delight in irony. The ‘most fair ideal forms’ are seen to be composed by the ‘Witchcraft’ of the ‘delicate’ spirits who make assertions about ‘ideal Forms’ that are claimed to surpass the earth’s material beauty. In making this reference, Wordsworth also inverts, and subverts, a famous passage in Plato’s Phaedrus in which Socrates is critical of Phaedrus’ rhetoric and states that his techne psychagogia is akin to witchcraft. Socrates asks ‘Is not rhetoric, taken generally, a universal art of enchanting the mind by arguments?’ (Phaedrus 261). Wordsworth sides with the rhetoricians here against the philosophers, since his poetry does indeed set out to enchant the mind by use of words. He and Coleridge had obviously discussed the debate in the Phaedrus at some time during their annus mirabilis, and Coleridge – as a poet rather than as a philosopher in those days – had also expressed his own delight in enchanting a reader with a ‘witchery of sound’, in his own poetry.

In the Prospectus to ‘The Recluse’ Wordsworth makes the point that his sense of Beauty is not a mental concept as in Plato (and Kant); it is a living reality, a phenomenological experience of divine and human existence, bound together in a ‘one life’ that exists here and now, not simply as a concept in the minds of philosophers, or theologians.

    Paradise and groves
    Elysian, Fortunate fields - like those of old
    Sought in the Atlantic Main - why should they be
    A history only of departed things,
    Or a mere fiction of what never was?
    For the discerning intellect of Man,
    When wedded to this goodly universe
    In love and holy passion, shall find these

23 In Wordsworth’s mind the Latin term forma or formosus, meaning ‘beautifully formed’, (rather than pulchritudo) was probably resonating here.
A simple produce of the common day.

These sentiments are repeated in Book X of *The Prelude* in the passage beginning ‘Oh! pleasant exercise of hope and joy’ which concludes:

Not in Utopia - subterraneous fields, -
Or some secreted island, Heaven knows where!
But in the very world which is the world
Of all of us, - the place in which, in the end,
We find our happiness, or not at all! (X 690-728)²⁴

Having already described the earth as ‘most beautiful’, the very final lines of *The Prelude* amplify that description by suggesting that ‘the mind of man’ is even more beautiful, and Wordsworth’s claims can be seen to echo Cato’s praise of the beautiful mind. At the conclusion of *The Prelude* Wordsworth describes his (and hopefully Coleridge’s) task, as ‘Prophets of Nature’, to teach and instruct:

how the mind of man becomes
A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
On which he dwells, above this frame of things
(Which, ‘mid all revolutions in the hopes
And fears of men, doth still remain unchanged)
In beauty exalted, as it is itself
Of substance and of fabric more divine.²⁵

It would appear, at first, that Wordsworth is making concessions to Coleridge’s idealism here in suggesting that the mind of man is so much more beautiful than the beauties of the earth, and that it could be described as dwelling in some transcendent, utopian, placeless place, ‘above this frame of things’. But this statement is still a comparison of *degree*, not one of difference in *kind*. And to maintain that the mind ‘is itself / Of substance and of fabric more divine’ is to assert that the mind of man is, *in itself*, divine. Wordsworth does not conceive of the mind requiring help from some hypothetical transcendent deity. He has already stressed this point in describing the joint labours of intellectual love and imagination. In order to recognise and realise its highest form of identity, as that of a truly wise being, capable of expressing ‘reason in her most exalted mood’, the ‘mind of man’ must draw on both the ‘sublime’ resources of Nature and the ‘beauties’ of human nature through an act of individual (Stoic) will:

Here must thou be, O Man!
Strength to thyself – no helper hast thou here;
Here keepest thou thy individual state:

²⁴ Published in *The Friend*, October 1809 as ‘The French Revolution: As it appeared to an enthusiast at its commencement’. Although many of Wordsworth’s political ideals as an enthusiast in 1792 are later seen as unrealistic, he is happy to repeat, and presumably still believes in, the sentiments expressed in the last lines of *The Prelude*, and in the lines published as a ‘Prospectus to The Recluse’.

²⁵ Jonathan Wordsworth glosses this passage with a reference to Wordsworth describing the powers of ‘the creative and responsive imagination’ that can ‘perceive the existence of God’. NP 482 Other critics might well turn to German Romantic ideals about ‘Beauty’ exemplified, for instance in Schiller’s work. But my argument here denies this ‘Romantic’ connection. Wordsworth, as Dockhorn stressed, was working out of the past – he was not in the vanguard of those defining a new Romantic future.
No other can divide with thee this work:
No secondary hand can intervene
To fashion this ability;  (XIII 188- 193)

The seeds of Wordsworth’s understanding of imagination in the final Book of *The Prelude* had already been planted in ‘the celestial soil of [his] imagination’ by the time he set out the character study of the Pedlar in March 1798. The source of the concepts Wordsworth defines there are to be found in his reading of Cicero’s representation of early Stoicism, as well as in issues raised in Cicero’s general discussion of Hellenistic philosophy, inflected by his Socratic, ‘Academic’ scepticism. They supply the concepts that form Wordsworth’s ‘one-life’ philosophy and oppose Coleridge’s attempts to define a differing one, according to his Platonic and Christian principles. Wordsworth’s position was unorthodox, and implicitly heretical, and he obviously gained a reputation, at the time, for holding such views. In his *Memoirs of William Wordsworth* his brother Christopher, a man of the Church, would pass comment on his brother’s beliefs at this time, noting that:

> at this period of his life, his religious opinions were not very clearly defined. He had too high an opinion of the sufficiency of the human will and too sanguine a hope of unlimited benefits to be conferred on society by the human intellect. He had a good deal of Stoical pride, mingled with not a little of Pelagian self-confidence. Having an inadequate perception of the necessity of divine good, he placed his hopes where they could not stand’. (I. 89)

Wordsworth’s ‘Stoical pride’ was later humbled, to a certain degree, as he accepted both the necessity for the existence of a transcendent deity, and the need for the Church of England to exist, as a political entity, to direct the *mores* of the people. The ‘Wordsworth’ celebrated by John Keble in 1844 was a respected member of the Church, and stood for the values of the establishment. But in 1802, 1805, and even 1815, Wordsworth was still prepared to make a stand, taking pride in his Stoic principles, and maintaining his ‘Pelagian self-confidence’. In 1815 it would appear he still considered Augustinian theology to deny the essential freedom of the human soul, and therefore negate the reason for the existence of the human will. He was also still ambivalent about any notion that he needed to be ‘saved’ by the redeeming power of Christ. He carefully defended himself from the charge of pantheism in *The Excursion* while, at the same time, shocking Crabb Robinson by telling him that he had ‘no need of a redeemer’.26

Wordsworth did not believe in clear-cut answers to questions about truth and religion. His own philosophical beliefs were still based on a healthy Socratic scepticism that saw the virtue in expressing uncertainty over such matters, rather than claiming to know the truth of matters that could not be proven. And he continued to reject dogmatic philosophy and dogmatic religious belief. It was up to wise individuals to make the effort to find answers for themselves through an open-minded enquiry. In intellectual discussion in his later life he would still make a point of arguing both sides of the question, as Aristotle had suggested the wise man be able to do – to demonstrate his wisdom,

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26 Crabb Robinson reported: ‘he could not feel with the Unitarians in any way. Their religion allows no room for imagination, and satisfies none of the cravings of the soul’. He further relates that Wordsworth told him “I can feel more sympathy with the orthodox believer who needs a Redeemer”, but then added “I have no need of a redeemer.” *On Books and their Writers*, ed Morley 1 87 & 1 158.
rather than his scepticism or sophistry. But his later turn to Christianity, and the revisions to *The Prelude* that followed as a consequence, led to the changes in the poem that did compromise his original stoic principles and confuse the logic of his argument. As a consequence, the ‘hiding places’ of his poetic power became more hidden, and the virtues and vices of his position were, once again open to interpretation. One of the very last revisions to *The Prelude*, probably made in 1832, was the re-description of the Prophet of Nature’s authority. In his revised state he would speak, ‘A lasting inspiration, sanctified / By reason, blest by faith’.
Appendix A

Rhetorical Traditions and British Romantic Literature

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Translated by Heidi I. Saur-Stull
Appendix B

Extracts from Virgil, Georgics II lines 458–540,
Lines in italics are from juvenile translations by Wordsworth.

‘O fortunatos nimium’

O ! all too happy tillers of the soil, 458
Could they but know their blessedness, for whom
Far from the clash of arms all-equal earth
Pours from the ground herself their easy fare !
...untroubled calm
A life that knows no falsehood. rich enow
With various treasures, yet broad-acred ease
Grottoes and living lakes, yet tempes cool,
Lowing of kine, and sylvan slumbers soft
They lack not

Me before all things may the Muses sweet,
Whose rites I bear with mighty passion pierced,
Receive, and show the paths and stars of heaven,
The sun’s eclipses and the labouring moons,
From whence the earthquake, by what power the seas
Swell from their depths and, every barrier burst,
Sink back upon themselves, why winter-suns
So haste to dip ‘neath ocean, or what check
The lingering night retards. But if to these
High realms of nature the cold curdling blood
About my heart bar access, then be fields
And stream-washed vales my solace, let me love
Rivers and woods, inglorious. Oh for you
Plains, and Sperchius, and Taygete,
By Spartan maids o’er revelled!, Oh, for one,
Would set me in deep dells of Haemus cool
And shield me with his bough’s o’ershadowing might!
Happy who had the skill to understand
Nature’s hid causes, and beneath his feet
All terrors cast, and death’s relentless doom
And the roar of greedy Acheron
Blest too is he who knows the rural gods
Pan, old Silvanus, and the sister nymphs!
Him nor the rods of public power can bend
Nor kingly purple…
Nor hath he grieved through pitying of the poor,
Nor envied him that hath. What fruit the boughs,
And what the fields, of their own bounteous will
Have borne, he gathers; not iron rule of laws,
Nor maddened Forum have his eyes beheld.

...the husbandman
With hooked ploughshare turns the soil: from hence
Springs his year’s labour: hence too he sustains
Country and cottage homestead, and from hence

To them the arts of falsehood are unknown
And nature’s various wealth is all their own
And living lakes and caves of cool recess.
All nature smiles
They find a Tempe cool in every vale
At languid noon the far off Heifer lows
While calm in secret they repose

Ah let me inglorious court the shade
And stream soft murmuring through the
opening glade
O that my feet might tread the holy grove
Whereat the bacchanalian[s] rove,
Let me lie
Far in some deep vale of Haemus
cool and high
There let the deep’ning forest still and dead
Hang in dim solemn twilight oer my head
His herds of cattle and deserving steers.
No respite! still the year oerflows with fruit,
Or young of kine, or Ceres wheaten sheaf
With crops the furrow loads, and bursts the barns.

Meanwhile about his lips sweet children cling
His chaste house keeps its purity; his kine
Drop milky udders, and on the lush green grass
Fat kids are striving, horn to butting horn
Himself keeps holy days; stretched oer the sward

Such life on earth did golden Saturn lead.
Nor ear of man had heard the war-trumps blast,
Nor clang of sword on stubborn anvil set.

Extract from Horace’s *Epode II*

Happy the man who, far away from business cares, like the pristine race of mortals, works his ancestral acres with his steers, from all money-lending free: who is not, as a soldier, roused by the wild clarion, nor dreads the angry sea: he avoids the Forum and the proud threshold of more powerful citizens; and so he either weds his lofty poplar-trees to well grown vines, or in a secluded dale looks out upon the ranging herds of lowing cattle ....Tis pleasant, now to lie beneath some ancient ilex-tree, now on the matted turf. Meanwhile the rills glide between their high banks: birds warble in the woods; the fountains plash their flowing waters, a sound to invite soft slumbers....Amid such joys, who does not forget the wretched cares that passion brings?
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