WHERE DARKNESS MAKES ABODE:

WORDSWORTH’S VOCABULARIES OF BEING

R J ROBINSON, B.A. HONS, THOD, HDB

Dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the
Requirements for the degree of Magister Artium in
English of the Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir
Christelike Hoër Onderwys

Supervisor: Prof A L Combrink

November 2000

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SUMMARY

William Wordsworth has been a controversial poet since the appearance of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. This joint volume with Samuel Taylor Coleridge embodied Wordsworth's revolutionary poetics not only in a new kind of poetry that dealt with ordinary rural people and that was written in what Wordsworth claimed was the "real language of men", but also explicated his literary theories in a Preface that truly set the cats of a radically new poetics amongst the literary pigeons. And the resultant flutter has still not subsided.

Wordsworth's innovative influence manifested itself very notably on the field of language. This comprises the main field of enquiry of this dissertation.

Chapter I speculates about the subtle and powerful linguistic and aesthetic impact of Wordsworth's language concomitant with his belief in and distrust of language and the power inherent in it. It explores Wordsworth's language not only as the medium of his poetry, but also as an explicit subject that he thought and speculated about in a serious and coherent manner.

Chapter II attempts to define some of the many different voices that can be heard in Wordsworth's poetry and the 'language' that these different voices speak. It explores some of the voices that various critics identify and then ponders the two distinctive voices that I hear in Wordsworth's poetry.

Chapter III looks at and analyses some of the many and fascinating practical aspects of Wordsworth's distinctive and highly individualised 'idiolect', most notably his use of repetition, word-clusters and his marked penchant for certain favourite words that recur throughout his oeuvre.

What emerged most strongly from this study is that the key to Wordsworth's unique and challenging poetry lies in his equally unique and challenging language usage. This aspect of his work cannot be ignored or disregarded without seriously, indeed fatally, compromising the appreciation and interpretation of his poetry.
William Wordsworth is al sedert die verskyning in 1798 van sy bundel *Lyrical Ballads* ’n omstrede digter. Hierdie bundel, wat saam met Samuel Taylor Coleridge gepubliseer is, het Wordsworth se revolusionêre poëtika uitgespel nie net met betrekking tot ’n nuwe soort digkuns wat oor gewone plattelandse mense gehandel het nie en wat geskryf is in wat Wordsworth beskou het as “the real language of men” nie, maar wat ook uitdrukking gegee het aan sy literêre teorieë in ’n Voorwoord wat werklik die spreekwoordelike klip van ’n radikaal-nuwe poëtika in die hoenderhok van literatore gegooi het. Die gefladder het nog nie bedaar nie.

Wordsworth se vernuwendige invloed is mees sigbaar in taal en taalgebruik. Dit is dan ook die hoofklem van hierdie verhandeling.

In Hoofstuk 1 word aandag gegee aan die subtiele en kragtige linguistiese en estetiese impak van Wordsworth se taal in samehang met sy geloof in en misnoë met taal en die krag wat inherent is aan taal. Daar word ook gekyk na Wordsworth se taalgebruik – nie alleen as die medium van sy digkuns nie, maar ook as die explisierte onderwerp waaroor hy nagedink en gespekuleer het op ‘n baie ernstige en samehangende manier.

Hoofstuk 2 verteenwoordig ‘n poging om sommige van die baie stemme wat in Wordsworth se digkuns spreek en die “taal” wat hierdie stemme praat te definieer. Daar is ook ‘n onderzoek na die stemme wat deur verskillende kritici geïdentifiseer word en nadenke oor die twee besondere stemme wat ekself in Wordsworth se digkuns hoor.

Hoofstuk 3 ondersoek en analiseer sommige van die baie en fassinerende praktiese aspekte van Wordsworth se besondere en hoog-geindividualiseerde “idiolek”, veral sy gebruik van herhaling, woordklusteres en sy duidelike voorkeur vir sekere gunstelingwoorde wat deurgaans in sy oeuvre gebruik word.

Wat die heel duidelikste blyk uit hierdie studie is dat die sleutel tot Wordsworth se unieke en uitdagende digkuns te vind is in sy ewe unieke en uitdagende taalgebruik. Hierdie aspek van sy werk kan nie geignoreer of afgewys word sonder om die waardering en interpretasie van sy werk ‘n ernstige indien nie fatale knou toe te dien nie.
PREFACE

To my mind any study on Wordsworth has to take into account the diversity of critical opinion that exists regarding not only his work but also himself and his life. It also has to take cognisance of the 'renaisance' that has occurred in Wordsworthian criticism since the 1960s, possibly inaugurated by the appearance of Geoffrey Hartman's truly revolutionary criticism. Many of the previously held opinions about Wordsworth's work and approaches to his poetry have been comprehensively challenged and indeed refuted by a host of new and exciting assessments during the last thirty odd years.

M.H. Abrams defines the problematic surrounding the study of Wordsworth, identifying two widely differing schools of thought regarding Wordsworth. The one school concentrates on the simple Wordsworth, the poet of "elementary feelings, essential humanity and vital joy" (1972:2) who finds solace in nature (the Wordsworth of Matthew Arnold and Helen Darbishire). The other school, initiated by A.C. Bradley in 1909, views Wordsworth as problematic – it sees his work as abounding in contradictions; while he writes about love and joy, he yet depicts a 'dark' world and is in short a self-divided poet, visionary and mystic. In this school one encounters critics like Hartman, Perkins and Ferry, among others. There is also a 'middle way', the critics of which regard Wordsworth as a complex, yet integral poet; critics like Harold Bloom and M.H. Abrams subscribe to this view of Wordsworth.

It is my contention that the 'key' to Wordsworth is to be found in his highly individualised use of language. I find it very significant that he was so dissatisfied with the poetic diction of his time that he felt compelled to depart from it so radically. I do not believe, however, that this was merely a reaction against the 'finny tribes' and 'Phoebus' Chariots' of his Neo-Classical predecessors; I believe it was more profound and ran much deeper than that.

His revolt against the artificial poetic diction then current can, I believe, be found in his overwhelming conviction that words hold an innate power and should be used with great circumspection. To illustrate, I will just briefly refer to and, in some instances paraphrase, some of his own comments regarding language. In Essays upon Epitaphs, (PrW, 1974:84-85), he makes the following points:
• Words are "too awful an instrument for good or evil to be trifled with".
• Words hold "dominion over thoughts".
• If words are not the very incarnation of thoughts, but only a mere covering for them, they will prove an "ill gift" and "poisoned vestments".
• If language is not used in such a way that words "uphold" and "feed" and "leave in quiet", it can become a "counter-spirit" working "unremittingly to subvert", to "lay waste", to "vitiate".

In the Note to 'The Thorn', he says that the mind attaches interest to words not only as symbols, but as "things" that are "active and efficient" in themselves (WW, 1988:594).

And finally, in lines 579-629 of Book V of The Prelude of 1805 he puts this most cogently. He first refers to his growing awareness in youth of words as "a passion and a power". Then he says that in the "mystery of words", "darkness makes abode" and "shadowy things do work their changes there" so that objects are "recognized, in flashes and with a glory scarce their own". (Thomas Weiskel makes the perceptive comment that this passage evokes the "penumbra" of words and Wordsworth's sense of their inherent power (1994:107).) In lines 568-69, he also claims that "words themselves/Move us with conscious pleasure". It is interesting to note that Duncan Wu says that even as a youth Wordsworth "had an unerring sense of the weight [my emphasis] of language" (1994:7).

In A.S. Byatt's novel Still Life, I came across a reference to Wordsworth that I found quite startlingly apposite to my own line of enquiry. One of the characters says the following:

The same Wordsworth, much mocked, thought himself back to an innocent vision, told us that grass is green and water wet because he had reached beyond familiarity to some primal wonder that these things were so and not otherwise, to some mythic sense that he was giving or finding the words for the things, not merely repeating (1985:59).

This touches closely on what I regard as one of Wordsworth's primary interests. I believe that he invites us to 'suspend our disbelief' and enter with him into the belief that words are much more than mere words; that they are in fact the modalities of our being. Sykes Davies describes it very well. In referring to the line 'Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower' from the 'Immortality Ode', he says the following:
There is no point whatever in trying to deal with that last line by methods of imagery analysis, by summoning up one's own impressions, however vivid, of grass and flowers. This 'splendour' and this 'glory' are not of vegetable origin; still less are they ironic. They are words which have become things in the long impassioned meditations of Wordsworth's mind and feelings (1986:87).

Finally it is of course impossible to divorce Wordsworth's preoccupation with language and nature from his concern with the power of the human mind, imagination and memory, so deliberations on these elements form an integral part of my study of Wordsworth's language.

I have therefore aimed to achieve the following in my dissertation:

- To arrive at as thorough a knowledge and understanding of Wordsworth's work as possible by the application of close reading (without the negative connotations attached to the phrase since the New Critics).
- To analyse Wordsworth's language and his theories about language with many references to his poetry and prose.
- To identify the 'methods' that Wordsworth employs in achieving his highly charged and individualized 'idiolect' and how these contribute towards and heighten the emotional and aesthetic impact of his work.
- To identify some of the different 'voices' audible in Wordsworth's poetry in so far as they contribute to an understanding of his language.

Wordsworth has been regarded by many critics, and through many years, as the poet who caused a literary 'revolution' by writing a 'new kind' of poetry with effects reaching to our very day. J.P. Ward even claims that Wordsworth "saved' language for poetry" (1984:3). Harold Bloom believes that Wordsworth "invented modern poetry" (1994:239). I believe that in 'fathering' this new kind of poetry Wordsworth achieved a major break-through in poetics. I also believe that he was, in fact, at the forefront of a change in language that was in keeping with a change in human perception in a turbulent age (Wordsworth and A.S. Byatt's 'unruly times') when social and economic pressures were building up with resultant actual revolutions in many countries, most notably the French Revolution that impacted very significantly on Wordsworth's own life. I finally believe that, in achieving a new poetic diction, Wordsworth also succeeded in evolving his own 'idiolect', densely laden
with meaning and emotional resonance. Throughout his oeuvre, Wordsworth is intensely concerned with both the resources and limitations of language, and the tension created by this ambiguity lends a fascinating dimension to his work. His conviction that mind, imagination and language are inextricably linked with nature is absolutely central to his poetics. Wordsworth creates an intensely personal poetry, dealing with his subjective experience and emotions, in a language that is equally personal and reflexive and charged with his distinctive vision. It is a language that is in step with the sweeping changes that were occurring in Wordsworth's world where the traditional view of the world, as created, stable and ordered, was changing to a more secular perception of the world as unstable and changeable.

Close reading, analysis and interpretation have been the methodological departure points of my study. Hugh Sykes Davies claims that what is primarily needed in the study of Wordsworth is a "dogged faithfulness to his own text" (1986:47). This I have attempted to adhere to, in conjunction with the work of many critics whose perceptive insights have been invaluable and indispensable. Whereas I have taken cognisance of the many literary theories that currently abound, I have chosen to pursue my mode of enquiry without adhering to the framework of the strictures of Structuralism, Post-Structuralism and Deconstruction although those approaches did furnish me with significant food for thought.

I conducted my study of Wordsworth's language on three levels. First I studied his language in terms of its effect and impact in an attempt to link feeling, meaning and being in his poetry with his language. This entailed an engagement with the emotional and linguistic understructure that underpins so much of his poetry. I then tried to define some of the many different voices that 'sound' in Wordsworth's poetry in a further attempt to throw more light on his language. And finally, I looked at the many practical aspects of his 'idiolect' in order to define the 'how' of his methodology. In this regard I paid particular attention to Wordsworth's employment of repetition, word clusters, recurring words and images and use of contrast, to mention just a few practical aspects of his language.

In my dissertation I concentrated mostly on the work from Wordsworth's so-called 'great decade' (1797-1807) but also referred to other poems and prose works where I felt warranted. I concentrated primarily on The Prelude (usually the 1805 version purely as a
personal preference), The Excursion(with its preface), Lyrical Ballads (with its prefaces), Essays upon Epitaphs, the 'Immortality Ode' and Tintern Abbey', as well as some of the well-known ballads and lyrics, but again allowed myself to dip into lesser known works where I felt this would be applicable.

In order to avoid lengthy repetition I refer to the primary works in abbreviated form. Here is the key to abbreviations used:

- **Excursion**
  - **The Excursion** from

- **LB or PLB**
  - **Lyrical Ballads**
  - BRETT, R.L. & JONES, A.R., eds. 1991,
  - Wordsworth & Coleridge Lyrical Ballads.

- **Prelude**
  - **The Prelude** from

- **PrW**
  - Wordsworth's prose works from

- **WW**
  - Wordsworth's poetry and prose extracts from

I abbreviated the lengthy 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood' to the 'Immortality Ode' (it is also referred to as the 'Intimations Ode' in many sources), and 'Lines Written in a few miles above Tintern Abbey' to 'Tintern Abbey'. As regards the titles of other poems (capitals and punctuation) I strictly adhered to Gill's usage in his excellent collection referred to above. As regards The Prelude I similarly followed the Wordsworth, Abrams and Gill version, and De Selincourt and Darbishire for The Excursion.
WORDSWORTH'S VOCABULARIES OF BEING

Visionary power
Attends upon the motions of the winds
Embodied in the mystery of words;
There darkness makes abode, and all the host
Of shadowy things do work their changes there
As in a mansion like their proper home.
Even forms and substances are circumfused
By that transparent veil with light divine,
And through the turnings intricate of verse
Present themselves as objects recognized
In flashes and with a glory scarce their own.
(Prelude, 1805, V, ll 620-29).

Wordsworth knew that language lay at the core of life and the human condition. He knew that words were much more than mere words—that they are in fact the very modalities of our being. This chapter is an attempt at an assessment and interpretation of the linguistic aspects of Wordsworth’s poetry concomitant with his concern with the power of the human mind, imagination and memory and his ambiguous feelings about language. I will also speculate about the powerful aesthetic and emotional impact of Wordsworth’s ‘words’ and how he achieves this.

Frances Ferguson claims that "language was an explicit subject of speculation" for Wordsworth and that he thought "seriously and coherently about language" in both his poetry and his prose (1977:XI). J.P. Ward refers to the "deep change he effected in poetry by writing in what he called 'the language of men' and claims that "Wordsworth 'saved' language for poetry" (1984:3). I believe that Wordsworth not only thought seriously and coherently about language, but that he also understood not only the determining function of language, but also had a strong sense of its inadequacies and instability. Again J.P. Ward puts it extremely perceptively:

... Wordsworth foresaw a large and forthcoming, if not already arriving, change in language which squared with a change in human perception, and that this was a change from a view of the world as traditional and stable to one which saw a secular world, uncreated and uncertain of itself. In such a world human language would cease to be that which templated realities and would become the chief means by which, inadequately and in our crowded and only half-comprehended existence, we contact each other. Wordsworth wrote in this new language, or in an early form it... For we have also to try to underline the idea that such poetry's character is reflexive. It inescapably entails a recognition, within the act of writing, of this deep change in the nature of language. ...This new poetry watches its own movement and expression at all times. ... In the hindsight of our knowledge of what Wordsworth was to
produce we can surely argue that he foresaw the deep change in language itself which was to come (1984:3-5).

Keith Hanley also sees Wordsworth's theory and practice as "historically prefigurative of the new 'signifying practice'" that would be realized fully by later avant-garde writers in that he tried to create a "modern literary discourse in which to accommodate the revolutionary knowledge of his time" (1998:1).

Wordsworth objected to the artificial poetic diction of his time exactly because it was artificial. He was convinced that language and the human mind were inextricably connected in an almost organic unity. In the second Essay upon Epitaphs he claims that language is interpreted in the "inner cell of the mind" (PrW, 1974, II:70). He saw an almost symbiotic relationship between mind and language and was concerned about the way in which "manner language and the human mind act and react on each other" (Preface to LB, 1991:243). He wanted his language to express the "inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind" (PLB, 1991:249). Likewise, he wanted to create a language free from "the triviality and meanness" (PLB, 1991:249) that he felt prevailed at the time. He opted for the language of rustic life because he felt that in "that situation the essential passions of the heart find a better soil ... and speak a plainer and more emphatic language" (PLB, 1991:245) free from the "gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers" (PLB, 1991:244). Essentially, Wordsworth wanted his language to express "the manner in which our feelings and ideas [i.e. the mind] are associated in a state of excitement (PLB, 1991:247) which is where and how poetry is generated. Above all else Wordsworth wanted to create a language and poetry that would be honest; that would be true to the "discerning intellect of man" (Excursion, 1949:4). He in short wanted to create a language that would be a fit vehicle to express:

... such fear and awe  
As fall upon us often when we look  
Into our Minds, into the Mind of Man —  
My haunt, and the main region of my song (Preface to The Excursion, ll 38-41).
He needed a language to "proclaim" and demonstrate

How exquisitely the individual Mind  
... to the external World  
Is fitted—and how exquisitely, too—  
... The external World is fitted to the Mind (Preface to The Excursion, ll 62-68).

In this regard it is crucial to remember that Wordsworth regarded poetry as passion—"it is the history or science of feelings" as he said in the Note to 'The Thorn' (WW, 1984:594). In the same Note he also said that

Words, a Poet's words more particularly, ought to be weighed in the balance of feeling and not measured by the space which they occupy upon paper (WW, 1984:594).

He therefore wanted to create a language that could depict feeling and emotion truly and without distortion; "what matters is how words are used to signal forth the important 'realities' behind them, the human passions" (Simpson, 1982:71) so that "the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation and not the action and situation to the feeling" (PLB, 1991:248).

Wordsworth needed to create a language in which he could "hold fit converse" (Prelude, 1850, XIV, l 108) with the world and his audience; a language in which he would not only be able to express the dignity of everyday things, but also the "under-presence" and the "dark deep thoroughfare" of the human mind (Prelude, 1850, XIII, 72, 64). He saw himself as both teacher and poet and in both guises he needed a language in which to explore the "mysteries of being" (Prelude, 1850, XIII, l 85) and teach his audience that "the mind of man becomes / A thousand times more beautiful than the earth/ On which he dwells" (Prelude, 1805, XIII, ll 446-48). Wordsworth regarded language as a natural product of the creative powers of the mind in conjunction with the imagination which "is consistently related to the power of language ... and the language-making impulse" (Rabinowitz, 1983:178).

As has already been indicated, however, Wordsworth's attitude to language was ambiguous. Whereas he was conscious of the power and resources of language, he was also aware of its instability and deficiencies. He not only refers to the "wondrous power of
words" (*Prelude*, 1805, VII, l 121), but regrets that he has to "call upon a few weak words to say/What is already written in the hearts/Of all that breathe" (*Prelude*, 1805, V, ll 186-88). In the frequently quoted and intriguing passage from the third *Essay upon Epitaphs* he describes it as follows:

Words are too awful an instrument for good or evil to be trifled with: they hold above all other external powers a dominion over thoughts. If words be not ... an incarnation of the thought but only a clothing for it, then surely will they prove an ill gift; such a one as those poisoned vestments, read of in the stories of superstitious times, which had 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, and to dissolve (*PrW*, 1974,II:84-85).

It is clear therefore that language, for Wordsworth, holds "the characters of [both] danger [and] desire" (*Prelude*, 1805,I, ll 496-97). He knows that much of what he wants to express "lies far hidden from the reach of words" (*Prelude*, 1850, III, l 187). In the 1800 Note to 'The Thorn' Wordsworth also touches on this:

For the Reader cannot be too often reminded that Poetry is passion: it is the history of or science of feelings: now every man must know that an attempt is rarely made to communicate impassioned feeling without something of an accompanying consciousness of the inadequateness of our own powers, or the deficiencies of language (*WW*, 1984:594).

This echoes what he said in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*:

... I ask what is meant by the Poet? What is a Poet? ... He is a man speaking to men ... [who] has acquired a greater readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels .... But, whatever portion of this faculty we may suppose even the greatest Poet to possess, there cannot be a doubt but that the language which it [the passions] will suggest to him, must, in liveliness and truth, fall far short of that which is uttered by men in real life (*LB*, 1991:256).

Wordsworth also touches on the deficiencies of language in the following well-known Simplon Pass passage from *The Prelude* of 1850:
Imagination—here the Power so called
Through sad incompetence of human speech
That awful Power rose from the mind’s abyss
Like an unfathered vapour that enwraps,
At once, some lonely traveller. I was lost;
Halted without an effort to break through;
But to my conscious soul I now can say—
‘I recognise thy glory’: in such strength
Of usurpation, when the light of sense
Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed
The invisible world, doth greatness make abode (Prelude, 1850, VI, ll 592-602).

In this passage the power referred to as the imagination is only called that through lack of a better, more apt, word. Language does not have the resources to allow Wordsworth to really name it as it should be named. One can detect a marked note of frustration in Wordsworth's reference to the "sad incompetence of human speech". I think this tone of linguistic frustration continues further on in the Simplon Pass episode (quoted on p.29)—the winds are "bewildered and forlorn", the rocks mutter and the stream is raving (ll 628-33). One has a strong sense of expression being impeded and thwarted. In the 1815 Essay, Supplementary to the Preface, Wordsworth refers to this very issue when he says that "the word, Imagination, has been overstrained, from impulses honourable to mankind, to meet the demands of the faculty which is perhaps the noblest of our nature. ... Poverty of language is the primary cause of the use which we make of the word, Imagination" (PrW, 1974, III:81). Douglas Kneale also refers, rather wittily, to this passage:

... it is the "incompetence" of language ... that gives to the power the so-called label of "Imagination". In other words, the naming of the power lies beyond the ability of language itself ... it actually lies beyond "the reach of words" (III, 187). Had Wordsworth said that the name was the result of the sad performance of the poet, he would have reiterated the convention [of the tongue-tied poet] of affected modesty; he makes himself worthy of his Romantic stature, however, by shifting the question of language to the questionableness of language, to the limits of language's competence (1984:14).

Alison Phinney states that we tend to think of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign as a 20th century idea, originating with Ferdinand de Saussure (1987:66). Locke had, however, voiced this very concept long before in his Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690) when he claimed that the relationship between word and idea is established by a

The Romantics (and Wordsworth in particular) wanted to find a purer, almost Adamic language to counter the artificial diction of their time and Neo-Classical forebears. They dreamt of a more natural language that would "transcend the arbitrariness of the sign" (Phinney, 1987:67). But this dream was not a naive assumption that language was transparent, but was a result of their struggle with the knowledge that language is unstable and that it unavoidably influences human perception and literary expression. And herein lies the reason why one often "encounters in Romantic texts a double vision of language, the dream of unmediated communication side by side with the realization that language always mediates between human beings" (Phinney, 1987:67). Phinney finds an interesting 'demonstration' of this dual consciousness in Wordsworth's 'There was a Boy', first published in Lyrical Ballads in 1800 and thereafter incorporated, in somewhat altered form, in Book V of The Prelude where the boy is depicted as a childhood friend (as opposed to earlier versions where the boy is the poet himself):

... many a time,
At evening, when the earliest stars began
To move along the edges of the hills,
Rising or setting, would he stand alone,
Beneath the trees, or by the glimmering lake;
And there, with fingers interwoven, both hands
Pressed closely palm to palm and to his mouth
Uplifted, he, as through an instrument,
Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls,
That they might answer him.—And they would shout
Across the watery vale, and shout again,
Responsive to his call,—with quivering peals,
And long halloos, and screams, and echoes loud
Redoubled and redoubled; concourse wild
Of jocund din! ('There was a Boy', ll 2-15).
The dialogue between the owl and the boy can be seen as a realization of the Romantic dream of a natural language of communication between man and nature—the boy hoots at the owls and the owls respond. But when the dialogue breaks down:

And, when it chanced
That pauses of deep silence mock'd his skill (ll 15-16)

it can be seen as an admission that unproblematic communication is not possible:

In effect, Wordsworth renounces here the Romantic dream of a natural language and resigns himself to the inevitable mediation of linguistic representation. This is not to say that Wordsworth abandons entirely the desire for an organic language (Phinney, 1987:68).

Charles Altieri also touches on this aspect of Wordsworth's poetry when he says that Wordsworth's poems

often vacillate between a desire to find a language that directly communicates natural sensations and a self-conscious reflection of the ironic gap between what the mind is given and what it constructs (1976:124),

to which I would like to add, obviously what it constructs in language upon the shifting sands of linguistic instability! Wordsworth can be viewed either as a "heroic precursor of our contemporary religion of tormented self-consciousness" or as somebody who "recognized the modern problematic of language and sought to overcome it within an essentially naturalistic scheme" (Altieri, 1976:124-25). A.C. Goodson argues along similar lines when he says that it is in Wordsworth's "conception of ordinary language as the locus of human significance" that Wordsworth's relevance for modern readers lies (1983:45).

And in the realm of nature and the naturalistic, Wordsworth also succeeds in making a powerful social statement about suffering and injustice — *Lyrical Ballads* was not just revolutionary as regards language and style, but was also revolutionary in political intent in that it highlighted the plight of the poor and disadvantaged in the repressive political climate that pertained inside England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Poems like 'The Last of the Flock', 'The Convict' and 'The Female Vagrant' "are powerfully disturbing statements about very unfortunate and painfully suffering poor people [that raise] important sociopolitical questions" (Johnston & Ruoff, 1987:135).
One now, of course, has to define, if possible, what this 'language' that Wordsworth 'created' was like. Possibly one of its most important characteristics is the echoing, resonating quality that it has. This is, in the first place, achieved by his use of repetition and his penchant for certain words (like naked, mind, glory, soul, dream), word groups or "word-clusters" (Davies, 1986:79), and recurring images like the cuckoo, the shield image, the moon and the imagination as a vapour or mist to mention but a few that permeate his work. These words, images and word clusters are used over and over in his poetry so that they become leitmotifs laden with meaning and traces from previous usages which reinforce and deepen their emotional impact and utilize meanings or 'shades' of meanings from previous usages and occasions.

Hugh Sykes Davies describes it as follows:

... the effects of repetition and apparent tautology were not by any means necessarily confined to particular poems, or to short passages in the longer poems. On the contrary, they naturally tended to extend their influence from poem to poem, over the whole range of his writing — even his prose. Once a word together with its close associates, 'words of the same character' as he puts it, had effectively become things, or a group of things, in his mode of expressing feeling and thought, it was never quite the same again. And when it had been used repeatedly, by a kind of extended tautology, in poem after poem, in year after year, as his meditations eddied round in their circling progress, such word-things would acquire a power in his vocabulary, in his poetry, quite out of proportion to their usual force in the language really spoken by men, even though they might well be a very common part of it. The 'selection', in fact, was made by this completely personal, individual process [and] it was upon words thus selected that his highly individual poetry was based (1986:46-47).

Edwin Stein is also aware of this quality in Wordsworth's poetry. He says that:

In Wordsworth all are revenants, perceptions which return after a time, though changed, from a mental hiding place to confront again an active consciousness. In this sense, they are all echoes ... the assertion of continuity against disruptive facts or forces [which] is achieved by an internalizing of the echo until it becomes a kind of soul music, a mediator of endless life experienced ... (1988:42, 79).

But Wordsworth does not just achieve a dense and emotionally laden language by his use of repetition. He also succeeds in binding his work into a tightly coherent whole by his use of recurring images and words that echo through it. These tautologies or repetitions do not
just link various passages with each other, but they also emphasize the dominant feelings and trains of thought that permeate Wordsworth's work. In this way for instance one finds that the image of an oppressive weight recurs again and again. In *An Evening Walk* (composed in 1788-89, published in 1793) the dying child's weight numbs its mother's arm:

—With backward gaze, locked joints, and step of pain,
Her seat scarce left, she strives, alas! in vain
To teach their limbs along the burning road
A few short steps to totter with their load,
Shakes her numb arm that slumbers with its **weight**,  
And eyes through tears the mountain's shadeless height (*An Evening Walk, ll 247-52)*.

In 'Salisbury Plain' (composed in 1793-1794 and rewritten in 1795) which compares the wretched state of the poor in England during a so-called civilized age with the conditions of primitive man, thoughts of happier times and social injustice acquire a deadly weight:

The thoughts which bow the kindly spirits down  
And break the springs of joy, their **deadly weight**  
Derive from memory of pleasures flown  
Which haunts us in some sad reverse of fate,  
Or from reflection on the state  
Of those who on the couch of Affluence rest  
By laughing Fortune's sparkling cup elate  
While we of comfort rest, by pain depressed  
No other pillow knows than Penury's iron breast ('Salisbury Plain', *ll 19-27*).

In 'The Female Vagrant', originally composed as part of 'Salisbury Plain' and published in *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798, the unfortunate woman is virtually rendered mute by her appalling misfortunes:

....—She ceased, and weeping turned away,  
As if because her tale was at an end  
She wept;—because she had no more to say  
Of that **perpetual weight** which on her spirit lay ('The Female Vagrant', *ll 266-70*).

The image is also found in 'Tintern Abbey' (which Wordsworth first saw in 1793, but only wrote about in 1798 when it was published in *Lyrical Ballads*) where reference is made to the weight of the world that oppresses the human spirit:
... that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the **heavy and the weary weight**
Of all this unintelligible world
Is lighten'd ('Tintern Abbey', ll 38-42).

And in the 'Immortality Ode' (completed in 1804):

> Thou little Child, yet glorious in the might
> Of untamed pleasures, on thy Being's height,
> Why with such earnest pains dost thou provoke
> The years to bring the inevitable yoke,
> Thus blindly with thy blessedness at strife?
> Full soon thy soul shall have her earthly freight,
> And custom lie upon thee with a **weight**,  
> Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life! ('Immortality Ode', ll 124-131).

Throughout *The Prelude* one also finds this image recurring. Wordsworth worked on *The Prelude* throughout his life. It was first composed in a two-book form between 1798 and 1799. This was later expanded to the thirteen-book version that was completed in 1805. By 1839 the fourteen-book version was in the main complete. This version, named *The Prelude* by Wordsworth's wife Mary, was only published after his death in 1850. Here are some instances of the weight image that occur in *The Prelude*:

> ... it grieves me for thy state, 0 man
> Thou paramount creature, and thy race, while ye
> Shall sojourn on this planet, not for woes
> Which thou endur'st—**that weight**, albeit huge
> I charm away (*Prelude*, 1805, V, ll 3-6).

> Though doing wrong and suffering, and full oft
> Bending beneath our **life's mysterious weight**
> Of pain and fear... (*Prelude*, 1805, V, ll 433-44).

> ... but for some personal concerns
> That hung about me in my own despite
> Perpetually, **no heavy weight**, but still
> A baffling and a hindrance... (*Prelude*, 1805, V, ll 34-37).

> A **weight** of ages did at once descend
> Upon my heart—no thought embodied, no
> Distinct remembrances, but **weight and power**,  
> Power growing with the **weight** (*Prelude*, 1805, VIII, ll 703-705).
... depressed
By false opinion and contentious thought,
Or aught of heavier and more deadly weight
In trivial occupations and the round
Of ordinary intercourse ...(Prelude, 1805, XI, ll 259-63).

Similarly in The Excursion (published in 1814) the weight image recurs:

And thus before his eighteenth year was told,  
Accumulated feelings pressed his heart  
With still increasing weight (Excursion, I, ll 280-82).

It is interesting to note that the above lines were first composed in slightly different form as part of 'The Pedlar' that Wordsworth worked on in conjunction with 'The Ruined Cottage' (that later incorporated it) between the years 1797 and probably, 1804.

He mingled, where he might, the various tasks  
Of summer, autumn, winter and of spring  
But this endureth not; his good humour soon  
Became a weight in which no pleasure was (Excursion, I, ll 576-79).

Wordsworth does not, however, just re-use the same image in a similar way all the time. Often he introduces the same image in somewhat altered form to change the emotion or mood of a passage, or enhance the emotional impact. In lines 104-10 of 'The Ruined Cottage' the desolation of Margaret's cottage (and, by implication, of her existence) is described:

... and this poor hut  
Stripped of its outward garb of household flowers,  
Of rose and sweet-briar, offers to the wind  
A cold bare wall whose earthy top is tricked  
With weeds and the rank spear-grass. She is dead,  
And nettles rot and adders sun themselves  
Where we have sate together ...

Yet towards the end of the poem the mood has changed. Although Margaret is dead and the misery of her existence and end is not in dispute, she is at peace — "She sleeps in the calm earth, and peace is here" — and the weeds and spear grass have been "By mist and silent rain-drops silvered o'er". This image of gentleness and beauty convinces us "imaginatively ... that Margaret is at peace because she is part of a world whose beauty is
the outward sign of its beneficence" (Jonathan\textsuperscript{1} Wordsworth, 1969:149). As always, Wordsworth puts it best himself:

As once I passed did to my heart convey
So still an image of tranquillity
So calm and still, and looked so beautiful
Amid the uneasy thoughts which filled my mind,
That what we feel of sorrow and despair
From ruin and from change, and all the grief
The passing shews of being leave behind,
Appeared an idle dream that could not live
Where meditation was. I turned away
And walked along my road in happiness ('The Ruined Cottage', II 516-25).

Hugh Sykes Davies makes an extremely perceptive point. Faithful readers of Wordsworth, who read him with "a dogged faithfulness to his own text" (1986:47), become sensitized to his words "which, by the process of repetition and tautology, had come to bear in it [his particular lexicon or idiolect] a weight, a power, greater than they usually carry" (1986:47). Then Davies also makes another very valid point namely that readers of Wordsworth are either "addicts or nothing":

The casual or desultory reader [of Wordsworth] never gives himself the chance of becoming sensitized to these words, and taking them at their usual instead of their Wordsworthian weight, he is simply puzzled that anyone has ever taken the poetry very seriously. But once a certain point in this sensitization is reached, there is a sudden, an almost inexplicable extension in understanding [my emphasis], as personal and intimate as the language through which it has been reached (1986:47).

Many critics have identified a great many 'typically' Wordsworthian words. These include (to mention but a few): 'man, love, heart, time, mind, life, eye, soul, nature, power, earth, heaven, sun, hope, joy, spirit, light, mountain, fear, hand, truth, death, pleasure, shadow, naked, bare, splendour, glory, gleam, lustre, nest, abode, motion, stream, vision, flash' and, 'dark'. Many of them often occur in conjunction with the so-called 'gleam-cluster' that Sykes Davies identifies (1986:86) which includes 'gleam(s), light, glory, dream, splendour' and 'lustre'. I regard 'brood/brooding/broods' as other typically Wordsworthian words. To illustrate I will quote a few examples before briefly discussing his usage of it:

\textsuperscript{1} To distinguish the critic from the poet, he will be referred to as Jonathan Wordsworth consistently even though this to some extent contravenes the bibliographical convention used throughout.
When, in the south, the wan noon brooding still,
Breathed a pale steam around the glaring hill (An Evening Walk, ll 53-54).

Now o'er the eastern hill, where darkness broods
O'er all its vanished dells, and lawns, and woods
Where but a mass of shade the sight can trace,
She lifts in silence up her lovely face;
Above the gloomy valley flings her light,
Far to the western slopes ... (An Evening Walk, ll 399-404).

—Such grateful haunts foregoing, if I oft
Must turn elsewhere—to travel near the tribes
And fellowships of men, and see ill sights
Of madding passions mutually inflamed;
Must hear humanity in fields and groves
Pipe solitary anguish; or must hang
Brooding above the fierce confederate storm
Of sorrow barricaded evermore
Within the walls of cities (Preface to The Excursion, ll 72-80).

'Twas summer, and the sun had mounted high:
Southward the landscape indistinctly glared
Through a pale steam; but all the northern downs,
In the clearest air ascending, showed far off
A surface dappled o'er with shadows flung
From brooding clouds; shadows that lay in spots
Determined and unmoved ... (Excursion, I, ll 1-7).

It is significant that in the opening lines of 'The Ruined Cottage' (completed in 1798) the description of the clouds is different—Wordsworth refers to the "deep embattled clouds". When Wordsworth used these lines (as quoted above) in The Excursion (1814) the clouds became "brooding". This goes some way towards demonstrating the many-layered significance that the word held for Wordsworth. "Brooding", for him is not a passive exercise — it holds turmoil and activity, which makes it a fit replacement for "embattled".

... He had received
A precious gift; for as he grew in years,
With these impressions would he still compare
All his remembrances, thoughts, shapes, and forms;
And, being still unsatisfied with aught
Of dimmer character, he thence attained
An active power to fasten images
Upon his brain; and on their pictured lines
Intensely brooded, even till they acquired
The liveliness of dreams (Excursion, I, ll 139-48).
But ill it suited me, in journey dark
O'er moor and mountain, midnight theft to hatch
The black disguise, the warning whistle shrill
And ear still busy on its nightly watch,
Were not for me, brought up in nothing ill;
Besides, on griefs so fresh my thoughts were brooding still ("The Female Vagrant", ll 235-43).

There was a roaring in the wind all night;
The rain came heavily and fell in floods;
But now the sun is rising calm and bright
The birds are singing in the distant woods;
Over his own sweet voice the Stock-dove broods ("Resolution and Independence", ll 1-5).

But, O dear friend
The poet, gentle creature as he is,
Hath like the lover his unruly times—
His fits when he is neither sick nor well,
Though no distress be near him but his own
Unmanageable thoughts. The mind itself,
The meditative mind, best pleased perhaps
While she as duteous as the mother dove
Sits brooding, lives not always to that end.
But hath less quiet instincts—goadings on
That drive her as in trouble through the groves (Prelude, 1805, I, ll 144-54).

Mighty prophet! Seer blest!
On whom those truths do rest
Which we are toiling all our lives to find:
Thou, over whom thy Immortality
Broods like the Day, a Master o'er a Slave
A Presence which is not to be put by ("Immortality Ode", ll 114-19).

I think that Wordsworth's usage of the words 'brood(s)' or 'brooding' in these extracts is similar and yet dissimilar, too. It varies from a fairly ordinary mode to distinctly strange usages. The darkness broods over the invisible landscape; likewise the clouds brood over a shadowed landscape. These are fairly concrete images. But then we move into more abstract territory—the Female Vagrant's thoughts brood over her griefs and The Wanderer (in The Excursion) broods over the images in his mind till they acquire a dreamlike quality. And in an even more abstract vein, the poet's thoughts brood over the "fierce confederate storm / of sorrow" that attends the human condition. Stranger still is the stock-dove's
brooding over "his own sweet voice" as opposed to the quiet and conventional image of the mother dove brooding on her nest. And strangest yet is the image of the child's immortality that broods over him like a day, as a master over a slave. Despite many critics' discussion of this line, I still think that it defies analysis—I do not know what it 'means'; what I do know is that it has, for me, many resonances and half-remembered echoes from previous usages. Another interesting point is that when Wordsworth uses 'brood' he often surrounds it with vigorous, sometimes even violent verbs—the landscape glares, shadows are flung, shadows lie determined, the brooding is intense, light is flung, madding passions are inflamed and a fierce storm of sorrow rages behind barricades. Warning whistles shrill around it and the wind roars all night; unruly times prevail and the poet's mind is goaded and driven and has unmanageable thoughts. This confirms what was said earlier that brooding for Wordsworth is not a passive or quiet exercise—it is an intense, even disturbing activity that often stimulates the mind's creativity. Jonathan Wordsworth says that the "human mind initiates the creative process by brooding" (WW, 1979:36) which reminds me of Sykes Davies's reference to "the long, impassioned meditations of Wordsworth's mind and feelings" during the course of his work (1986:87).

Wordsworth's language has strong covert elements that underpin his poetry and add to its impact and resonance. These solicit, indeed demand, the reader's participation and involvement. One is constantly (albeit sometimes only subliminally) aware of other meanings and echoes that flicker around his words and the boundaries of his sense. Alison Phinney says that Wordsworth in fact plays a "language game ... in which the reader is an active player" (1987:70). In referring to the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter (Prelude, 1805, V, ll 619-29, p.1) she describes it extremely well:

Language is here presented simultaneously as transparent embodiment and cloaking veil, a place of darkness and a source of light, pure presentation of things in themselves, and as a radiant addition to them. The very duplicity of Wordsworth's metaphors suggests a hesitation between the two views of language. While he wants language to be pure transparence, it would seem to be the very obscurity of language that constitutes its brilliant sublimity (1987:70).

The 'sensitized' reader (to use Davies's term) is drawn into the poetry, and works alongside Wordsworth in order to make the poetry 'mean' (to use that current buzz word!). But Wordsworth does not hand his largesse to the reader on a platter—the reader has to
unearth, as it were, "the unsaid that inheres in the said" (1987:71) to do the writing justice and gain some access to:

... the things which I had shaped
And yet not shaped, had seen and scarcely seen
Had felt, and thought of in my solitude (Prelude, 1805, VIII, ll 514-16).

Jonathan Wordsworth refers to the matter of fact descriptions of Michael's life (after his son Luke's departure and descent into crime) that are underlaid by deeper implications:

... and at length
He in the dissolute city gave himself
To evil courses: ignominy and shame
Fell on him so that he was driven at last
To seek a hiding-place beyond the seas.
There is a comfort in the strength of love;
'Twill make a thing endurable, which else
Would break the heart:—Old Michael found it so
.................................................................

... Among the rocks
He went, and still looked up upon the sun,
And listened to the wind and as before
Performed all kinds of labour for his Sheep,
And for the land his small inheritance.
And to that hollow dell from time to time
Did he repair, to build the fold of which
His flock had need. 'Tis not forgotten yet
The pity which was then in every heart
For the Old Man—and 'tis believed by all
That many and many a day he thither went,
And never lifted up a single stone.
There, by the sheep-fold, sometimes was he seen
Sitting alone, with that his faithful Dog,
Then old, beside him, lying at his feet.
The length of full seven years from time to time
He at the building of his sheep-fold wrought,
And left the work unfinished when he died (ll 453-81).

The descriptions of Michael's daily round suggest to me the terrible hollowness left in his life—he works to maintain an inheritance that nobody can in fact inherit. This is later confirmed—his wife survives him by a mere three years after which "the estate ... went into a Stranger's hand". Their cottage disappears and "the ploughshare has been through the ground/On which it stood". The reference to 'comfort' suggests to me the very opposite—I detect a terrible desolation in his 'going through the motions', as it were. The fact that he
leaves the sheep-fold, that was to have been a covenant between him and Luke, unfinished, confirms this. Reference to his faithful dog underlines the fact that his son was not faithful.

In depicting powerful emotions in such a restrained and understated way, Wordsworth creates a poetry that makes "dangerously few concessions to the reader" (Jonathan Wordsworth, 1969:84). This touches on a point that has been made by many critics—Wordsworth effectively demands to be read on his own terms. The reader has to do this in order to do the poetry justice and to gain from it the immense riches that can be reaped when one enters the linguistically challenging but rewarding Wordsworthian milieu on his terms. Readers and critics who 'buy into' the tired old negative criticisms from the past do neither Wordsworth, his poetry, nor themselves justice. One can not help but think of the many condescending references made through the years to these much maligned lines from 'The Thorn'.

You see a little muddy pond  
Of water, never dry;  
I've measured it from side to side  
'Tis three feet long, and two feet wide.

How can anybody miss or disregard the horror inherent in those much scorned dimensions if one considers that Martha Ray may have drowned her baby in that little muddy pond? What desperation is suggested by the very thought that she would utilize such a barely sufficient body of water for her terrible deed?

Frances Ferguson also refers to the necessity of the reader's 'participation' in reading Wordsworth when she claims that Wordsworth's language throws "the burden of consciousness back upon the reader" (1977:34). The reader's consciousness has to fill the "power vacuum" (1977:33) that Wordsworth detects in words. Ferguson is referring specifically to epitaphs here, but I think this is true of Wordsworth's language in general; it is not only into epitaphs that the "reader must be read" (1977:33), but into all his poetry. When Wordsworth refers to the imagination as an "unfathered vapour" (Prelude, 1805, VI, 527), he calls on the reader's own poetic sensibility and creativity to interpret his words. Alison Phinney says that the "reader must become active as a self-conscious producer" (1987:70) of the poem and as an active participant in the production of its meaning. A reader who does not do this, who refuses to listen to "the music of the poem" and abjures
his "voluntary power to modulate" (*WW*, 1984:630) this music as Wordsworth said in his 1815 Preface to *Poems*, "is driven to the conclusion that the poem is absurd and trivial" (Phinney, 1987:70).

Michael O'Neill argues along similar lines when he claims that Wordsworth's poetry shapes "intuitions on the margins of language" and that his words "act as enigmatic signs towards a barely graspable significance" (1996:3). I think this is particularly true of passages like the Simplon Pass episode, (already referred to on p.5), the ascent of Snowdon and the so-called 'spots of time' episodes, all from *The Prelude*. Likewise the 'Immortality Ode' and some of the lyrics (most notably 'A slumber did my spirit seal') suggest a multi-layered significance beyond the surface meanings of the words. The lengthy Snowdon episode illustrates this:

... I panted up
With eager pace, and no less eager thoughts
Thus might we wear perhaps an hour away,
Ascending at loose distance each from each
And I, as chanced, the foremost of the band—
When at my feet the ground appeared to brighten,
And with a step or two seemed brighter still;
Nor had I time to ask the cause of this,
For instantly 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,
Which meek and silent rested at my feet.
A hundred hills their dusky backs upheaved
All over this still ocean, and beyond,
Far, far beyond, the vapours shot themselves,
In headlands, tongues, and promontory shapes,
Into the sea, the real sea, that seemed
To dwindle and give up its majesty,
Usurped upon as far as sight could reach.
Meanwhile, the moon looked down upon this shew
In single glory, and we stood, the mist
Touching our very feet; and from the shore
At distance not the third part of a mile
Was a blue chasm; a fracture in the vapour,
A deep and gloomy breathing-place, through which
Mounted the roar of waters, torrents, streams
Innumerable, roaring with one voice.
The universal spectacle throughout
Was shaped for admiration and delight,
Grand in itself alone, but in that breach
Through which the homeless voice of waters rose,
That dark deep thoroughfare, had Nature lodged
The soul, the imagination of the whole.

A meditation rose in me that night
Upon the lonely mountain when the scene
Had passed away, and it appeared to me
The perfect image of a mighty mind,
Of one that feeds upon infinity,
That is exalted by an under-presence,
The sense of God, or whatso'er is dim
Or vast in its own being,—above all,
One function of such mind had Nature there
Exhibited by putting forth, and that
With circumstance most awful and sublime,
That domination which she oftentimes
Exerts upon the outward face of things,
So moulds them, and endues, abstracts, combines,
Or by abrupt and unhabitual influence
Doth make one object so impress itself
Upon all others, and pervade them so,
That even the grossest minds must see and hear
And cannot chuse but feel. The power which these
Acknowledge when thus moved, which Nature thus
Thrusts forth upon the senses, is the express
Resemblance—in the fullness of its strength
Made visible—a genuine counterpart
And brother of the glorious faculty
Which higher minds bear with them as their own (Prelude, 1805, XIII, ll 35-90).

Geoffrey Hartman feels that there is something truly magical in this passage with its "rich confusion" and "partial and contradictory structures of unification" (1987:172-73), and its covert scriptural and Miltonic echoes. The moon's light echoes 'Let there be light' from Genesis, and lines like "a hundred hills their dusky backs upheaved" (l 44) evoke Milton's description of Creation in Paradise Lost. J. P. Ward makes the insightful comment that, with its abundance of abstract nouns, this passage does not generate meaning as much as it generates energy, an energy, however, which then succeeds in yielding "even stronger charges of meaning" (1984:93). Wordsworth does not merely uncover the meaning of words in this passage, but rather infuses "further power into whatever meanings the vocabulary he employs already has in the minds of readers" (1984:9). I personally find that
the more one analyses this passage, the stronger and more intriguing it becomes. Firstly, there are such strong links with the Simplon Pass episode (see p.5) in Book VI where the imagination rises like a vapour that usurps ordinary reality and the "light of sense" (*Prelude*, 1805, VI, l 534), to mention but one congruent element of the many that exist. This has the effect that the words in this passage become even more laden with significance in that they echo the previous passage so strongly. Secondly, if one looks at the words themselves, the images that are evoked are not only unusual and intriguing, but often contradictory, containing marked contrasts. The sea of mist is huge, yet it rests "meek and silent" at the poet's feet in sharp contrast with the hills and "their dusky backs upheaved". The vapours shoot themselves into various shapes. From the "blue chasm, a fracture in the vapour" rises a tremendous roar of many waters and yet the "voice" of the waters is "homeless" with, to me, connotations of a more plaintive nature. All this is overlooked "in single glory" by the moon as it "stood naked in the heavens". Surely the most amazing image is that in the fracture or breach, nature has "lodged" the "soul, the imagination of the whole" which seems to Wordsworth the "perfect image of a mighty mind/Of one that feeds upon infinity" (is there a suggestion of voracity here?), possibly God, but it could also be "an inner vastness". The "dark deep thoroughfare" (l 64) becomes an "under-presence" within the individual mind (*Prelude*, 1979:462, note 8). This strongly states Wordsworth's view that the human mind has awesome, indeed godlike, potential and capacities.

I would also like to look at one of the other images in more detail and pursue it further in his work. Wordsworth describes the chasm as a "deep and gloomy breathing-place (l 57). Breath(less), 'breathe' and 'breathing' are typically Wordsworthian words that are often used in conjunction with the idea of sublimity and awesome/awful powers or presences. These repeated usages load the words with added significance. The famous boat-stealing incident is a case in point. It is quoted fairly extensively to convey the linguistic *milieu* in which the word 'breath' occurs later on:

... lustily:

I dipped my oars into the silent lake,
And, as I rose upon the stroke, my boat
Went heaving through the water, like a swan;
When from behind the craggy steep, till then
The bound of the horizon, a huge cliff,
As if with voluntary power instinct,
Upreaed its head. I struck, and struck again
And, growing still in stature, the huge cliff
Rose up between me and the stars, and still
With measured motion, like a living thing,
Strode after me. With trembling hands I turned,
And through the silent water stole my way
Back to the cavern of the willow tree.
There, in her mooring-place, I left my bark,
And, through the meadows homeward went, with grave
And serious thoughts; and after I had seen
That spectacle, for many days, my brain
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being; in my thoughts
There was a darkness, call it solitude,
Or blank desertion, no familiar shapes
Of hourly objects, images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
But huge and mighty forms that do not live
Like living men moved slowly through my mind
By day and were the trouble of my dreams.

Wisdom and spirit of the universe!
Thou soul that art the eternity of thought!
That giv'st to forms and images a breath
And everlasting motion! [my emphasis] not in vain,
By day or star-light thus from my first dawn
Of childhood didst thou intertwine for me
The passions that build up our human soul,
Not with the mean and vulgar works of man,
But with high objects, with enduring things
With life and Nature, purifying thus
The elements of feeling and of thought,
And sanctifying, by such discipline,
Both pain and fear, until we recognize
A grandeur in the beating of the heart (Prelude, 1805, I, ll 401-40).

The most striking image in this passage is that of the cliff coming to life—it has seemingly been imbued with life and breath and rears up its head so that it blocks out the stars and with "measured motion" strides after the boat. There is a strong link between lines 408-11, 425-27 and 430-31—they all deal with forms and images that acquire life (breath) in the poet's imagination and provide him with 'intimations' of "dim and undetermined/Of unknown modes of being" to be found, perhaps, in the "dark deep thoroughfare" of the human mind and its creative, imaginative powers.
A similar, but not quite as powerful an evocation occurs in Book IV of *The Prelude*. During an evening walk the poet gains much "restoration" of the spirit and obtains "glimmering views/How life pervades the undecaying mind" (*Prelude, 1805, IV, ll 146 and 154-55*). In this peaceful and musing communion with nature,

... in a wood I sate me down  
Alone, continuing there to muse ...  
........................................  
And in the sheltered coppice where I sate  
Around me, from among the hazel leaves—  
Now here, now there, stirred by the straggling wind—  
Come intermittingly a **breath-like** sound,  
A respiration short and quick ... (*Prelude, 1805, IV, ll 167-76*).

Living nature, indeed! Further examples in Wordsworth's work of his use of the word 'breath' (and its variants) include the following:

the **breathing** air (*Excursion, I, l 188*).

... far and near  
We have an image of the pristine earth,  
The planet in its nakedness: were this  
Man's only dwelling, sole appointed seat,  
First, last, and single, in the **breathing** world (*Excursion, II, ll 359-63*).

Thus, O friend,  
Through times of honour, and through times of shame  
Have I descended, tracing faithfully  
The workings of a youthful mind, beneath  
The **breath** of great events ... (*Prelude, 1805, X, ll 941-45*).

... Sometimes it befell  
In these night-wanderings, that a strong desire  
O'erpowered my better reason, and the bird  
Which was the captive of another's toils  
Became my prey; and, when the deed was done  
I heard among the solitary hills  
Low **breathings** coming after me, and sounds  
Of undistinguishable motion, steps  
Almost as silent as the turf they trod (*Prelude, 1805, I, ll 324-32*).
... giving me
Among the fretful dwellings of mankind
A knowledge, a dim earnest, of the calm
Which nature breathes among the fields and groves (Two-Part Prelude, First Part, II 12-15).

... when from excess
Of happiness my blood appeared to flow
With its own pleasure, and I breathed with joy (Two-Part Prelude, Second Part, II 225-27).

... For I would walk alone
In storm and tempest, or in starlight nights
Beneath the quiet heavens, and at that time
Would feel whate'er there is of power in sound
To breathe an elevated mood ... (Two-Part Prelude, Second Part, II 351-55).

For proof behold this valley, and behold
Yon cottage, where with me my Emma [Dorothy] dwells.
Aye, think on that, my heart, and cease to stir
Pause upon that, and let the breathing frame
No longer breathe, but all be satisfied (Home at Grasmere, II 97-101).

... Urania, I shall need
Thy guidance, or a greater Muse, if such
Descend to earth or dwell in highest heaven.
For I must tread on shadowy ground, must sink
Deep, and, aloft ascending, breathe in worlds
To which the heaven of heavens is but a veil (Home at Grasmere, II 975-79).
(These lines also occur, with very slight variations, in the Preface to The Excursion, II 25-30).

... Thou last left behind
Powers that will work for thee; air, earth and skies;
There's not a breathing of the common wind
That will forget thee ... ('To Toussaint' L 'Ouverture', II 9-12).

It is a beauteous Evening, calm and free;
The holy time is quiet as a Nun
Breathless with adoration ... ('It is a beauteous Evening, calm and free', II, 1-3),

When in the south, the wan noon brooding still,
Breathed a pale steam around the glaring hill (An Evening Walk, II 53-54).
The above goes some way towards illustrating Wordsworth's many-faceted usage of a very ordinary word like 'breath' (and its variants). He endows the word with so many layers of meaning that when he does use it in an ordinary way, it retains glimmerings of these other usages. In 'Nutting' (first composed in 1798 and published in 1800 in *Lyrical Ballads*) Wordsworth uses the word in a perfectly ordinary fashion, and yet so laden has the word become through its many usages, that it resonates with more than ordinary meaning:

... Among the woods,  
And o'er the pathless rocks, I forced my way  
Until, at length, I came to one dear nook  
Unvisited, where not a broken bough  
Drooped with its withered leaves, ungracious sign  
Of devastation, but the hazels rose  
Tall and erect, with milk-white clusters hung,  
A virgin scene!—A little while I stood,  
**Breathing** with such suppression of the heart  
As joy delights in, and with wise restraint  
Voluptuous, fearless of a rival, eyed  
The bouquet ...('Nutting', ll 12-23).

Finally one of the most beautiful and evocative usages of the word 'breathing' occurs in a poem that I agree with Davies was written for Wordsworth's wife Mary as a love-poem, despite the "elegiac bedevilment" (Davies, 1986:16) of its ending. Davies makes the illuminating point that the elegiac endings of the so-called 'Lucy' poems is a 'trick' used by Wordsworth to round off an "intensely personal poem into a semblance of objectivity—of concealing himself" (1986:281). I quote stanza four:

She shall be sportive as a fawn  
That wild with glee across the lawn  
Or up the mountain springs,  
And hers shall be the **breathing** balm  
And hers the silence and the calm  
Of mute insensate things ('Three years she grew in sun and shower', ll 13-18).

I find Thomas Weiskel's reference to "submerged metaphors" in Wordsworth's poetry very apposite here (1985:95). These are metaphors that are not overtly stated or developed, but that 'lurk', in covert fashion, in Wordsworth's poetry and exert a hidden but powerful influence on their linguistic environment. A close look at the famous 'spots of time' passage from *The Prelude* will illustrate this very clearly:
There are in our existence spots of time,
Which with distinct pre-eminence retain
A renovating virtue, whence, depressed
By false opinion and contentious thought,
Or aught of heavier and more deadly weight
In trivial occupations, and the round
Of ordinary intercourse, our minds
Are nourished and invisibly repaired—
A virtue by which pleasure is enhanced,
That penetrates, enables us to mount
When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen.
This efficacious spirit chiefly lurks
Among those passages of life in which
We have had deepest feeling that the mind
Is lord and master, and that outward sense
Is but the obedient servant of her will.
Such moments worthy of all gratitude,
Are scattered everywhere, taking their date
From our first childhood—in our childhood even
Perhaps are most conspicuous. Life with me,
As far as memory can look back, is full
Of this beneficent influence (Prelude, 1805, XI, l 258-79).

This passage is overtly very positive—the mind derives inspiration and strength from the memory of certain events that happened in the past and Wordsworth would use the "spirit of the past/For future restoration" (l 342-43 of the same Book). And yet, if one looks at the hidden metaphor here—that of a spirit 'lurking' in a 'passage'—an almost sinister note is injected. There is a suggestion that the mind's autonomy and power is probably not as unproblematic as one would assume at first reading. Probably the mind's awesome power even holds a threat, particularly if one remembers the Simplon Pass episode where the imagination usurps reality in an inspiring but also frightening way. If one further considers that memory is 'edited' in a subjective fashion by the mind, even the "renovating virtue" of line 260 is placed under a question mark.

It can therefore be seen that what we are dealing with here is another instance of a word having a 'loaded' meaning; words that have a pivotal function in Wordsworth's work although this function is often difficult to define. J. P. Ward refers to these loaded words as words that "leap out" at you (1984:96). There are many instances of these pivotal words in Wordsworth's poetry, but I cannot think of a stronger case in point than the occurrence of
diurnal' in 'A slumber did my spirit seal', (one of the five Lucy poems) that I am going to quote in full simply because I love it and regard it as the virtually perfect poem:

A slumber did my spirit seal;
    I had no human fears:
She seemed a thing that could not feel
    The touch of earthly years.

No motion has she now, no force;
    She neither hears nor sees,
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course
    With rocks and stones and trees.

It is difficult to analyse the impact of the word 'diurnal' in this poem. Whether it is because it is an 'intellectual' word in the linguistically relatively simple environment of the poem or whether it is a simple case of alliteration, the word, to me, seems to anchor the whole poem in a matrix of powerful, suppressed and rigorously controlled emotion. One is aware of "subterranean voicings" (Stein, 1988:114) in the poem that emphasize the loss and pain depicted, despite the reserved tone maintained throughout this lyric. Frances Ferguson refers to "the tone of heightened reserve which characterizes all of the Lucy poems" (1977:175) that is interesting in view of Hugh Sykes Davies's comment in this regard (see p.24).

Many critics have referred to the 'ghostly' quality in Wordsworth's poetry. Wordsworth himself often refers to presences or shades or intimations that 'haunt' him, or admonitions from another world that impinge on his spirit. One of the best examples can be found in Book II of The Prelude:

... and I would stand
Beneath some rock, listening to sounds that are
The ghostly language of the ancient earth
Or make their dim abode in distant winds.
Thence did I drink the visionary power.
I deem not profitless those fleeting moods
Of shadowy exultation; not for this,
That they are kindred to our purer mind
And intellectual life, but that the soul—
Remembering how she felt, but what she felt
Remembering not—retains an obscure sense
Of possible sublimity, to which
With growing faculties she doth aspire,
With faculties still growing, feeling still
That whatsoever point they gain they still
Have something to pursue (Prelude, 1805, II, ll 326-41).

Thomas Weiskel maintains that this ghostly language is a language without semantic dimension (1985:99), but I wonder if it is not rather a powerfully nostalgic reaching back to an ideal, original, pure, almost perfect Adamic state that truly held "the glory and the dream" ('Immortality Ode', l 57). Wordsworth attempts to capture (or recapture, even) this ideal state in an echoing, resonating, reaching or striving language that, in its tight-packed and multi-layered significance, tries to embody and evoke this world that he feels is "thronged with impregnations" (Prelude, 1805, VIII, l 791), intimations of which colour so many of his perceptions. He often refers to the difficulty of distinguishing between the "substance and shadow" (Prelude, 1805, VIII, l 719); and "cannot part/The shadow from the substance" (Prelude, 1805, IV, ll 254-55) because he is so aware of that other dimension "with gleams of half-extinguished thought,/With many recognitions dim and faint" ('Tintern Abbey', ll 59-60).

Wordsworth yearns to express in words these half-comprehended and half-apprehended thoughts, feelings and insights that often come to him in conjunction with memory. His preoccupation with childhood, indeed almost obsession with it, can be explained by his conviction that the child is still close to and in touch with this ideal world. The child still has access to "those truths ... Which we are toiling all our lives to find" (Immortality Ode', ll 115-116). This contact or connectedness is slowly lost with approaching adulthood when "Shades of the prison-house begin to close/Upon the growing Boy" and the human soul acquires the burden of "her earthly freight" (Immortality Ode', ll 67-68 and l 129) and the "deadly weight" of "trivial occupations" (Prelude, 1850, XII, ll 212-13).

But in view of the already stated fact of Wordsworth's ambiguity towards language, the creation of a language that can express what Wordsworth wants it to express, and which can carry the tremendously complex and often highly abstract and abstruse quality of Wordsworth's meditations, is obviously not an easy or unproblematic matter. Wordsworth attempts no less a task than to capture "ghostly revelation[s] beyond the scope of writing" in his "nostalgia for an original or apocalyptic plenitude in language" (Jacobus, 1979:618). Wordsworth yearns to use the spirit, possibly even the vigour and strength, of the past for
"future restoration" but he knows that he is hampered by the limitations of language and the passage of time:

Oh mystery of man, from what a depth
Proceed thy honours! I am lost, but see
In simple childhood something of the base
On which thy greatness stands—but this I feel,
That from thyself it is that thou must give
Else never canst receive. The days gone by
Come back upon me from the dawn almost
Of life; the hiding-places of my power
Seem open, I approach, and then they close;
I see by glimpses now, when age comes on
May scarcely see at all; and I would give
While yet we may, as far as words can give, [my emphasis]
A substance and a life to what I feel:
I would enshrine the spirit of the past
For future restoration (Prelude, 1805, XI, ll 328-42).

The above passage occurs just after one of the so-called 'spots of time' episodes namely the instance of the six year old Wordsworth coming across the gibbet with the murderer's name carved into the turf and kept clear "by superstition of the neighbourhood" (Prelude, 1805, XI, l 296). Wordsworth sees these episodes, usually traumatic ones, as holding a "fructifying virtue" (Two-Part Prelude, 1799, I, l 290) or a "renovating virtue" (Prelude, 1805, XI, l 259) that can be tapped into for strength in future life. It is almost as if Wordsworth listens to his own form of ghostly language from the past to mediate his present by its "beneficent influence" (Prelude, 1805, XI, l 278).

Mary Jacobus is also aware of Wordsworth's longing to create a pure, Adamic language in which to express "as far as words can give / A substance and a life to what I feel" (Prelude, 1805, XI, ll 339-40). She claims that "Wordsworth's nostalgia for an original or apocalyptic plenitude in language ... hardly needs dwelling on" (1979:618). She is likewise conscious of the ghostly quality of Wordsworth's poetry

... when the limits of comprehension and of language are reached together, and the invisible world is disclosed. The tumultuous rhetoric of the Vale of Gondo [Simplon Pass] passage—"Characters of the great Apocalypse,/The types and symbols of Eternity" (VI.570-71)—gestures towards a ghostly revelation beyond the scope of writing ... (1979:618).
The famous Simplon Pass episode (already referred to on p.5) is probably one of the best examples of the poet's mind being stimulated by external nature to a veritable *tour de force* of powerful and visionary poetic eloquence:

... downwards we hurried fast,  
And entered with the road which we had missed  
Into a narrow chasm. The brook and road  
Were fellow-travellers in this gloomy pass,  
And with them did we journey several hours  
At a slow step. The immeasurable height  
Of woods decaying, never to be decayed,  
The stationary blasts of water-falls,  
And everywhere along the hollow rent  
Winds thwarting winds, bewildered and forlorn,  
The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky,  
The rocks that muttered close upon our ears—  
Black drizzling crags that spake by the wayside  
As if a voice were in them—the sick sight  
And giddy prospect of the raving stream,  
The unfettered clouds and region of the heavens,  
Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light,  
Were all like workings of one mind, the features  
Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree,  
Characters of the great apocalypse,  
The types and symbols of eternity,  
Of first, and last, and midst, and without end (*Prelude*, 1805, VI, ll 551-72).

As has been said previously, I detect a struggle for expression in this passage. The poet is forced to confront the limits of language and his linguistic capabilities as he strives to communicate the inchoate feelings and perceptions that throng his mind and fire his imagination, but that lie beyond the reach of the words that he has at his disposal. As a result the passage teems with paradoxes and contradictions: the woods are decaying, yet are never to be decayed; the waterfalls (surely images of continuous motion) are stationary; there are both tumult and peace; darkness and light. Significantly, Nature acquires human qualities—the brook and road are "fellow-travellers", the rocks "mutter", the crags "spake ... as if a voice were in them" and the stream becomes sick and "raving". Nature is attempting to 'speak'—that singularly human ability. It is as if Nature becomes infused with the poet's consciousness and reflects his feelings of turmoil. Tumultuous rhetoric and intricate turnings of verse, indeed!
Paul De Man claims that Wordsworth transposes the contradictions in this passage "into the complexity of a language that unites irreconcilable opposites" (1985:33). This extremely perceptive comment succeeds in pinpointing a very distinctive quality of Wordsworth's language of ambiguity with its "intimation of something illimitable, eternal, infinite" (Abrams, 1972:4). David Ferry also refers to a "tension" between the surface and deeper, covert meanings that one encounters in Wordsworth's poetry (1972:42).

In referring to the passage on visionary power quoted at the beginning of this chapter (see p.1) Mary Jacobus succeeds extremely well in capturing and describing this ghostly, elusive quality of Wordsworth's language. She says that

Wordsworth writes like a man trying to net the wind in the "turnings intricate" of his own blank verse; for all his insubstantiality, his meaning can only be glimpsed if we actually look at the lines (and the spaces between them) rather than [just] read them. We have, so to speak, to see, not feel, how beautiful they are. The deadening of a text already slowed by its solemn rhythms allows us, paradoxically, to endow it with a living spirit—*lodged in the interstices of the web, behind the veil*, as a ghostly and unrepresented presence (1979:619-20. Final italics my emphasis).

This can be linked to what Michael Riffaterre refers to as the "latent intertext" that "surfaces into the text" of Wordsworth's poetry (Hartman, 1987:208). Riffaterre is referring here specifically to Wordsworth's use of "smokeless" in 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge' that in fact suggests the opposite—it cancels, yet preserves the image of the crowded, dirty city. By saying that the city is now clean and bright, it emphasizes that there are times when it is not.

This city now doth like a garment wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.

This valid comment can be extended over Wordsworth's poetry as a whole. Like Hartman, I believe that Riffaterre is indeed attempting to "smoke out" the technique of a very subtle poet (Hartman, 1987:208). And this is simply, to my mind, that Wordsworth can never, or should never, be read on the surface level—Wordsworth's words almost invariably carry metalingual significance. As has already been said Wordsworth's poetry demands the reader's active response; indeed it depends on it. A Wordsworth poem often has no overt
point—the point is Wordsworth's response to whatever stimulus prompted the poem or prompted the emotion that engendered the poem. As readers we in fact respond to the "mystery of his response" (Hartman, 1987:209) on the "divinatory level of interpretation" (1987:210) rather than on a purely grammatical one. The reader has to tap into the submerged consciousness and the hidden or submerged codes in Wordsworth's poetry as they are manifested in his repetition of certain words, themes and trains of thought. And when we do that, we cannot but be aware that under the often ordinary subject matter that Wordsworth imaginatively transforms into his compelling poetry "the fantasy within stirs like a coiled snake" for which marvellously apposite phrase I have to thank Geoffrey Hartman (1987:212).

This quality is also identified by Hugh Sykes Davies. In discussing the proposed arrangement for Lyrical Ballads in Chapter XIV of Biographia Literaria, Coleridge writes that it had been agreed that

... my endeavours should be directed to persons or characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our outward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. Mr Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose to himself as his object to give the charm of novelty to things of the everyday, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us (1990:484).

Davies claims that Wordsworth's poetry in fact succeeds in being more eerie and uncanny than Coleridge's. In a passage that shows a similar understanding to Hartman's of this powerfully evocative yet elusive quality of Wordsworth's poetry, Davies writes:

His 'naked pools and dreary crags' are indeed uncanny, eerie, to a degree far beyond the river Alph and his measureless caverns. And The Leech Gatherer ['Resolution and Independence'] is much more like a ghost-story than Christabel or the Ancient Mariner. So are parts of The Thorn, the meeting with the discharged soldier in Book IV of The Prelude, the sight of the blind beggar in Book VII, and many other minor incidents up and down Wordsworth's poetry. He is, in fact, one of the most notable masters in European literature of the eerie, the uncanny (1986:135).
Wordsworth's desire to create or recover an original, undistorted (one almost wants to say, unpolluted) language can be linked, I believe, to his belief in a pre-existence and his preoccupation with being. Hartman refers to Lionel Trilling's apt comment in this regard:

Throughout all his poetic life Wordsworth was preoccupied by the idea, the sentiment, by the problem of being. All experiences, all emotions lead to it. He was haunted by the mysterious fact that he existed (Hartman, 1987:202).

In Book I, lines 420-22, of *The Prelude* (1805) Wordsworth says that his "brain/Worked with a dim and undetermined sense / Of unknown modes of being". In Book IV, lines 155-61, he has "glimmering views" of

How life pervades the undecaying mind  
How the immortal soul with godlike power  
Informs, creates and thaws the deepest sleep  
That time can lay upon her, how on earth  
Man if he do but live within the light  
Of high endeavours, daily spreads abroad  
His being with a strength that cannot fail.

In Book VI, line 538 he feels that "Our destiny, our nature, and our home,/Is with infinitude". In Book XII, lines 369-77, he remembers

That in life's everyday appearances  
I seemed about this period to have sight  
Of a new world—a world, too, that was fit  
To be transmitted and made visible  
To other eyes, as having for its base  
That whence our dignity originates,  
That which both gives it being, and maintains  
A balance, an ennobling interchange  
Of action from within and from without:  
The excellence, pure spirit, and best power,  
Both of the object seen, and eye that sees.

In Book I of *The Excursion* (ll 950-51) he is concerned with "all the grief / That passing shows of Being leave behind". In Book IV, lines 754-60, a similar preoccupation surfaces:

.... a thought arose  
Of Life continuous, Being unimpaired;  
That hath been, is, and where it was and is  
There shall endure—existence unexposed
To the blind walk of mortal accident;
From diminution safe and weakening age;
While man grows old, and dwindles, and decays;
And countless generations of mankind
Depart; and leave no vestige where they trod.

In 'Nutting', the very essence of the peaceful "bower" is destroyed:

Then up I rose,
And dragged to earth both branch and bough, with crash
And merciless ravage; and the shady nook
Deformed and sullied, patiently gave up
Their quiet being ...

The whole of the 'Immortality Ode' is concerned with the mysteries of being and of pre-existence, for example:

Not for these I raise
The song of thanks and praise;
But for those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishing;
Blank misgivings of a Creature
Moving about in worlds not realized,
High instincts, before which our mortal Nature
Did tremble like a guilty Thing surprised:
But for those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain light of all our day,
Are yet a master light of all our seeing
Uphold us, cherish us, and make
Our noisy years seem moments in the being
Of the eternal Silence: ... (ll 142-58).

Geoffrey Hartman defines the problematic that pertains here and that Wordsworth attempted to confront and grapple with, very clearly:

... whether we can speak Being; whether that language of knowledge about Being can be found by the recovery of a "natural", vividly rhetorical, now alienated speech; what sort of recall of it is possible through reading and writing (1987:196).
Wordsworth's interest in the Classics, and Plato in particular, predisposed him towards a belief in a pre-existence, probably as a result of Plato's myth of recollection and anamnesis. This, I believe, mediated his own strong belief in the power of memory. His 'Immortality Ode' can be viewed as his 'manifesto' in this regard. But again, as is so often the case with Wordsworth, this is not unproblematic. Whereas memory can be positive (think of the 'spots of time' with their 'renovating virtue'), memory can also be disturbing. Ross Woodman puts it as follows:

Memory as darkness, twilight, imprisonment, forgetfulness finds for Wordsworth its oxymoronic equivalent in the Platonic myth of pre-existence in which birth itself becomes 'a forgetting' (l 58). As natural objects ('the earth and every common sight') begin to register upon the senses, the soul's 'celestial light' (l 2-4) darkens into twilight, fading finally into 'the light of common day' (l 76) (1993:112).

Harold Bloom also refers to Wordsworth's preoccupation with memory. He claims that Wordsworth valorised memory as one of the touchstones of his poetry to the extent that

Wordsworth so mystified memory as to make it the one great myth of his antmythological poetry. ... The hiding places of man's power are in his past, in childhood. Only memory can take him there, but even memory fades, and at length fades away (1985:113,118).

The dominant emotion in the 'Immortality Ode' is one of loss. Indeed, almost a grieving tone is often detectable. The poet mourns the link with a pre-existence, a state of idealized connectedness with and consciousness of the animating spirit that imbues everything. This link is broken through birth that is "a sleep and a forgetting" (l 58) although the child still retains some of this consciousness. Through a progressive process of loss this consciousness disappears as "shades of the prison-house begin to close" (l 67) on the growing boy with approaching adulthood until his soul is weighed down by her burden of "earthly freight, / And custom" (l l 130-31). The poet is convinced that "there hath passed away a glory from the earth" (l l 18) and that

Turn wheresoe'er I may,
   By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more (l l 7-9).
Possibly the strongest statement regarding Wordsworth's belief in a pre-existence can be found in the following lines from the 'Immortality Ode':

To whom the grave
Is but a lonely bed without the sense or sight
Of day or the warm light
A place of thought where we in waiting lie; (ll 120-23, my emphasis).

Coleridge raised such strong objections to the radical thoughts expressed in these lines that Wordsworth actually excised them after 1815. Coleridge objected to the "frightful notion of lying awake in his grave"—this is in marked contrast to Dorothy Wordsworth's entry in her journal at the time (29 April 1802) where she refers to the idea of lying in the grave listening to the peaceful sounds of the earth (WW, 1984:714).

Wordsworth explained his use of the idea of a pre-existent state to Isabella Fenwick as follows:

... a pre-existent state has entered into the popular creeds of many nations: and, among all persons acquainted with classic literature, is known as an ingredient in Platonic philosophy ... I took hold of the notion of pre-existence as having sufficient foundation in humanity for authorizing me to make for my purpose the best use of it I could as a poet (WW, 1984:714).

Wordsworth's desire for or hankering after an ideal (possibly idealized) pre-existent state of heightened consciousness and awareness would seem to be an important factor in his desire to create a language in which he could articulate these often inchoate, certainly often abstract, sentiments and perceptions. He wanted "to liberate or steal back a language that discloses Being" (Hartman, 1987:206). Whether he succeeded (can one succeed in this?) is open to debate. What he did succeed in doing was to create a language that tantalizes and intrigues us with its haunting, echoing qualities and its frequently contradictory elements. Hartman points out the "instability of reference" that inheres in so "spectral a diction" (1987:205). I agree, but regard this ghostly dimension of Wordsworth's language as a definite gain in that it demands the reader's committed participation in making the poetry 'speak'. In fact, Wordsworth encourages us to do this in so many words, possibly somewhat tongue-in-cheek:
O reader! had you in your mind
Such stores as silent thought can bring,
O gentle reader! you would find
A tale in every thing.
What more I have to say is short,
I hope you'll kindly take it;
It is no tale; but should you think,
Perhaps a tale you'll make it ('Simon Lee', ll 73-80).

David Simpson describes it as follows:

Challenging us with the declaration that the ideal reader will find a 'tale in every thing', 'Simon Lee' seems to fulfil Wordsworth's anti-authoritarian mandate in transcribing a poet who is a man speaking to men, rather than a sage gifted with superior insight. Invited to 'make' our own tale out of the raw materials of this incident, we at once accede to a creative stature ... (1993:65).

John Barrell makes a very similar point when he discusses 'Tintern Abbey':

... the poem's success ... is achieved not in spite of its failure to define the meaning of its abstract nouns, but absolutely because of its refusal or failure to define them ... the power of the poem, the power it communicates to us, is somehow dependent upon the refusal of the poem to communicate fixed meanings (1993:149).

This is true of Wordsworth's poetry as a whole as well. Wordsworth makes a strong call on the performance capabilities of his readers (in the sense of speech and reader response theory). In writing his spectral, haunting poetry, Wordsworth also succeeds in foregrounding language as the only means or vehicle for exploring being. As would be said by later philosophers like the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl and his student Martin Heidegger (Being and Time is dedicated to Husserl), I believe that Wordsworth knew that language is "a means of understanding what it means to be" (Birch, 1996:5).

I therefore contend that Wordsworth attempted to ground or fix Being in a language that was more closely attached or linked to the permanencies of existence, and that would display, incorporate and express, an "exquisite regard for common things" (Prelude, 1805, XIII, l 243) that "round us lie" ('A Poet's Epitaph', l 49). It was, however, because he was aware that this was an extremely difficult, if not impossible undertaking, that Wordsworth's work abounds in contradictions. In the 'Immortality Ode' a contradiction in human development is expressed—there is no place or time where Being and the essence of Being coincide. Memory is therefore not only qualified, but in fact disqualified at the same time,
because it is simultaneously "a forgetting" (l. 58). The poet attempts to reconcile himself to the idea of loss with the thought that "our past years in me doth breed/Perpetual benedictions" (ll 136-37). Yet, in saying that he is grateful for

... those obstinate questionings  
Of sense and outward things,  
Fallings from us, vanishing;

he in fact acknowledges the

Blank misgivings of a Creature  
Moving about in worlds not realized

where our "noisy years seem moments in the being / Of the eternal Silence" (ll 143-58). Whereas our souls "have sight of that immortal sea" (is it too fanciful to interpret this as possibly referring to the 'secrets' of existence or being?), the grieving tone surfaces strongly in the acknowledgement that "nothing can bring back the hour / Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower" (ll 166 and 180-81). Indeed, in the poet's very celebration of the beauty of existence, lies an admission of the contradiction that lies at the heart of Being:

The Rainbow comes and goes,  
And lovely is the Rose  
The Moon doth with delight  
Look round her when the heavens are bare;  
Waters on a starry night  
Are beautiful and fair;  
The sunshine is a glorious birth;  
But yet I know, where'er I go,  
That there hath passed away a glory from the earth (ll 10-19).

Is there not an almost incipient despair in the realization that

Turn whereso'er I may  
By night or day  
The things which I have seen I now can see no more (ll 7-9)?
Hartman says that Wordsworth

... depicts the flux and reflux of a mind aware of loss that cannot be fixed precisely, a thinking which is always already a grieving, as if thought and grief had an immemorial connection. The quest for Being is acknowledged yet seen through, as Blake said he saw through the eye rather than with it. So the poet keeps turning in every direction, or stands on his understanding of the sentiment of nonbeing. The "thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears," [l 206] with which he ends, mark a referent located beyond mourning or object loss: beyond nature, possibly, but also beyond myth as a resting-place for the homeless imagination (1987:203).

And, I believe, beyond language and possibly even beyond Being. Rarely indeed will one find a stronger enactment or embodiment of the sentiments expressed than in the language employed in the 'Immortality Ode'. Not only is the language restless and eddying, sometimes even tentative, but it varies from simple and natural expression to an almost portentous declamation of sublimity. It is a language which is extremely evocative, even provocative and subversive, yet it is a "language that seems to corrode stable reference" (Hartman, 1987:205). Frances Ferguson also refers to a "curiously wavering quality" in this poem which represents "a Wordsworthian excursus into the absolute" with the result that it contains "conspicuously unknowable" elements (1977:101, 103).

The 'Immortality Ode' is also an excellent example of Wordsworth's employment of a word cluster, in this case the so-called gleam cluster that consists of: 'light, glory, glories, glorious, dream, gleam, vision, visionary, splendid' and 'splendour'. These often occur in conjunction with what I regard as 'related' words like 'bliss, delight, star (or starry), song, sing, sunshine, sun' and 'moon', as is indeed the case here. These words are repeated throughout the 'Ode' ('light' alone occurs no fewer than seven times) so that they heighten the impact of the individual words by the creation of a linguistic 'mood' or tone, as it were. In this way the words strengthen and reinforce each other significantly and confer an almost incantatory quality on what are in fact quite ordinary words. As Sykes Davies puts it: "their repetition throughout the Ode confers on them the final fullness of their special power" (1986:87). As the words gain in power from each other Wordsworth succeeds, in creating a language that goes some way towards revealing (albeit possibly only in glimpses) the Being that he struggled to come to grips with all his life. There is little doubt, however, that there is nothing definitive or final about this achievement, though I do believe that it is a significant, even radical, one. Wordsworth's language of Being is a tentative and fragile
thing as I think he would have been the first to acknowledge. Whereas it constitutes a revolutionary attempt

... to liberate or steal back a language that discloses Being [and] every poem aspires to the condition of restoring language to its status as an Archimedean tool, a meta-instrument, fundamental and moving ..., it yet remains as susceptible to internal injury as a child's psyche (Hartman, 1987:206,205).

But then humanity's understanding of Being is also, surely, a fragile and tentative thing. As Martin Heidegger says at the beginning of his fascinating (but shockingly difficult!) book *Being and Time*:

Do we in our time have an answer to the question of what we really mean by the word 'being'? Not at all ... It is said that "Being" is the most universal and the emptiest of concepts. As such it resists every attempt at definition (1978:2).

Heidegger asks the question: "What kind of Being does language have?" (1978:209). It would seem that Wordsworth attempted to establish what kind of language Being has and then tried to write in that language. Thomas Hobbes said that no "man can have in his mind an Image of infinite magnitude" (1968:99). But this is exactly what I believe Wordsworth attempted to do: to create a language in which to say, or at least suggest, the unsayable. It is probably a bit fanciful to suggest that Wordsworth attempted to restore the original language that Hobbes claims God gave to Adam to set man apart from the

... Lyons, Bears, and Wolves ... [which] was again lost at the tower of Babel, when by the hand of God, every man was stricken for his rebellion, with an oblivion of his former language (1968:100-101),

but it would appear that there was an element of this in Wordsworth's linguistic quest. Fascinatingly, Hobbes also sees language as a 'tool' that can do harm:

... for seeing nature hath armed living creatures, some with teeth, some with horns, and some with hands, to grieve an enemy, it is but an abuse of Speech, to grieve him with the tongue ... (1968:102)

which forms an interesting link with Wordsworth's contention that words are too powerful, for both good and evil, to be used lightly.
Christine Winberg points out (in a very interesting discussion of the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*) that linguistic ambiguity also pertains to Wordsworth's prose statements about language:

There is not a single statement about the nature of poetic language that does not involve contradictions, ambiguities, paradoxes, metaphors or, at very least, some form of qualification .... In attempting to describe the language of poetry Wordsworth has to make use of contradictions and metaphors: poetic language is like ordinary language, yet it is also quite different; it is like prose without being prosaic; and always the poet modifies, adapts, alters the arrangement of language in a poem ... (1991:20).

Winberg then makes the extremely interesting and valid point that Wordsworth achieves the "strange" effects in his poetry because he succeeds in mixing "conversational and poetic modes"; similarly his prose moves between poles of "straight-forward and metaphoric discourse" with the important rider that this discourse is of course not straight-forward at all (1991:21). Gene Ruoff claims that Wordsworth's first poetic commitment is to language, and that his lyric poems in particular "attempt to broaden the significatory range of the language of feeling, spoken as well as poetic" (1972:210).

And this is of course an overwhelmingly important point: poetry is feeling for Wordsworth and its language must embody that feeling. But because Wordsworth was aware of the power that inheres in words (for both good and evil); because he recognized what Michel Foucault refers to as the "formidable materiality" (1990:52) of words, he was wary of the ability of "syllogistic words" to "unsoul"

Those mysteries of being which have made,  
And shall continue evermore to make  
Of the whole human race one brother-hood *(Prelude, 1850, XII, II 83-87)*.

In concluding this chapter Winberg can be quoted again:

The reader needs to be aware of the complexity of Wordsworth's language and its equivocations and metaphors must be taken into account when engaging with it (1991:28).
So when Wordsworth says

The moving accident is not my trade
To curl the blood I have no ready arts;
'Tis my delight, alone in summer shade,
To pipe a simple song to thinking hearts ("Hart-Leap Well", ll 96-100)

he is being somewhat modest. To the sensitized Wordsworthian reader, Wordsworth's poetry is so evocative, so fraught with echoes and imbued with such metalingual significance, that one can but acknowledge him a "mighty harmonist" to paraphrase line 187 of 'On the Power of Sound'. As Geoffrey Hartman puts it

Greatness and scrupulousness combine to make a difficult poetry hardly recognized as such even today. It is in many ways the most ghostly poetry ever written... This extreme calculus of words, and this internal, obstinate questioning of every ghostly or glorious mood, is what all readers feel in Wordsworth, though they may not be happy with it if they expect from poetry a decisive rhetoric or a seductive animation (1987:150).

Did Wordsworth succeed in couching his poetry in the Vocabularies of Being? Possibly, though I cannot give a categoric answer here. Did he succeed in creating a language that with its teasing ambiguity engages the creative and imaginative faculties of his readers? Yes, Surely he did, in his "WORD[s], that shall not pass away" ('On the Power of Sound', l 224).
THE DIFFERENT VOICES IN WORDSWORTH

The comers and goers face to face —
Face after face ...
(Prelude, 1805, VII, l/172–73).

Many critics have been struck by the different 'voices' that speak in Wordsworth's poetry. Many critics have identified 'different' different voices that can be heard in his work. In this chapter I want to look at some of these voices and finally discuss the two voices that I hear.

Some of the different voices that one hears in Wordsworth, on an overt level, are self-evident — one but has to think of the dialogue between the determined little girl and her interlocutor in 'We are Seven' and the loquacious narrator in 'The Thorn'. Similarly one has the Pedlar's voice alternating in 'The Ruined Cottage' with that of the poet. The Excursion constitutes an extended dialogue between the different characters, most notably the Wanderer (a continuation of the Pedlar), the sceptical Solitary and the Pastor.

Reference has also been made to the different consciousnesses that manifest themselves in Wordsworth's work. This is closely linked to the different voices that one hears, on a covert level, in his poetry. Wordsworth himself voiced this aspect very clearly in The Prelude. In referring to the powerful influence that childhood memories still exert on his mind, he says,

A tranquillising spirit presses now
On my corporeal frame, so wide appears
The vacancy between me and those days
Which yet have such self-presence in my mind,
That musing on them, often do I seem
Two consciousnesses, conscious of myself
And of some other Being (Prelude, 1805, II, ll 8-34).

Frances Ferguson advances a very interesting theory in this regard. In a discussion about the consistency that underlies Wordsworth's classification of his own poems, she claims that the other consciousness in Wordsworth is not only the audience that he addresses, but also himself as a "spectator ab extra". This reveals, she believes, a situation in which "Wordsworth is able to imagine his own writing as something to be read, by himself as well as by his audience" (1977:xv). A very similar thought is voiced by Thomas Weiskel when he claims that The Prelude is structured like a dialogue, but that Wordsworth's real interlocutor is not Coleridge to whom the poem is addressed, but is Wordsworth himself:
Wordsworth's real interlocutor is not Coleridge but himself, a part of himself, archaic or prospective but in any case alienated from his present, who beckons to him across a "vacancy". "Often do I seem," he says, "Two consciousnesses, conscious of myself/And of some other Being" (2.31-33). That "other Being" is in part a remembered state of mind, a previous consciousness, and in part the inferred protagonist of visible scenes of whom he is now conscious for the first time. For the first time because that other Being did not exist in the past; though he now exists there, he is a creation of the present ... So Wordsworth is to be found forming his significant other Being even as he searches for his signature in recollected hours ... In general, the other Being or consciousness implied by Wordsworth's speech remains inaccessible except through the immensely mediated languages of memory and desire ... Insofar as Wordsworth is a speaker, that Other is the being to whom his speech is unconsciously directed; but the Other is also the one to whom he listens, and it is in fact mainly as a listener that Wordsworth overtly construes his identity in *The Prelude* (1985:96-7).

Here a connection can be made to one of the voices that can be heard in Wordsworth's poetry, namely that which inheres in the ghostly quality that often characterises his language (as discussed in the previous chapter, p.26) In the very indeterminacy of his language, one hears echoes of previous utterances. As so perceptively noted by Davies (1986:136), along with the later poet Emily Dickenson (1830-1886), Wordsworth knew that

One need not be a Chamber—to be haunted—
One need not be a House—
The Brain has Corridors—surpassing
Material Place— ('Ghosts', II 1-4).

And it is this spirit that lurks in the passages of Wordsworth's brain that one hears so often as a haunting murmur that underlies the everyday subject matter that Wordsworth so frequently writes about. This can be closely linked to Wordsworth's evocative creation of the uncanny in his poetry (see p.31). Wordsworth was strongly aware of this tendency in himself and attempted to control it, thus creating a tension between the often radical imaginative impulses that drove his poetry and his self-critical attempts (partly fuelled by Coleridge, I believe) to 'keep his feet on the ground', as it were. If one looks at the first copy of 'Strange fits of passion I have known' (sent to Coleridge by Dorothy Wordsworth
from Goslar in Germany in 1798) it is less qualified as 'strange' than the later poem is and, therefore, I believe, more haunting and evocative:

Once, when my love was strong and gay,  
And like a rose in June,  
I to her cottage bent my way,  
Beneath the evening Moon.

Upon the moon I fixed my eye  
All over the wide lea:  
My horse trudg'd on, and we drew nigh  
Those paths so dear [to] me.

And now I've reached the orchard-plot,  
And as we climbed the hill,  
Toward the roof of Lucy's cot  
The moon descended still.

In one of those sweet dreams I slept,  
Kind nature's gentlest boon,  
And all the while my eyes I kept  
On the descending moon.

My horse moved on; hoof after hoof  
He raised and never stopped,  
When down behind the cottage roof  
At once the planet dropp'd.

Strange are the fancies that will slide  
Into a lover's head,  
'O mercy' to myself I cried  
'Tf Lucy should be dead!'

I told her this; her laughter light  
Is ringing in my ears;  
And when I think upon that night  
My eyes are dim with tears (Davies, 1986:142).

But even in this poem a "sceptical caveat" is interjected about the strangeness of the fancies that will enter a lover's mind, thus introducing a "delicate, wavering mixture of belief and self-mockery" (Davies, 1986:142).
J.P. Ward also identifies what he describes as a "curious tentativity" which can often be heard in Wordsworth's poetry and, in particular, in *The Prelude* (1984:139). This is often manifested as a perplexed questioning of what should be mentioned and what omitted, and the frequent use of denials and double negatives:

It is not now as it has been of yore;—
Turn wheresoe'er I may,
   By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more ('Immortality Ode', ll 6-9).

Not for these I raise
The song of thanks and praise ('Immortality Ode', ll 141-42).

... Not for this
Faint I, not mourn nor murmur: ('Tintern Abbey', ll 86-7).

... that neither evil tongues,
Rash judgements, nor the sneers of selfish men
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us ... ('Tintern Abbey', ll 129-33).

Yet must I not entirely overlook
The pleasure gathered from the elements
Of geometric science (*Prelude*, 1805, VI, ll 135-37).

I often find this tentative voice in Wordsworth's work most intriguing as it makes a powerful appeal to the reader's own creative and interpretive faculties. It also frequently intensifies the underlying emotion and mood that are conveyed. In 'Tintern Abbey' for instance the poet seems to find "Abundant recompense" for the "aching joys" of the past that he has lost along with the "dizzy raptures" that accompanied a time when nature to him was "all in all" and haunted him "like a passion" (ll 76-89). But, because of the very tentativeness with which these sentiments are voiced, the stated abundance of the recompense is implicitly questioned and the reader is made aware of the aching sense of loss that in fact underlies the whole poem.

Brooke Hopkins argues along similar lines. Hopkins claims that Wordsworth strikes a note of self-critique when he refers to some of his earlier opinions, particularly regarding his idealistic espousal of the ideals of the French Revolution and his later somewhat short-
lived adherence to the doctrines of William Godwin. In Book X of *The Prelude* of 1805, Wordsworth writes as follows in the view that Godwin's theories of rationalism provided hope after the emotional and political excesses of the French Revolution:

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, [reason]
Found ready welcome. 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—
But, speaking more in charity, the 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 (*Prelude*, 1805, X, ll 805-18).

Wordsworth had been predisposed to support Godwin's theories because of his acute disappointment in and disillusionment with the French Revolution:

In the main outline, such, it might be said,
Was my condition, till with open war
Britain opposed the Liberties of France.
This threw me first out of the pale of love,
Soured and corrupted upwards to the source
My sentiments; was not, as hitherto
A swallowing up of lesser things in great,
But change of them into their opposites,
And thus a way was opened for mistakes
And false conclusions of the intellect,
As gross in their degree, and in their kind
Far, far more dangerous. What had been a pride
Was now a shame, my likings and my loves
Ran in new channels, leaving old ones dry;
And thus a blow, which in maturer age
Would but have touched the judgement, struck more deep
Into sensations near the heart (*Prelude*, 1805, X, ll 757-73).

These passages therefore present Wordsworth's refutation of his previous sentiments and Being, as well as Godwin's theories of political justice as set out in his book *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* that appeared just after the execution of Louis XIV in February 1793.
Hopkins claims that Wordsworth is in fact addressing his previous self (rather like Thomas Weiskel and Frances Ferguson maintain) in a self-parody that constitutes a mockery of the ideological position held by the speaker himself at the time of his enchantment by Godwin's thought ... what the poem presents its audience with in this passage is the narrator looking back and quoting, indeed (re)citing, his former voices ... through a complex dialogical style that characterises much of *The Prelude's* revolutionary verse (1994:280-81).

In these passages Wordsworth succeeds not only in refuting his previous somewhat naive stance, but also in passing a covert commentary on his previous sentiments. By portraying the youthful and somewhat self-righteous young man that he was during the French Revolution and shortly thereafter, Wordsworth exposes and mocks his previous attitudes in a covertly ironic tone of self-critique that he now employs from a more mature perspective.

This leads to an aspect or voice of Wordsworth that is often overlooked or at least underrated, namely his humorous voice. Hopkins makes the point that this self-parody is often "gently comic" (1994:297), as in the following passage in which Wordsworth celebrates his freedom after leaving the city:

Now I am free, enfranchised and at large,  
May I fix my habitation where I will  

The earth is all before me—with a heart  
Joyous, not scared at its own liberty,  
I look about, and should the guide I choose  
Be nothing better than a wandering cloud  
I cannot miss my way...  

... Whither shall I turn,  
By road or pathway, or through open field,  
Or shall a twig or any floating thing  
Upon the river point me out my course? (*Prelude*, 1805, I, ll 9-32).

There is an element of gentle, tongue-in-cheek humour in the very haphazardness of entrusting life-choices, as it were, to the direction of a floating twig or drifting cloud. 'The Idiot Boy' contains an almost boisterous sense of fun, as does 'Peter Bell' and even 'Goody Blake and Harry Gill' despite their rather grim subject matter of inhumaneness and cruelty. Jonathan Wordsworth believes that there was something in the vitality of the ballad-form with its strong rhythm and rhyme schemes that released Wordsworth's sense of the
incongruous (1991:141). (Kenneth R. Johnston makes the very valid point, however, that Wordsworth's ballads are written in a much more intricate form and with more varied rhyme schemes that those that typify the authentic folk ballad (Johnston & Ruoff, 1987:144).) When Wordsworth started writing his ballads for *Lyrical Ballads* in March, 1798 an amazing expansion of his emotional range, accompanied by new and innovative techniques and increased dramatic power, manifested itself. One of the areas of Wordsworth's poetry that gained significantly in this regard was the comic dimension of the poetry that positively burgeoned with an, at times, almost exuberant sense of fun.

Jonathan Wordsworth perceptively notes that though Wordsworth's comedy probably owes something to both Stem and Burns, it is mostly an outflow of

... Wordsworth's own profoundly original genius. It is to be found locally in many places—in the playful moments and delicately shifting tones of *The Prelude*, for instance—but its sustained achievements belong chiefly to the period of *Lyrical Ballads* (1991:141).

Wordsworth's comedy varies between the gently comic to the whimsical, the incongruous and the almost exuberant, as is found in 'The Idiot Boy' that Jonathan Wordsworth refers to as follows:

His comic masterpiece, *The Idiot Boy*, is an almost faultless work of art, a creation of exquisite tact, at once humorous and deeply moving (1991:141).

I personally regard the charming, delicate and whimsical prologue to 'Peter Bell' as a high point of Wordsworth's humorous writing:

```plaintext
There's something in a flying horse,
There's something in a huge balloon
But through the clouds I'll never float
Until I have a little boat
In shape just like the crescent moon.

And now I have a little boat
In shape just like a crescent moon.
Fast through the clouds my boat can sail,
But if perchance your faith would fail,
Look up and you shall see me soon.
```
Up goes my boat between the stars,
Through many a breathless field of light,
Through many a long blue field of ether,
Leaving ten thousand stars beneath her:
Up goes my little boat so bright.

There is a party in the Bower,
Round the stone table in my garden;
The squire is there, and as I guess,
His pretty little daughter Bess,
With Harry the church-warden.

And there's the wife of Parson Swan,
And there's my good friend Stephen Otter.
And, ere the light of evening fail,
To them I must relate the tale
Of Peter Bell the Potter.

Off flew my pretty little barge
All in a trance of indignation,
And I, as well as I was able,
On two poor legs to my stone table
Limped on with some vexation.

Although Thomas McFarland does not regard this prologue as "an auspicious beginning" (1976:6), I see it as a marvellously evocative depiction of the free flight of fancy and the imagination, and the uninhibited "play of creative fantasy" (1976:2). Despite his criticism, McFarland does regard Wordsworth as "nonetheless one of the greatest poets of the English language" (1976:5). Again Jonathan Wordsworth shows his perceptive insight into Wordsworth's poetry:

Wordsworthian comedy is a voyaging of the mind, an adventure of the imagination in which the poet permits himself to dispense with the rootedness that Coleridge unkindly called his "clinging to the palpable"... It marvellously evokes ... the imaginative level at which the poetry in its most successful moments confront experience ... In a matter of a dozen lines [of the prologue to 'Peter Bell'] Wordsworth has stated his wish for a space flight, invented himself a flying boat, got into it, taken off, and is addressing from among the clouds an imaginary earth-bound audience amid the roaring woods below. To put it differently, he has introduced to us his poetic self and made clear the terms of his comedy. We are to look up and see the crescent moon as his "sky-canoe", we are to listen and hear the woods roaring like a sea. If we see merely the moon, hear merely the sounds of our own experience, this poetry is not for us (1991:147).
And we would be the poorer, I believe. Here are a few of the many comic moments in 'The Idiot Boy':

—Why bustle thus about your door,
What means this bustle, Betty Foy?
Why are you in this mighty fret?
And why on horseback have you set
Him whom you love, your idiot boy?

But Betty's bent on her intent,
For her good neighbour, Susan Gale,
Old Susan, she who dwells alone,
Is sick, and makes a piteous moan,
As if her very life would fail.
And he must post without delay
Across the bridge that's in the dale,
And by the church, and o'er the down
To bring a doctor from the town
Or she will die, old Susan Gale.

And when Johnny fails to return, Betty goes in search of him:

'Oh saints! what is become of him?
Perhaps he's climbed into an oak,
Where he will stay till he is dead;
Or sadly he has been misled,
And joined the wandering gypsey-folk.

And now she's got into the town,
And to the doctor's door she hies;
'Tis silence all on every side;
The town so long, the town so wide,
Is silent as the skies.

And now she's at the doctor's door,
She lifts the knocker, rap, rap, rap,
The doctor at the casement shews,
His glimmering eyes that peep and doze;
And one hand rubs his old night-cap.

After much anxious searching Betty does find her son:

She looks again—her arms are up—
She screams—she cannot move for joy;
She darts as with a torrent's force,
She almost has o'erturned the horse
And fast she holds her idiot boy.

The happy ending is complete because Susan Gale has made a miraculous recovery and comes to meet the ecstatic mother and her son.

For while they all are travelling home,
Cried Betty, 'Tell us Johnny, do,
Where all this long night you have been,
What you have heard, what you have seen,
And Johnny, mind you tell us true'.

And thus to Betty's question, he
Made answer, like a traveller bold,
(His very words I give to you,)
'The cocks did crow to-whoo, to-whoo,
And the sun did shine so cold.'
—Thus answered Johnny in his glory,
And that was all his travel's story.

Douglas Kneale also identifies two different voices in Wordsworth's poetry. These he believes are located in the difference inherent in the spoken word and the written word; in speech and writing; in voice and letter. While

the question of language in Wordsworth's poetry once tended to focus on poetic diction and the relation of poetry to prose, the emphasis today seems to be less on Wordsworth's repudiation of any "essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition" (Prose, 1:135) than on the description of an essential "difference" within all language ... an understanding of the difference within and between spoken and written discourses .... Wordsworth's poetry exhibits a double consciousness of its status as language in its images of voice and letter (1986:351).

Wordsworth composed virtually all his poetry in oral fashion – it was only on completion that it was written down, usually by Dorothy or Mary or her sister Sara. This would seem to favour the spoken aspect of language. He does, after all, refer to the poet as "a man speaking to men" (PLB, 1991:25) in "a selection of the language really spoken by men" (PLB, 1991:254). It would therefore appear that Wordsworth is mainly a phonocentric poet. This apparent privileging of voice is, however, contradicted if one looks at the many instances in his work that refers to the written or engraved word. In the first 'spot of time' episode, for instance (Prelude, 1805, XI, ll 93-94), the murderer's name is carved into the
turf—Wordsworth refers to it as "monumental writing". In London, the shop and house fronts bear names and symbols and seem like the title pages of books:

\[
\text{Shop after shop, with symbols, blazoned names,}
\text{And all the tradesman's honours overhead:}
\text{Here, fronts of houses, like a title-page}
\text{With letters huge inscribed from top to toe (Prelude, 1805, VII, ll 174-77).}
\]

In the intriguing Sadler Wells passage (surely a deconstructionist's dream!), writing, though visible, suggests yet simultaneously emphatically denies, invisibility:

\[
\text{To have, for instance, brought upon the scene}
\text{The Champion Jack the Giant-killer, lo!}
\text{He dons his coat of darkness; on the stage}
\text{Walks, and achieves his wonders from the eye}
\text{Of living mortal safe as is the moon}
\text{'Hid in her vacant interlunar cave'.}
\text{Delusion bold! and faith must needs be coy;}
\text{How is it wrought? His garb is black, the word}
\text{INVISIBLE flames forth upon his chest (Prelude, 1805, VII, ll 302-10).}
\]

Likewise the description of the blind beggar in London carries submerged and disturbing undertones:

\[
\text{Amid the moving pageant, 'twas my chance}
\text{Abruptly to be smitten with a view}
\text{Of a blind beggar, who, with upright face,}
\text{Stood propped against a wall, upon his chest}
\text{Wearing a written paper, to explain}
\text{The story of a man, and who he was.}
\text{My mind did at this spectacle turn round}
\text{As with the might of waters, and it seemed}
\text{To me that in this label was a type,}
\text{Or emblem, of the utmost that we know,}
\text{Both of ourselves and of the universe;}
\text{And on the shape of the unmoving man}
\text{His fixed face and sightless eyes, I looked}
\text{As if admonished from another world (Prelude, 1805, VII, ll 610-23).}
\]

This passage evokes not only the power of the written word to give meaning, but also to subvert meaning. Although the written paper on the beggar's chest merely purports to give a few details about the man, its impact on the poet is very powerful and certainly, to an extent at least, inexplicable. Ross Woodman makes the extremely interesting point that
Wordsworth's first version of line 618 read differently. Wordsworth originally wrote as follows: 'I thought'

That even the very most of what we know,
Both of ourselves and of the universe,
The whole of what is written to our view,
Is but a label on a blind man's chest (1993:133).

This denotes not only the power of writing (and therefore language), but also its limitations, and the limitations of human knowledge and comprehension. This emphasises yet another contradiction in Wordsworth. He lauds the power of the human mind, yet seems to subvert this concept as well, especially in his imperfect contemporary world.

There are many other examples in Wordsworth's work where the written, printed, imprinted or engraved word is emphasised. In 'To Joanna', Wordsworth "chiselled out in those rude characters/Joanna's name upon the living stone". He believes that Nature is imprinted with the "characters/of danger or desire (Prelude, 1805, I, ll 496-97). The Prelude contains a whole book (number V) entitled "Books", although Wordsworth is perturbed by the fact that the human spirit must "lodge in shrines so frail" (l 48). And finally, of course, there is his preoccupation with epitaphs, the ultimate engraved writing, as it were; indeed "the WORD, that shall not pass away" ('On the Power of Sound', l 224). It almost seems as if he attempts to bring speech and writing together in the third of his River Duddon sonnets when he refers to his poetry as "a speaking monument" (l 3). In this regard, it is perhaps interesting to note that Wordsworth finds the most moving epitaph to be the simplest that he ever encountered. In his third Essay upon Epitaphs, he tells of finding in an obscure corner of a country church-yard

.... half-overgrown with Hemlock and Nettles, a very small Stone laid upon the ground, bearing nothing more than the name of the Deceased with the date of birth and death, importing that it was an Infant which had been born one day and died the following. I know not how far the Reader may be in sympathy with me, but more awful thoughts of rights conferred, of hopes awakened, of remembrances stealing away or vanishing were imparted to my mind by that Inscription there before my eyes than by any other that it has ever been my lot to meet with upon a Tomb-stone (PrW, 1974:93).

Here Wordsworth himself stands in the guise of the responsive, empathic reader who responds strongly to the implicit message of the little tomb-stone. It also constitutes a very
telling example of the power of language, and the written word in particular, to evoke that which inheres in the unsaid, to paraphrase Phinney's apt comment (Phinney, 1987:71).

It would not be possible to discuss the different voices in Wordsworth without referring to the voice of Nature that permeates his work so resoundingly. But as is almost always the case in Wordsworth this is an extremely complex aspect of his work. Wordsworth both speaks to and listens to Nature. He does not, however, often address Nature directly—more often he speaks about her rather than to her (I will use the female pronoun in line with Wordsworth's practice). Although Wordsworth has long been known as the poet of Nature, many critics, most notably Geoffrey Hartman, have pointed out that this relationship is not an unproblematic one as portrayed by earlier critics like Matthew Arnold and Helen Darbishire. Donald Marshall puts it as follows:

According to the common view ... Wordsworth found the true source of imagination: in nature and particularly in the poet's experience of nature during childhood, when he was most open to its varied and spirited influence. The language in which this recollected experience was transformed into the guide of later life and feeling derived from the ordinary language of men ... Hartman demonstrated instead an antagonism or dialectic between nature and imagination in Wordsworth (Marshall, 1987:vii).

Whereas I would probably not go quite so far as to claim that there is an antagonism between Wordsworth's imagination and Nature, the relationship certainly has a dialectic tension and is at times ambiguous, shifting and elusive. Thomas Weiskel very perceptively refers to nature as a "paradoxically fugitive omnipresence" in Wordsworth's work (particularly in *The Prelude*) which is an extremely apposite description (1985:97). Douglas Kneale makes a rather similar claim when he writes that:

In *The Prelude* we often hear that "Nature" speaks, but we rarely hear what she says. Only once, in book 6, does Wordsworth give the reader an account of what he heard Nature utter and even then it is a tentative account (1986:352).

The passage that Kneale refers to is the following one:

... though our eyes had seen,  
As toward the sacred mansion we advanced,  
Arms flashing, and military glare  
Of riotous men commissioned to expel
The blameless inmates,

— 'Stay, stay your sacrilegious hands!' — The voice
Was Nature's, uttered from her Alpine throne;
I heard it then and seem to hear it now—
'Your impious work forbear, perish what may,
Let this one temple last, be this one spot
Of earth devoted to eternity!'
She ceased to speak ... (Prelude, 1850, VI, ll 430-36).

This passage describes Nature's 'reaction' to the expulsion of the monks from the Carthusian monastery of Chartreuse near Grenoble in 1792 although it is not possible that Wordsworth actually witnessed this event. The guise that Nature appears in here, is an admonitory and imperative, even a peremptory and commanding, one. Elsewhere in Wordsworth's poetry nature 'speaks' in a different voice. In 'Tintern Abbey' (composed 11-13 July 1798) Wordsworth experiences a Nature that reassures and comforts him and brings him intense joy. 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 (ll 108-12).

Often "in lonely rooms, and mid the din/Of towns and cities" he has experienced "tranquil restoration" in "hours of weariness" by remembering the beauty of nature (ll 27-31). In fact, the "heavy and the weary weight" of the world is lightened by the "blessed mood" induced by Nature (ll 37-42). But already the relationship within Nature is changing—five years previously, when he first visited the banks of the Wye, his experience of Nature was simpler and more spontaneous:

.... For nature then

To me was all in all.—I cannot paint
What then I was. The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock.
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite: a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied ... (ll 73-83).
Yet even then "when like a roe/I bounded over the mountains" he was "more like a man/Flying from something that he dreads, than one/Who sought the thing he loved" (ll 68-73). And now indeed

... That time is past,
And all its aching joys are now no more,
And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur: other gifts
Have followed, for such loss, I would believe,
Abundant recompence. For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth, but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity (ll 84-92).

So Nature does not only speak of joy but also of sadness; it contains a disturbing presence as well as a comforting one that calms and soothes. The river Derwent made "ceaseless music" that first lulled the poet as a baby and gave him

Among the fretful dwellings of mankind
A knowledge, a dim earnest, of the calm
Which Nature breathes among the hills and groves (Prelude, 1805, I, ll 283-85).

Yet Nature can also be overwhelming and frightening—in the famous Snowdon episode (I quote from Book XIV of the 1850 version of The Prelude), Wordsworth writes that from

A fixed, abysmal, gloomy breathing-place—
 Mounted the roar of waters, torrents, streams
Innumerable, roaring with one voice
Heard over earth and sea, and, in that hour,
For so it seems, felt by the starry heavens (ll 58-62).

Many other figures involving the voice or voices of Nature abound in Wordsworth. Here are just a few more:

It was an April Morning: fresh and clear
The Rivulet, delighting in its strength
Ran with a young man's speed, and yet the voice
Of waters which the winter had supplied
Was softened down into a vernal tone, ('It was an April Morning: fresh and clear', ll 1-5).
There was a roaring in the wind all night;  
The rain came heavily and fell in floods;  
But now the sun is rising calm and bright;  
The birds are singing in the distant woods;  
Over his own sweet voice the Stock-dove broods;  
The Jay makes answer as the Magpie chatters ('Resolution and Independence', ll 1-6).

This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;  
The Winds that will be howling at all hours ('The world is too much with us', ll 5-6).

—But there's a Tree, of many one  
A single Field which I have looked upon,  
Both of them speak of something that is gone  
The Pansy at my feet  
Doth the same tale repeat ('Immortality Ode', ll 51-55).

Loud is the Vale! the Voice is up  
With which she speaks when storms are gone  
A mighty Unison of streams!  
Of all her Voices, One!

Loud is the Vale;—this inland Depth  
In peace is roaring like the Sea;  
Yon Star upon the mountain-top  
Is listening quietly ('Lines', ll 1-8).

Think you, 'mid all this mighty sum  
Of things for ever speaking ('Expostulation and Reply', ll 25-26).

'The Tables Turned' possibly constitutes one of Wordsworth's strongest extended statements about speaking Nature. I quote stanzas 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6.

Up! Up! my friend, and clear your looks,  
Why all this toil and trouble?  
Up! Up! my friend and quit your books,  
Or surely you'll grow double.

Books! 'Tis a dull and endless strife,  
Come, hear the woodland linnet,  
How sweet his music; on my life  
There's more of wisdom in it.
And hark! how blithe the throstle sings!
And he is no mean preacher;
Come forth into the light of things
Let Nature be your teacher.

She has a world of ready wealth,
Our minds and hearts to bless—
Spontaneous wisdom breathed by health
Truth breathed by cheerfulness.

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

Despite the light, almost playful tone, the sentiments expressed are deep and enduring. In this poem Wordsworth's joy in and appreciation of Nature seems unshadowed and untroubled, without the apocalyptic overtones that critics like Hartman and A. C. Bradley identify. These manifest strongly, however, in scenes like the boat-stealing incident where "a huge cliff .../Upreared its head ..." and "like a living thing/Strode after" the poet (Prelude, 1805, I, ll 406-11). Similarly, in lines 70-82 (Prelude, 1805, X) an almost nightmarish view of the world emerges, particularly in the chilling lines "it seemed a place of fear,/Unfit for the repose of night,/Defenceless as a wood where tigers roam".

Douglas Kneale queries the rhetorical function of all "these whisperings, murmurings, utterings, prattlings, breathings and echoings" (1986:354). He concludes, firstly, that they "haunt" Wordsworth, but also believes that the voice of nature sometimes usurps that of the poet. Wordsworth himself indeed refers to the voice of nature as "an alien sound/Of melancholy" (Prelude, 1805, I, ll 470-71). Previously he had referred to a darkness that pervaded his thoughts in which

... no familiar shapes
Of hourly objects, images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields,
But huge and mighty forms that do not live
Like living men moved slowly through my mind
By day, and were the trouble of my dreams (Prelude, 1805, I, ll 422-27).

And in the disorientating egg-stealing incident, (Prelude, 1805, I, ll 345-50) the poet as a young boy is "but ill sustained" by his handholds on the slippery rocks:
While on the perilous ridge I hung alone,
With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind
Blow through my ears; the sky seemed not a sky
Of earth, and with what motion moved the clouds!

These lines reveal an uneasy, even troubling and perplexing, side to Wordsworth's relationship with Nature that is imbued for him not only with the signs or characters of desire, but also of danger as is literally the case in the egg-stealing episode. Geoffrey J. Finch points out that many of Wordsworth's most intense moments are characterised by uncertainty and

... a sense of vulnerability, of being caught off guard in a world only dimly apprehended ... The sense however of something recognised but not completely explicable is unmistakable (1985:34).

I hear two very clear voices in Wordsworth. The first is that of the very accomplished but conventional 18th-century poet heard in images like "heavenly face" ('Surprized by joy', I 4) and "blest the Babe/Nursed in his Mother's arms" (Prelude, 1850, II, ll 234-35). The other, and to me more compelling, highly original and intriguing voice, manifests itself when Wordsworth seems to tap into a dark, profound and powerfully interrogative vein. This voice is at times a tentative, questioning one and at times a sceptical one that seems to pursue an almost anarchic line of enquiry that possibly takes him beyond the normal verities—he refers to the "burthen of mystery" that pervades life, "obstinate questionings" that haunt his mind and a "dark inscrutable workmanship" perceptible in the world, (these quotations and references are provided in full and discussed further on in this chapter). Is Wordsworth possibly mining or trawling in some murky, radical substratum of the unconscious? Is the key to Wordsworth, after all, psychoanalytical as Richard McGhee maintains? In his fascinating study of Wordsworth entitled Guilty Pleasures: William Wordsworth's Poetry of Psychoanalysis, McGhee states unequivocally

... that Wordsworth is a poet of psycho-analysis, that his poetry is a record of an unending analysis. He knew he was this kind of poet, which is one of the reasons we still read his writings ... (1993:iii).

In an extremely interesting discussion of the episode of the drowned man of Esthwaite (Two-Part Prelude, I, ll 265-79) Duncan Wu also refers to Wordsworth's "flawless grasp
of human psychology"—Wordsworth in fact describes the scene from the vantage point of an "inhabitant of a psychological underworld" with echoes of the Orpheus myth (1996:4).

Or, is the voice that I hear just a manifestation of Wordsworth's 'night of the spirit' after his disillusionment with the ideals of the French Revolution and Godwinian Rationalism (Prelude, 1805, X, ll 885-900) when his heart "had been turned aside/From Nature by external accidents" and he was

... 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.

Or, could this voice in fact simply be a manifestation of the dark destructive side of the Romantic impulse that manifested itself in Coleridge and De Quincy's opium addictions, Shelley's atheism and Byron's frenetic lifestyle?

Possibly the two different voices are simply those of the so-called 'simple' Wordsworth and the so-called 'problematic' Wordsworth. M.H. Abrams identifies two roads to Wordsworth. The first road is that trodden, as it were, by Matthew Arnold and Helen Darbishire and their critical descendants. This school of thought sees Wordsworth as

... primarily the simple, affirmative poet of elementary feelings, essential humanity, and vital joy (1972:2),

in line with Wordsworth's own Preface to Lyrical Ballads in which he applies some of the humanistic values of the European Enlightenment. (Kenneth R. Johnston refers amusingly to the Preface "with its splendid but pugnacious humanism" (Johnston & Ruoff, 1987:134)) Arnold particularly lauded Wordsworth for restoring our "lost capacity for spontaneous and uncomplicated responsiveness" (Abrams, 1972:3) to the freshness and beauty of the world. Arnold 'acknowledged', however, that Wordsworth only achieved this by averting his eyes from half the human condition.
The second road (to the 'problematic' Wordsworth) was first signposted by A. C. Bradley in 1909. This school of thought challenges and refutes Arnold's belief that Wordsworth disregarded the 'dark side' of the human lot and regards Wordsworth as

... primarily the complex poet of strangeness, paradox, equivocality, and dark sublimities .... In Bradley's view, that which is most distinctive in Wordsworth's poetry is "peculiar", "audacious," "strange", and Wordsworth's characteristic attitudes are a complex of contraries or contradictions (Abrams, 1972:2-3).

Geoffrey Hartman (who continued in Bradley's critical tradition) was the first critic to open my eyes and ears to this strange, intriguing Wordsworth. And once one has become aware of this aspect of Wordsworth's poetry, it seems amazing that one could ever have missed or disregarded it before and just seen him as the 'Daffodils poet'. Once one has become alerted and sensitized to this dimension of Wordsworth's poetry, his radical originality is so obvious that one unavoidably assesses his work from a significantly different viewpoint. A. C. Bradley summed it up as follows:

There have been greater poets than Wordsworth, but none more original. He saw new things, or he saw things in a new way. Naturally, this would have availed us little if his new things had been private fancies, or if his new perception had been superficial. But that was not so. If it had been, Wordsworth might have won acceptance more quickly, but he would not have gained his lasting hold on poetic minds. As it is, those in whom he creates the taste by which he is relished, those who learn to love him (and in each generation they are not a few), never let him go. Their love for him is of the kind that he himself celebrated, a settled passion ... and twined around the roots of their being (1972:13).

Similar sentiments are expressed by critic after critic. Geoffrey Hartman states roundly that:

I have never been able to get away from Wordsworth for any length of time. The moment I was obliged to read him during high school in England, he reflected back my own sense of nature: rural nature, but more generally a world that felt as ancient and immemorial as "rocks, and stones, and trees," that encompassed, inanimate yet animating, the mind in its earth-walks [my emphasis] .... So startling yet undramatic is Wordsworth's originality that it is hard not to see him as an inaugural figure for both modern philosophy and poetry .... Wordsworth is preeminently the poet of dark passages ... Where would I like the study of Wordsworth to go? Toward an understanding of the radicalism that shapes even his evasions or euphemisms (1987:xxv-xxvii).
Jonathan Wordsworth also refers to Wordsworth's "profoundly original genius" (1991:141). Duncan Wu believes that Wordsworth's view can never be predicted—"what marks Wordsworth out as a genius is that nothing he writes is predictable" (1996:2). Amy Clampitt mentions how controversial he was and still is (1991:185), and Keith Hanley refers to Wordsworth's "revolution in poetic language" that was "historically prefigurative" in the movement towards a new mode of expression that would be fully realised only by the avant garde writers of the 19th-century (1998:1). Thomas Pfau refers to Wordsworth's Preface to Lyrical Ballads as "nothing short of a landmark document in romantic cultural and social theory" (1993:127). Above all, Wordsworth succeeded in foregrounding language in poetry in a way never done before—he thought intelligently and coherently about his medium; in fact he placed "his trust in a vigilance about language" (O'Neill, 1996:1) that resulted in his intriguing and linguistically challenging poetry. Hugh Sykes Davies likewise refers to Wordsworth's "extreme originality" that is often "more than half-hidden" by the "extreme simplicity" of some of his poetry, especially some of the ballads. Wordsworth does this by

... the uncovering and recovery of thoughts and feelings long overgrown by custom and fashion, by stripping away the veil which an accumulation of formulaic words had interposed between the mind and reality (1986:26).

Whereas I would argue that the seeming simplicity of Wordsworth's poetry is an optical illusion (the underlying thought is in fact extremely complex), I contend that Wordsworth succeeded in presenting his audience with a new view of the world and Nature. Possibly it would be more accurate to say that Wordsworth restored to his readers a more uncluttered and non-artificial view. In order to gain full access to Wordsworth's world, it is extremely important to read him on his own terms, without prejudice and with that "willing suspension of disbelief" that Coleridge argued for so persuasively (1990:484). Hugh Sykes Davies maintains that Wordsworth should be read with "a dogged faithfulness to his own text" (1986:47). A similar thought is voiced by John Barrell. With reference to Donald Davie's comment about "the risks taken by the language of The Prelude", he agrees with Davie's claim that Wordsworth's words "have meaning so long as we trust them" (1993:143).

It is when one does this—approach Wordsworth on his own terms, consciously free from negative comment and opinion perpetuated through the years—that this highly original and powerfully Wordsworthian voice becomes audible. I do not advocate a totally uncritical hearing of Wordsworth, just a fair, open-minded and above all unbiased one. It was in his
struggle to come to terms with his world, memory and Nature, their impact on his emotions, imagination and perceptions and his depiction thereof in his poetry—recognising and expressing as he did so the paradoxes and contradictions inherent in the human condition and in poetry—coupled with his fascination with, belief in and distrust of language, that this individual and original Wordsworrian voice was born. It is the expression and utterance of his unique, often radical, vision that informs it. He really did believe that the most insignificant flower generates thoughts that "do often lie too deep for tears" ('Immortality Ode', l 123) and that visionary power inheres in "the motions of the winds/Embodied in the mystery of words [where] darkness makes abode" (*Prelude*, 1805, V, ll 620-29). His vision is often strange and unusual—as Bradley says "for good or evil, or both, peculiar" (1972:13) and certainly peculiar to him. I agree with Bradley that

... the road into Wordsworth's mind must be through his strangeness and his paradoxes, and not around them. I do not mean that they are everywhere in his poetry. Much of it, not to speak of occasional platitudes, is beautiful without being peculiar or difficult; and some of this may be as valuable as that which is audacious or strange. But unless we get hold of that, we remain outside Wordsworth's centre ... we cannot get hold of that unless we realise its strangeness, and refuse to blunt the sharpness of its edge (1972:14).

Harold Bloom, who regards Wordsworth as having "invented modern poetry" (1994:239) is also strongly aware of the radical originality of Wordsworth's mind. With reference to 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' (a poem Bloom admires greatly), he writes eloquently about the moving conclusion to the poem. The final six lines of the poem are quoted first:

And let him, where and when he will, sit down
Beneath the trees, or on a grassy bank
Of highway side, and with the little birds
Share his chance-gathered meal; and, finally,
As in the eye of Nature he has lived,
So in the eye of Nature let him die!

Bloom writes as follows:

This sublime and peculiar passage moves from "Let him be free" to "let him die," and pragmatically the freedom cannot be more than the freedom to suffer and to die out in the open. The shock of this conclusion is considerable .... To
exalt the old man's will seems fantastic, yet that is exactly what Wordsworth is doing, even though the exercise of the will is reduced to where the Beggar rests and eats. But this is highly deliberate in the early Wordsworth: human dignity is indestructible, the will endures, the eye of Nature is on you from life to death. In no danger of sentimentality, the poem courts the possibility of brutality in its quest for a natural piety that stands at the border of the preternatural. Wordsworth's originality can hardly be overestimated here; the otherness of the poet's mind is the largest figure that the poem makes, and it is the otherness that I have carried in my head these past thirty-three years whenever my memory drifts back to "The Old Cumberland Beggar". Robert Frost and Wallace Stevens ... recapture something of Wordsworth's otherness, but not its full reverberations (1994:243-44).

It is this 'otherness' in Wordsworth that has intrigued me more and more as I have studied him. One glimpses a mind so original and unique, a vision so distinctive and individual that it is virtually inevitable that true recognition of Wordsworth's greatness only came in the 20th-century—he was so far ahead of his time that he only gained some recognition during his lifetime when he modified and toned down his radicalism (both poetically and politically). Geoffrey Hartman says that Wordsworth transgressed the rigid law of "literary and social decorum"—what scandalised the emerging class of middle-class readers of his time were Wordsworth's strange moods of exaltation: the way he inflated a trite or private happening as if it contained a truth never before perceived ... Wordsworth's originality does not lie in his ideas as such. It has to do with the way they emerge from the depth of felt experience. They are organic thoughts: we see them growing on him, we watch him struggling with his own—often unexpected imaginings ... A new attitude to consciousness—a radical consciousness of consciousness—is brought to light: Wordsworth is truly a subjective thinker ... Today, when every poet "walks naked" (Yeats) [I think this is a reference to Yeats's poem 'A Coat'], it may be hard to appreciate the courage Wordsworth showed and the advance in sensibility he made possible .... Many of his contemporaries did not value the stripped nature of his poetry, the characteristic Wordsworthian bareness: what they saw was poverty of imagination and the scandal of subjectivity (1987:7-9).

The world that emerges when one listens to the voice of the problematic Wordsworth, is a complex one, full of paradoxes and contradictions. It is often a seemingly dark world. Bradley writes that:

... we find ourselves in the presence of poverty, crime, insanity, ruined innocence, torturing hopes doomed to extinction, solitary anguish, even despair ... Unquestionably then he saw the cloud of human destiny, and he did not avert his eyes from it. Nor did he understand its darkness (1972:17).
In fact, Wordsworth is often perplexed and disturbed by this darkness. As the Sceptic puts it in _The Excursion_, VI, ll 551-57:

... and here the tragic Muse  
Shall find apt subjects for her highest art.  
Amid the groves, under the shadowy hills,  
The generations are prepared; the pangs,  
The internal pangs, are ready; the dread strife  
Of poor humanity's afflicted will  
Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny.

As previously discussed, life is often seen as holding a weight or burden, even as a prison. In the 'Immortality Ode' Wordsworth pities the child whose soul will soon acquire "her earthly freight/And custom lie upon thee with a weight,/Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!" (ll 129-31). On approaching adulthood "Shades of the prison-house begin to close/Upon the growing Boy" (l 67-68). Wordsworth often experiences the confusion and perplexity of "a Creature/Moving about in worlds not realised" (ll 147-48). He is appalled by the life people are subjected to in cities (London in particular) where he perceives "the whole swarm of its inhabitants" as "slaves unrespitd of low pursuits" (Prelude, 1805, VII, ll 699-701). In _The Excursion_ "a book much possessed by transience and decay" (O'Neill, 1996:1) the Solitary (also referred to as the Sceptic) often speaks "the bitter language of the heart" (III, l 462) and voices words of pessimism and disillusionment:

Ah! what avails imagination high  
Or question deep? what profits all that earth,  
Or heaven's blue vault ...  
..............................if nowhere  
A habitation, for consummate good  
Or for progressive virtue, by the search  
Can be attained,—a better sanctuary  
From doubt and sorrow, than the senseless grave? (_Excursion_, III, ll 209-24).

In Book IV of _The Excursion_, l 970, the sentiment is expressed that human life rests on "dark foundations" and in 'Extempore Effusion Upon the Death of James Hogg' l 29 reads that "Our haughty life is crowned with darkness". In Book XII of _The Prelude_ Wordsworth falls into a reverie and has a nightmare vision of past cruelty and barbarism as he "called upon the darkness" (ll 320-36).
In his own persona, Wordsworth himself strikes a note of pessimism in *The Excursion*. In his dedication of the poem to Lord Lonsdale he says "but Life is insecure,/And hope full oft fallacious as a dream".

Michael O'Neill makes the interesting comment that the Solitary, *The Excursion*'s

... worst character ... has the most captivating tunes. 'Who' as Geoffrey Hartman asks rhetorically, is the Solitary, if not the Hamletian man in black, and the dangerous part of the poet's mind?' Central to the failings, but also the achievements, of *The Excursion* is the process of surfacing and submerging to which that 'dangerous part of the poet's mind' is subject (1996:2).

This 'dangerous' part of Wordsworth's mind can be allied to his conviction that the human mind has truly amazing qualities and power. He says that nothing

... can breed such fear and awe
As fall upon us often when we look
Into our Minds, into the Mind of Man—
My haunt, and the main region of my song (Preface to *The Excursion*, ll 38-41).

He also believes (ll 62-68 from the same Preface) that there is a harmonious accord between the world and the human mind:

... while my voice proclaims
How exquisitely the individual Mind
(And the progressive powers perhaps no less
Of the whole species) to the external World
Is fitted—-and how exquisitely, too—
Theme this but little heard of among men—
The external World is fitted to the Mind.

In Book V of *The Prelude*, entitled "Books", Wordsworth is distressed that books offer such an insubstantial medium for the mind to stamp its imprint on (ll 37-48):

But all the meditations of mankind
Yea, all the adamantine holds of truth
By reason built, or passion (which itself
Is highest reason in a soul sublime),
The consecrated works of bard and sage
Sensuous or intellectual, wrought by men,
Twin labourers and heirs of the same hopes—
Where would they be? Oh, why hath not the mind
Some element to stamp her image on
In nature somewhat nearer to her own?
Why, gifted with such powers to send abroad
Her spirit, must it lodge in shrines so frail?

At times this almost seems to manifest itself as a kind of intellectual arrogance. Harold Bloom writes that awe of the "personal Godhead fades before the poet's reverence for his own imaginative" and creative powers (1985:1) in Ⅱ 31-35 of the previously quoted Preface:

All strength—all terror, single or in bands
That ever was put forth in personal form—
Jehovah—with his thunder, and the choir
of shouting Angels, and the empyreal thrones—
I pass them unalarmed.

To which Blake wrote the following sardonic rejoinder:

Solomon, when he married Pharaoh's daughter & became a convert to the Heathen Mythology, Talked exactly in this way & was permitted. Jehovah dropped a tear & follow'd him by his Spirit into the Abstract Void; it is called the Divine Mercy (Bloom, 1985:2).

In fact I believe that Wordsworth saw the human mind as an extension of the Divine Mind. In lines 252-60 (Prelude, 1850, II), Wordsworth expresses the sentiment that the human mind's creativity is a reflection of that of the Creator:

Emphatically such a Being lives,
Frail creature as he is, helpless as frail,
An inmate of this active universe.
For feeling has to him imparted power
That through the growing faculties of sense
Doth like an agent of the one great Mind
Create, creator and receiver both,
Working but in alliance with the works
Which it beholds.

This echoes those well-known lines from the 'Immortality Ode', Ⅱ 59-65:

The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness
And not in utter nakedness
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:

The above are good examples of the paradoxes and contradictions that occur in Wordsworth's poetry—from a seeming rejection to a beautiful affirmation of faith. Despite his belief in a harmonious 'fittingness' between the human mind and the world, the Wordsworthian world often speaks a lonely, solitary language. Wordsworth's poetry abounds with solitary figures: the discharged soldier, the 'Old Cumberland Beggar', the young girl of 'The Solitary Reaper', the forsaken Indian Woman, 'Lucy Gray, or Solitude'. Wordsworth was aware of this tendency to solitude in himself. He writes as follows:

... and gradually produced
A quiet independence of the heart.
And to my friend who knows me I may add,
Unapprehensive of reproof, that hence
Ensued a diffidence and modesty
And I was taught to feel—perhaps too much—
The self-sufficing power of solitude (Prelude, 1805, II, ll 72-78).

Despite this insight, Wordsworth continued to be intrigued by the single, the solitary. When Walter Scott misquoted a line from 'Yarrow Unvisited', namely "The swan on still St Mary's lake (l 43) as "The swans on sweet St Mary's lake" in Marmion in 1806, Wordsworth not only pointed out the mistake, but requested that it be corrected in future editions. Many years later, in the 1840s he told Aubrey de Vere

Never could I have written "swans" in the plural. The scene when I saw it, with its still and dim lake, under the dusky hills, was one of utter loneliness; there was one swan, and one only, and the pathetic loneliness of the region gave importance to the one companion of that swan—its own white image in the water. It was for that reason that I recorded the swan and the shadow. Had there been many swans and many shadows, they would have implied nothing as regards the character of the place, and I should have said nothing about them (Davies, 1986:123).

Certainly I agree with Wordsworth that his version of the line has significantly more evocative impact than Scott's incorrect version. Even more significant is that Wordsworth felt the 'wrongness' of the line so strongly that he raised the matter with Scott who was at that stage a vastly more successful poet and author than Wordsworth himself.
Bradley believes that Wordsworth's affinity with solitude was a result of being raised in the mountains because there are

tones in the mountain voice scarcely audible except in solitude ... but for Wordsworth not this solitude only, but all solitude and all things solitary had an extraordinary fascination (1972:18).

The preoccupation with solitude and the solitary is therefore a significant dimension in the Wordsworthian voice that I am trying to describe—references abound in his work. In one of the 'spots of time', when Wordsworth as a young boy was waiting for the horses to take the Wordsworth boys home for the holiday, his only companions are a "single sheep, and the one blasted tree/And the bleak music of that old stone wall" (Prelude, 1805, XI, ll 377-78). In Book IV, ll 364-69 he says

A favorite pleasure hath it been with me
From time in earliest youth to walk alone
Along the public way, when, for the night
Deserted, in its silence it assumes
A character of deeper quietness
Than pathless solitudes.

And a little later when he meets the discharged soldier he describes him as follows

... He was alone
Had no attendant, neither dog, nor staff
Nor knapsack; in his very dress appeared
a desolation, a simplicity
That seemed akin to solitude (ll 415-19).

He sees the tall shepherd as

A solitary object and sublime
Above all height! like an aerial cross
Stationed alone upon a spiry rock (Prelude, 1850, VIII, ll 272-74).

In 'The Solitary Reaper' the young girl stands "single in the field"—she is singing by herself and is alone as she cuts and binds the grain. Michael goes to the sheepfold alone and sits there without lifting up a single stone. Alice Fell is an orphan, sitting alone and sobbing bitterly behind the chaise, her only possession, a ragged, weather-beaten cloak entangled in the wheel. Even after the "wretched, wretched rag" has been released, she
cannot be comforted—"Sob after sob she forth did send/In wretchedness, as if her grief/Could never, never, have an end" (ll 30-40). The Preface to The Excursion contains one of the bleakest descriptions of the human lot I have ever read:

Must hear Humanity I fields and groves  
Pipe solitary anguish; or must hang  
Brooding above the fierce confederate storm  
Of sorrow, barricadoed evermore  
Within the walls of cities ... (ll 7-80).

So the world inhabited by the problematic Wordsworth is indeed often a dark one, but it is far, far more than that. It is indeed the case that often in his poetry "something interposes darkly and complicates the sequence" and causes a "disturbance that lingers on" (Hartman, 1987:91,92) and makes the poetry more complex and challenging. In this way 'A little onward lend thy guiding hand', a poem about a walk in the country with his daughter Dora, voices Wordsworth's submerged fear of going blind by echoes of Milton, and Antigone leading the blind Oedipus. Whereas his poetry does indeed carry "the darkness, the silence, the strange gleams and mysterious visitations which startle and confuse with intimations of infinity" as Bradley puts it (1972:26),

The sun always rises, eventually, for Wordsworth. But the phantoms of imagination—glimpses of glory or privation, ancestral voices, blind thoughts—continue to cast over the cheerful scene a mingled light (Hartman, 1987:91).

I agree with Hartman about the 'mingled light', but I think that, usually, the sunlight is stronger. Wordsworth does not deny the darkness and contradictions that exist in the world and permeate the human condition, but does believe that

Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows  
Like harmony in music; there is a dark  
Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles  
Discordant elements, makes them cling together  
In one society. How strange that all  
The terrors, pains, and early miseries  
Regret, vexations, lassitudes interfused  
Within my mind, should e'er have borne a part  
And that a needful part, in making up  
The calm existence that is mine when I  
Am worthy of myself! (Prelude, 1850, I, ll 340-50).
Wordsworth does experience feelings of confusion and perplexity and disorientation in "this unintelligible world" ('Tintern Abbey', l 41). He feels a strong sense of loss that "there hath passed away a glory from the earth" and knows that "nothing can bring back the hour/Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower ('Immortality Ode', ll 8 and 180-81). It is indeed debatable whether the "years that bring the philosophic mind" (l 189) do provide "abundant recompence" for the loss of "the glory and the dream" (l 57). He experiences "a strangeness in my mind/A feeling that I was not for that hour/Not for that place" ('Prelude', 1805, III, ll 79-81). He accepts loneliness as a fact of life and acknowledges that "Points have we all of us within our souls/Where all stand single" ('Prelude', 1850, III, ll 188-89). He knows that humanity's vision is often flawed, even in hindsight—"We see but darkly/Even when we look behind us" ('Prelude', 1805, III, ll 491-92). He acknowledges the imperfections of the world and humanity and deplores the loss of an empathic and sensitive connectedness with Nature:

Sweet is the lore which nature brings
Our meddling intellect
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things;
—We murder to dissect ('The Tables Turned', ll 5-29).

Yet he still believes that "A gracious spirit o'er this earth presides/And o'er the heart of man" ('Prelude', 1805, V, ll 516-17). Despite the "burthen of the mystery" and "the heavy and the weary weight" ('Tintern Abbey', ll 39-40) of the world, this is the world in which humanity has its being and has to "exercise their skill".

Not in Utopia,—subterranean fields,—
Or some secreted island, Heaven knows where!
But in the very world, which is the world
Of all of us,—the place where, in the end,
We find our happiness, or not at all! ('Prelude', 1850, XI, ll 139-44).

He ultimately retains his faith in the power of the human mind and imagination. Although he has only had "glimmering views" of "How life pervades the undecaying mind", he trusts in the "immortal soul with godlike power" that

Informs, creates, and thaws the deepest sleep
That time can lay upon her, how on earth
Man if he do but live within the light
Of high endeavours, daily spreads abroad
His being with a strength that cannot fail ('Prelude', 1805, IV, ll 154-61).
Wordsworth does not, however, disregard the contradictions and paradoxes that add to the complexity of life. He acknowledges that there are inexplicable inconsistencies (like suffering and poverty) in life, and imaginatively deals with them in his poetry. He knows that there are inexplicable and perplexing aspects of existence. He does not reject these elements; indeed, he is even grateful for

... those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings; ('Immortality Ode', ll 145-47)

and "shadowy recollections" that plague and tantalise humanity in its struggle with life, the world and eternity. Wordsworth saw these intimations of the unseen and the undefined, lurking behind reality and behind and in language as powerful spurs to the imagination and the mind's creativity and drew on them as an invaluable source for his often perplexing but always rewarding and challenging poetry.

I do not believe that the 'true' Wordsworth or Wordsworthian voice can be defined or fully explicated. The Wordsworth that speaks to every reader will inescapably be informed and coloured by subjective elements that the reader brings to the poetry. To a certain extent every reader will create 'her' or 'his' own Wordsworth. But whatever Wordsworth we create, whichever road we take into his poetry, I believe the effort will be rewarded and the journey worthwhile. Regardless of which Wordsworthian voice we listen to, provided we listen to it on Wordsworth's own terms, with faith in his words and his language, that voice will be worth hearing. Whereas it is easy to 'over-read' the dark Wordsworth, he does exist and lends an intriguing dimension and resonance to Wordsworth's poetry. Wordsworth was almost obsessively concerned with the darkness that inheres in the mystery of life and in language and it is indeed in the "turnings intricate" of his poetry that his original genius manifests itself most compellingly:

Enough of science and of art;
Close up those barren leaves;
Come forth, and bring with you a heart
That watches and receives ('The Tables Turned', ll 29-32).

In my next and final chapter I wish to pursue some of these intricate turns and twists that Wordsworth employs to achieve the haunting and challenging language of his poetry.